

Verona, Italy - Where Romance and History Come Alive

By Mira Temkin

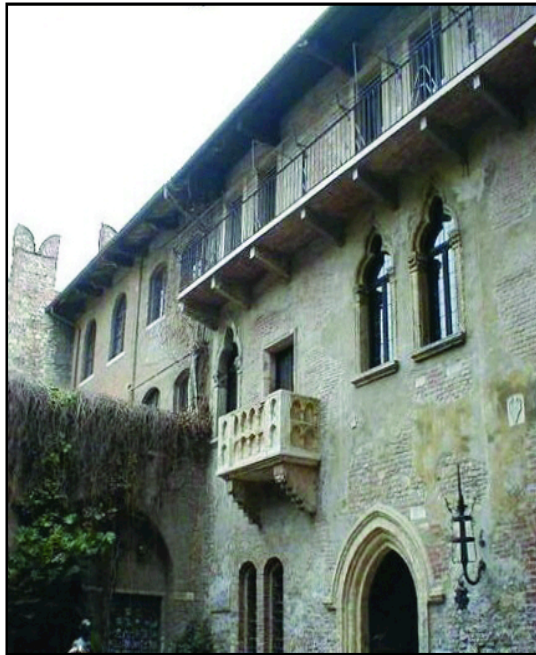


“In fair Verona, where we lay our scene” begins the opening of Shakespeare’s immortal *Romeo and Juliet*. As it has for more than 500 years, Verona continues to lure visi-

tors with its tales of romantic literature, fascinating history and magnificent architecture. The city is also a UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage Site that bustles with top Italian designer shops, elegant cafes and a spirited atmosphere. While I only spent an afternoon in Verona, it was a place I’m longing to return.

Verona traces its origins back to 89 B.C.E. But the city has more than embraced its Shakespearean charm and remains a cultural center for Renaissance art and architecture. Historians say that Shakespeare once heard the story of the doomed lovers, but moved the play’s setting to reflect those “hot-blooded Italians.” According to Dr. Jerry Findley, lecturer in English Literature at Indiana University, “The Italian city-states were far more culturally advanced than England, including London. While Shakespeare was not known to have ever visited Italy, he chose Verona (and other Italian cities) because the English associated them with corruption, decadence and passion.”

Each year, millions of visitors descend upon Verona, yearning to experience a little piece of this romantic tale. In turn, Verona has responded with the creation of Juliet’s home at No. 27 Via Cappello, complete with marble balcony, which, according to Shakespeare, Romeo climbed up to court her. Visitors can tour the inside of her home and bedroom, decorated with authentic furniture as well as decor. I saw many a young girl (and those not so young) actually posing on her balcony, trying to place themselves in the story! A



bronze statue of Juliet stands in the courtyard. Legend says that if you rub her right breast (now buffed to a golden shine), you’ll be lucky in love. Judging by the throngs of people doing just that, it must be true!

A brisk, 15 minute walk from the house is the graceful monastery of San Francesco al Corso, where according to legend, lies Juliet’s tomb. Surrounding the area are paintings and frescoes from 16th - 18th century artisans. There are several other famous works, celebrating the story of *Romeo and Juliet*, along with a statue of the Bard himself. Verona keeps Romeo and Juliet very much alive with various

productions of the play throughout the year. And, I sampled tasty miniature pastries – “Romeo’s Tears and Juliet’s Kisses” – found only in Verona!

But there is much more to discover in this splendid Renaissance city. The Arena de Verona in the Piazza Bra was built in the 1st century and holds 25,000 spectators, still used today for operas, concerts and bullfights. Be sure to visit Verona’s 12th century Duomo (cathedral). And the ruins of the Roman Theatre, across the Adige River, are spectacular. Castelvecchio, a 14th century fairytale castle, is now the city’s top art museum. For those literature buffs, Verona also served as the backdrop for Dante’s epic poem, the *Divine Comedy*. There’s a statue to honor him in Piazza de Signori, in the heart of Verona.

If you can, plan to spend at least a full day in Verona. Even better, stay the night. There’s a sense of romance in the air...and you’re sure to fall under its spell!

Mira Temkin is a North Shore freelance writer specializing in advertising, promotional marketing and public relations. As a travel journalist, her skills have taken her across Europe and the Caribbean. In addition, she is Editorial Consultant for Suburban Woman North Shore and Chicago Suburban Woman newspapers. She can be reached at 847-433-2109.

