

A five-star view of Elba

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FOLLONICA, Tuscany — As the porter walked me to my room through a large garden under the shade of roman pine trees, I could feel the stress of Rome traffic leave me. This was a promising start to a trip that climaxed with a dazzling trip to Napoleon's prison island.

The Sense Experience Resort by Icon is located in the Gulf of Follonica on the Tuscan coast, it has a perfect view of the island of Elba. Less than a three-hour drive from Rome, or less than two hours from Florence, the resort is a perfect weekend getaway.

The resort is divided into a small collection of buildings focused on a central area filled with a pair of bars and tables facing the sea with a gorgeous beach. A wonderful setting for a sunset aperitivo and also the nightly entertainment of singers and performers.

Their bar, the Red Rabbit, the mixology and cocktail bar, serves

are placed in protected wicker sea baskets, then in the sea 10 meters deep for five days. The grapes are then dried in the sun for two days and then placed into the fermentation process.

At the next step, the grapes once removed from their stalks, were placed in terracotta jars along with their skins. The small amount of salt present in the grapes works as an antioxidant and disinfectant agent. The result speaks for itself.

"The chef is a fundamental resource for any hotel", said Hotel Manager, Silvia Ficanterri, as we sat down to an eight-course dinner at Eate, the resort's main restaurant. She was referring to Chef Andrea Cimino, who works by subtraction, eliminating every unnecessary element to achieve a clean and recognisable synthesis.

Currently working towards a Michelin star, they did a tremendous job impressing us. Some stand out dishes include the antipasti, Amberjack carpaccio and Lobster with cucumber tomato red en-



Overlooking the vineyard Azienda Agricola Arrighi on Elba

Elba winery, Azienda Agricola Arrighi takes part in Vetrina Toscana is a regional project that promotes food and wine tourism. It highlights restaurants, producers, shops, and businesses that offer culinary experiences. The network also includes accommodation facilities that offer a breakfast characterised by its "Tuscan

spirit." Serving a breakfast based on local products demonstrates a strong connection to the territory and respect for the environment. The goal is to introduce tourists to Tuscan food and wine traditions; every town, village, and hamlet possesses a distinct culinary identity—a tangible cultural heritage

ity group employees around 320 people.

As we headed off, I was left with memories of the dark blue water and a Tuscan seaside culinary experience that was a new experience for me. As the return traffic to Rome on Sunday started to build, I wished that we had stayed an extra day.



Sunset with a view of Elba at the Sense Experience Resort

up an incredible aperitivo along with providing drinks for the beach guests from mid-morning. Watching the mixologists work can also be entertaining.

The resort offers over 200 experiences from museum tours in Florence, bike adventures, cooking courses, beach horseback riding and numerous boat tours. The most popular one is a tour of the island of Elba which was the one we participated in.

Leaving comfortably at mid-morning on a private boat, we landed in Porto Azzurro. Around Elba the water is a dark blue that really looks inviting next to the bright green hills of the Tuscan island. Where also, Napoleons residence at the Palazzina dei Mulini just reopened to visitors after a lengthy renovation.

Our tour included a visit to a local vineyard, Azienda Agricola Arrighi. The 22-hectar, 100-year-old family farm is located just behind the port surrounded by a national park. They offer a stay with meals and wine for guests.

The vineyard has gained popularity from resurrecting an ancient Greek method of wine making, "Vino Marino", (sea wine). After the grapes are harvested, they

ions, and the first course of the bottone pasta with ricotta and scampi. All were served with fresh made in house bread. To finish things off, a tomato sorbet, goat cheese mouse, and a parmesan and pistachio crumble.

Another highlight of the trip was an introduction to the Vetrina Toscana initiative that the



Porto Azzurro in Elba



A room with a view at the Sense Experience Resort

that, along with the region's immense biodiversity, must be preserved.

Their program, breakfast as a "local experience," offers visitors the chance to discover the authenticity and unique character of Tuscan culinary tradition. We sampled "schiaccia bianca", a popular way to start your day on the island of Elba, which is a twice-baked flatbread with raisins, pine nuts, walnuts and almonds. The bread became popular with sailors during the renaissance due to its durability on long voyages.

No stranger to hospitality, the managing group, Icon, has experience in the industry for close to 40 years, operating five other properties in the region including the Botticelli Hotel in Florence. During peak season, the hospital-



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