



LIFE IN THE FERRARI LANE

JANE CORNWELL TAKES THE 488 SPIDER FOR A SPIN THROUGH LUXURIANT LANDSCAPES.

Early morning at the Borgo Condé wine resort, a 110-hectare vineyard nestled on the side of a mountain in Emilia-Romagna, the bucolic region of northern Italy separated from Tuscany by the Apennines. Dew puts a shine on fat ruby grapes. A pheasant waddles under a line of vines; a deer picks its way across farmland into forest. In the distance, at a sun-dazzled squint, are the outlines of Adriatic seaside resorts Ravenna and Rimini. Scattered below, amid rolling fields, lie stone villages filled with restored medieval palazzos.

Just metres from my vast, chicly decorated room, at the bottom of a set of steps, is the gleaming red beast I'll be driving while I'm here: the 488 Spider by Ferrari.

With its fold-back roof, twin-turbo V8 engine and knack for zooming from 0 to 100km/h

in 8.7 seconds, it's a ride sure to prompt double-takes around this untouristy province, whose hairpin bends and dead-straight Via Emilia highway (first laid by Romans in 187BC) I'll be cruising with the top down.

The Italian car manufacturer rolls out a new vehicle twice a year, with test-drives for international media held a few months after each launch, in an Italian location chosen for its varied terrain and picturesque surrounds.

Ferrari's HQ might be a mere 1.5 hour's drive away (or in a 488 Spider, about three or four minutes) in Maranello, but they rarely use their home as a launching pad.

For years, Ferrari has been showcasing cars in Tuscany, a romantic vision fixed in the minds of visitors thanks to a plethora of themed cookbooks and the sumptuous 2003 film *Under the Tuscan Sun*. Romagna, however, is fast gaining traction as a gastronomic hotbed and a place to explore without the crowds.

ABOVE: The northern Italian region of Emilia-Romagna offers a wealth of wining, dining and great vistas. BELOW: Writer Jane Cornwell with "the red beast" – Ferrari's 488 Spider – in the picturesque fishing village of Cesenatico.

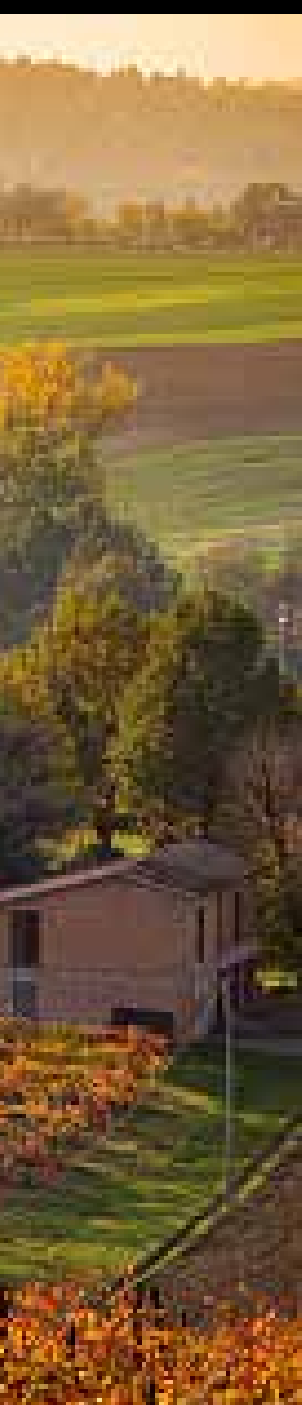


The opening of Borgo Condé, a 39-room resort offering cooking classes, wine tastings and a spa complete with wine therapy – a 30-minute soak in a red-wine filled bath brimming with all sorts of nutrients and antioxidants – along with the area's appallingly bumpy B-roads, offered the ideal alternative.

"Ferrari was impressed by our mix of tradition and innovation," says Daniel Terranova, Borgo Condé's manager, over a glass of their signature Sangiovese, 80 per cent of which is exported.

"They loved the fact that our wine is made using old-fashioned barrels as well as the latest technology. And that we only use local produce – pork, truffles, cheeses – in each of our three restaurants."

Having renovated a trio of farms and reinvigorated a previously abandoned valley, Borgo Condé now actively promotes the region: "For us it's important that people get to know the Renaissance architecture of Forlì [15 kilometres away], the mountains of the



TOP: Time to pull over and sample sweeping views from the clifftops below the Forte di San Leo, built by the Romans to capitalise on the vantage point. ABOVE: La dolce vita – mediaeval towns, superlative wines, and the thrill of driving an Italian masterpiece.

Republic of San Marino (a microstate 70km away) and all these unknown hill towns,” he says. “And San Leo.” Cue a wide smile. “San Leo is essential.”

Boasting an ancient fortress clamped atop a sheer precipice, the art capital of San Leo once provided inspiration for the likes of Machiavelli and Dante – who namedrops the place in *The Divine Comedy* – and has given dramatic backdrop to many a film.

Built by the Romans, customised by the colonisers, the fort became a prison for the Vatican’s enemies, who gazed out over a Romanesque old town with a parish church, cathedral and the Medici Palace, which now houses the elegant Museum of Sacred Art.

The 488 purrs epically up the mountain

BORGO CONDÉ WINE RESORT

With prices for a junior suite starting at €195 a night (\$293), which includes breakfast and access to the outdoor pool and wellness centre, the Borgo Condé wine resort nestles amid 110ha of extensive, undulating vineyards and is the perfect luxury bolthole for those wanting to kick back in idyllic surrounds, a glass of red in hand.

Located 11km from the lush Parco Urbano Franco Agosto – a celebrated park featuring hills, rivers and lakes that are home to otters – and 14km from Monte Poggiolo, on top of which lie the ruins of a 15th-century Florentine castle, Borgo Condé is also an hour’s drive from Rimini, the largest beach resort on the Adriatic Sea, and is best reached via airports at Forlì (15km away) or Bologna (97km).

Elegant, rustic suites in three villas and the main Borgo (estate) feature flat-screen TVs, free WiFi, sitting areas and furnished balconies. There are family suites with kitchens, too. Activities on offer include wine tours and wine-tasting, as well as cooking workshops using the local produce on offer in the resort’s three restaurants, all of which offer sigh-inducing views of the vineyards and rolling countryside.

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en route to San Leo as I sit low and snug behind the light-touch steering wheel and those cresting, aerodynamic front wings. Running through the lower gears of the seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox, my hair ruffled but unmussed, I find myself relating rather too well to the 488 demographic,

or what Ferrari marketing speak calls an “open-air hedonist breathing in nature’s heady aromas”. When a guy on a passing Vespa toots and waves, I press a horn button on the wheel and unleash a mellifluous honk.

After a look around the museum – arguably followed by the eyes on a portrait of a 15th-century monk – I down an espresso and slide back into the leather interior of the 488, which I’ve parked in one of San Leo’s three cobblestoned piazzas and find surrounded by gawkers on my return.

Sat nav switched on, I set off for lunch in Cesenatico, an old fisherman’s village on the Romagna coast midway between Ravenna and Rimini, 60km away. Down on the flat the car comes into its own, surging through glorious countryside like greased – rather red – lightning.

Cesenatico has a colourful historical centre, including a canal harbour designed by Leonardo da Vinci in 1502 and dotted with old bragozzi fishing boats – great wooden structures flying large geometric flags – in testament to the town’s seafaring identity. Seated al fresco, eating a plate of Adriatic blue fish, sipping a superb house white (Ferrari places an inordinate amount of trust in its test drivers), it’s tempting to imagine the fleet sailing out to rescue Venice from foreign bondage – just as the revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi attempted in 1849.

After a round of selfies with local Ferrari fans – the brand is adored with religious fervour in Italy – the 488 zooms me away with a nimble flick of its big rear tyres. I speed happily and not a little haughtily back to Borgo Condé, daydreaming of an ideal world where I could afford the 488 Spider’s \$526,888 (plus on-road costs) price tag.

I book a wine therapy session, which feels like the next best thing.

The writer travelled as a guest of Ferrari.