

>>> and restaurants to try, all of them recommended by the owners.

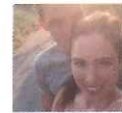
I hit Chelsea Market straight after unpacking. A block long and a whole block wide, the market is heralded as one of the greatest indoor food halls. With over 35 vendors selling foods from around the world, I was spoilt for choice. Food shopping on holiday would usually be one aspect of domesticity I could do without, but here, I relished the dose of reality. I felt like I actually lived here, and with no room service in my home-away-from-home, I cooked my first dinner in NYC with the spoils of my market visit.

My days were spent working inside and outside – Central Park in early summer made for a beautiful alternative office, and at night I walked around Chelsea, discovering new places and checking out those recommended on the app.

The High Line was a highlight. A public park built on a historic freight rail line elevated above the streets on Manhattan's West Side, it runs from Gansevoort Street in the Meatpacking District to West 34th Street, between 10th and 12th Avenues. You can walk along the 1.45 mile linear park or take part in the activities on offer – from star-gazing, tai chi and meditation to dining and interactive art installations.

The community spirit here is at an all-time high – New Yorkers are friendlier than their reputations would have you believe. I met new friends and caught up with old buddies who had already made the move I was contemplating, and I felt like I fitted right into the melting pot that is this city. One day, I'd like to call New York home; until then, a Onefinestay property is my next best option. [onefinestay \(onefinestay.com/+44-20-7167-2524\)](http://onefinestay.com/+44-20-7167-2524) offers the West 20th Townhouse from £555 per night, sleeping 5-6 people, with three bedrooms and two bathrooms. Virgin Atlantic flies daily to New York from London (virgin-atlantic.com).

FALLING IN LOVE WITH ITALY



Having forever felt at home under the Tuscan sun, a huge surprise irrevocably bonds Ali Roff's life to Italy forever

Italy is an enigma for me. I've travelled around the world, from Australia where society is similar to the UK, to Africa and Asia where the culture shock has rendered me awestruck. Yet no place makes me feel quite as at home as *bella Italia*.

It's quite possible that I feel even more at home in Italy than I do in England, to the point where I wonder if I may have Italian ancestors, so naturally does the Italian way of life sit with me: the food, the weather, the art, the passion, the late nights strolling through town with family. Yet, I do not speak Italian, and I have no Italian family! So for this year's trip, I decided to strengthen my bonds with the country I feel so content and comfortable in, and learn some Italian.

It certainly came in handy, as in Tuscany, many Italians do not speak English. Camaiore, in the province of Lucca, is where the Italians go on holiday to enjoy beautiful countryside dotted with cypress trees and enormously wide beaches lined with beach clubs serving fresh fish.

It was a short drive in our little Fiat 500 through winding country lanes to find Locanda al Colle; a small guesthouse of only 13 bedrooms, which was to be our home for the next three nights. As we were shown to our room through the open-plan kitchen by our host Ricardo and his assistant Giovanna, I could tell by the smells from the stove and the sight of fresh dough being prepared that

we were in for a treat at breakfast.

As we sat in our garden, Giovanna poured us some wine and suggested a restaurant for us to visit for dinner in nearby Pietrasanta. It was as if we were staying at a friend's villa; a friend who is the perfect host, preempting all the things you might want to do during your stay, plying you with wine and breakfasts of freshly baked savoury croissants and eggs made just the way you like them. As we sipped our wine, I felt as if I was melting into my chair. Stress dissolved from my body until all that was left were the crickets around us, chirruping in my ears. Italy holds the senses and the soul with its beautiful scenery and art, out-of-this-world

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food and wine, and wonderful people. I realised that for me, Italy is the best form of mindfulness. On our last night, I had a surprise that would bond me to Italy forever. On the private deck of a restaurant looking out over the Tuscan hills, my boyfriend asked me to marry him. They say home is where the heart is, and he had felt at home enough here to ask me a question that would change our lives forever. Now, back in the UK, every time I look at my engagement ring, I am reminded of Italy, and how it is part of my story, my identity and what I feel in my heart is 'home'. Double rooms with breakfast and beach club access (bagnocavallone.it) start from €145 per night at Locanda al Colle (locandaalcolle.com). The nearest airport is Pisa.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: the town of Lucca; looking to Camaiore from the Alps; nightlife in Pietrasanta; outside Locanda al Colle

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