



INSIDE:

Cortina d'Ampezzo in Summer 3

History and Hiking in the Dolomites 4

Hotel Rosa Alpina 5

Yoga Retreats in Le Marche and Lazio 8

Salento



Cortina d'Ampezzo

DREAM OF ITALY®

Volume 9, Issue 3

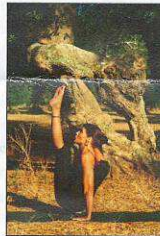
www.dreamofitaly.com

April 2010

Italian Yoga Retreat: Saluting the Sun in Salento

It was wintertime in Brooklyn when Stephanie Steiker picked up the postcard. She may have been at a yoga studio or a restaurant in Red Hook. She can't remember for sure. But, she vividly recalls the photographs on the card: A woman posed in a graceful backbend. A lotus blossom. A placid azure swimming pool. The images came from a place called *Yoga in Salento (YIS)*.

"It was beautiful and peaceful. I said to myself, 'I must get to this place of stillness and sunshine.' I held on to that card as a talisman for months," says Stephanie, who was dealing with an intense period at work and a caved-in ceiling in her apartment.



The following July, Stephanie stepped into that idyllic setting on the Salento Peninsula, the tip of Italy's "heel" in the region of *Puglia*. Its fertile soil and pristine coasts have long attracted outsiders — from ancient Greeks to today's urban Italian and northern European sun seekers. Mystery and melody inhabit this rustic land, as evidenced by the conical-roofed stone houses called *trulli* and the exhilarating rhythms of *pizzica* folk music.

For another New Yorker, Katie Rashid, a week at YIS opened vistas onto Ashtanga yoga as well as the region. "It was my first time to Puglia and I loved being there. I loved being near the sea, I loved the rawness of the area,

continued on page 6

Warm Weather + The Dolomites = Perfect Together

Despite dozens of visits to Italy, I'll readily confess that the Dolomite Mountains (*Dolomiti*) in the northeastern corner of the country had barely registered on my radar. I was familiar with *Cortina d'Ampezzo* of course, site of the 1956 Winter Olympics. Plus I knew that Cortina was a famously luxurious town with a reputation for chic après-ski partying à la Aspen. One winter, I thought, I might come here to ski — after I advanced a bit in my talents and when I could afford just the right skiwear (keeping in mind *la bella figura*).

Instead, I was invited to visit the Dolomites on a hiking vacation early last September. Apparently, there's great debate about whether the mountains are truly more beautiful in the summer or winter (an unusual September snowstorm gave me an inkling of what it's like in both seasons) and I jumped at the chance to see for myself. While better-known hiking trails in other parts of the Alps are frequently crowded in the summer, the Dolomites remain something of an unknown — especially to foreign sports enthusiasts. Though that may be changing; a few months before my arrival, the Dolomites were named a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

continued on page 2

Salento is dotted with coastal watchtowers.

the landscape, the smells, the sun, the music."

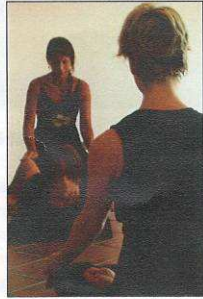
While yoga is a relatively new, but fast growing, practice in Italy, classic Mediterranean and Indian philosophies share a quest for self knowledge in pursuit of harmony. At Yoga in Salento, the association founded by Genoa native Francesca "Frizzi" Maniglio, these aspirations of east and west converge.

Ashtanga yoga, popularized by the late Indian yogi Sri K. Pattabhi Jois, with whom Maniglio studied, synchronizes the breath with a progressive series of postures — a process that produces body heat and perspiration intended to detoxify muscles and organs, improve circulation, strengthen the body, and calm the mind.

Converting Le Campine

As with most everything in Italy, it takes a family. After traveling abroad, earning a masters at City University of New York, and working as a documentary filmmaker in New York in the late '90s, Francesca returned to Genoa enlightened by a variety of yoga experiences. She wanted "to cultivate a way of life where peace, joy and friendship are celebrated as the very essence of who we are."

Francesca has recruited her family to collaborate in restoring the *Masseria Le Campine*, "Little Fields," her grandfather's century-old rose-hued country house, where she passed idyllic childhood summers. After a period of relative neglect, the property is once again thriving.



Francesca's mother, the prominent landscape architect *Annalisa Maniglio Calcagno*, designed several



rotating roster of acclaimed international teachers, such as Americans Louise Ellis and David Williams.

A Week in Paradise

For Stephanie Steiker, an experienced traveler drawn to out-of-the-way Mediterranean locales, YIS felt like a warm embrace. As a decade-long but sporadic yoga practitioner on her first-ever retreat, she was the only American among two

dozen male and female guests, which included Italians, French and Belgians.

"It was an expressive, interesting, self-selecting group," says Stephanie, who felt an immediate Big Apple bond with Francesca.



Stephanie shared a double room with a visitor from Belgium. She found the accommodations "low-key, nice and relaxed, not posh." Some guest rooms are in the

restored house, some in an adjacent building.

Several Ashtanga yoga sessions, geared to different experience levels, were offered every

morning. (Depending upon the visiting teacher, the primary language could be English, French or Italian, with someone available to translate.) The Yoga Studio, housed in a separate building, is a temple of air and light with its high Romanesque arches, whitewashed walls, tile floors and generous windows.

Stephanie's teacher was Roman *Tina Pizzimenti*, a pioneer in Ashtanga yoga in Italy. "I had never done Ashtanga,"

areas of the grounds, including a small orchard. Her father, *Paolo Maniglio*, who owns a 5-star hotel in the nearby coastal resort of *Otranto*, is on a mission to collect and plant native species of fig trees, nearly two dozen and counting. (Are these native species on the estate?) And it's fitting that in this land of intense sun, the property is powered completely by solar energy.

Francesca's husband, Frenchman Marc-André Vincent, shares her dream and has been by her side in creating YIS. As Francesca says, "Nobody really believed we would actually leave Genoa but on March 10, 2007, in a FIAT 600, with our three cats we drove 1,200 kilometers and we started our new life in *Le Campine*." The couple had their first child *Giampaolo* last December.

The YIS tent is high and wide. Francesca encourages locals to come practice yoga and also welcomes students from around the globe. She has recruited a



...guests are free after brunch to swim in the pool, read, nap, go horseback riding, or explore the gardens on the 24-acre property.

Stephanie says. "You're supposed to know the positions. I did improve and I felt great doing it."

After classes, between the hours of 10 a.m. and noon, everyone convened on the shaded veranda to share a vegetarian buffet brunch. Offerings could include salads, cold pasta, *friselle e pomodoro* (a bread ring dressing with fresh tomato and luscious olive oil) and fruit.

"The chef was incredible. The food was healthy, organic and beautiful. A big part of my attraction to Puglia was the food — eggplant, zucchini, tomato, basil, homemade pasta, vegetables from the garden, and incredible desserts," Stephanie says. At YIS, the Italian Slow Food movement meshes seamlessly with the tenets of macrobiotic eating.

Three afternoons a week, yoga classes and optional massage sessions are offered but otherwise guests are free after brunch to swim in the pool, read, nap, go horseback riding, or explore the gardens on the 24-acre property. Some take the short train trip into the Spanish baroque city of *Lecce*.

Those with cars organized into impromptu mini-groups for outings. Within easy driving distance on the rough points of a diamond emanating outward from *Le Campine*: *Lecce* to the north, the port of *Gallipoli* on the western Ionian Coast, the pretty seaside *Otranto* east on the Adriatic, and gorgeous beaches along *Santa Maria di Leuca*, the very southern tip of the

peninsula. For Katie Rashid, encountering "warm and friendly" people from Puglia was a pleasant part of her experience.

At 7:30 p.m., dinner is served on the veranda. "Afterwards, people usually stayed at the beautiful tables to talk, which was so lovely — a mix of languages, cultures, and experiences, with plenty of laughter," Stephanie says. "A few people would drift over to the pool area to sit and talk there, look at the stars, relax quietly. Sometimes a small group of us would meander into town for a kind of post-

meal constitutional. Then, off to bed, some reading, or a good night's sleep."

For Stephanie, YIS proves to be the vacation that keeps on giving. "You just feel good when you're there — and you carry that home with you," she says.

— Sharon Sanders

Writer and certified culinary professional Sharon Sanders lived for several years in Firenze where she married in the Basilica di Santa Croce. She contributes to Women's Health, Cooking Light and other national publications. She is the author of Cooking Up an Italian Life and inspires others to "feed their inner Italian, body and soul" on her award-winning blog www.simpleitaly.com

The Details

To get to *Le Campine* in *Zollino*, you may fly to *Bari Airport* (169 km) or *Brindisi Airport* (50 km). You may rent a car or board local bus and train lines to connect to *Lecce* and transfer to *Zollino*. From *Brindisi*, taxi service is available. With advance notice, YIS also organizes group pick-ups.

Trains to *Lecce* depart from major Italian cities. *Rome to Lecce* is 5 1/2 hours. From the *Lecce* train station you may take a taxi or take the *Ferrovie del Sud Est* local train, a 20-minute ride to *Zollino*, then a 5-minute walk to *Le Campine*.

Yoga in Salento
Le Campine Eco Resort
 Via Stazione, 116
 Zollino
 (39) 0836 802108
 (39) 3489 117272 (mobile)
 www.yogainsalento.com

Retreats are scheduled from April through October.

For guests who'd prefer luxury accommodation in nearby *Otranto*, the *Maniglio* family also runs this 5-star hotel with Ecolabel certification:

Hotel Palazzo Papaleo
 Via Rondachi, 1
 Otranto (Lecce)
 (39) 0836 802108
 www.hotelpalazzopapaleo.com

Rates: A single superior room with private bath ranges from 90 to 120€ per night, depending upon the season; superior double 55 to 65€; superior triple 35 to 45€. (All bookings include yoga classes, brunch and dinner).

Rates: Classic rooms with double occupancy range from 99 to 285€ depending upon the time of year.

1 € = \$1.35 at press time

Yogi: A follower of the yoga philosophy; an ascetic.