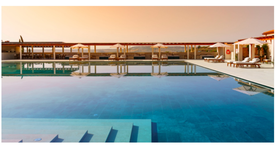
Honeymoon Review: Il San Corrado di Noto, Sicily

A tranquil oasis of luxury, set within one of the most beautiful regions of Sicily

by MARIE-CLAIRE CHAPPET / July 31, 2023 in Travel 0



Why go?

A slice of luxurious tranquillity in the middle of rural Sicily, yet still within reach of some of the island's premier attractions: Il San Corrado di Noto is a new jewel in the Italian's isle's crown, ideal for anyone in need of supreme relaxation with a side of culture.

Honeymoon style

Undisturbed luxury is the mood here. This is the spot for languishing in the sun, sipping a glass of Italian sparkling and dipping your toes in one of the hotel's eye-wateringly impressive pools. This is all while you train your eye upwards across an undulating expanse of vineyards and olive groves and, if you're lucky, a wild rabbit or two.

An old monastery turned winery turned five-star hotel, Il San Corrado di Noto somehow manages to combine an ethos taken from all three of its iterations. The peace and stillness of monastic life can still be felt in this remote location, the love of luxury, food and a good time snakes through all aspects of the hotel, and the hospitality is up there with the best.

The crowd here are stylish and of all ages. Mostly couples and a few young families, there is a shared seeking of refined calm. That said, the poolside restaurant does its best to ramp up the volume at dinner with live music, and the gourmet restaurant, open to non-guests, attracted quite a few big Italian family groups, of multiple generations.

Set the scene

Set in the rolling hills of the Val di Noto, Il San Corrado is nestled within one of the most picturesque regions of the island. Historically one of the three valleys of Sicily, this area is dominated by the limestone Hyblaean Plateau and famous (and recognised by UNESCO) for its smattering of Baroque towns, from Modica and Regusa to Noto (yes, of *The White Lotus* fame).

Yet it is the immediate surroundings of Il San Corrado which makes it special. The vineyards and olive groves, and fields of orange trees which hug the hotel are where many of the ingredients at your table derive from (I didn't dare ask about the rabbits). The noisiest thing you will hear is the wind shaking the trees and the endless soft chirrups of the cicadas. The view is glorious.

The main body of the hotel is the old monastery, which still contains the original chapel, and the building which once became the fortified farmhouse and winery of Prince Nicolaci. This is where the two main restaurants lie, the bar and the main reception area, as well as the two gargantuan pools. One is a behemoth encircled by rooms and the poolside restaurant and bar overlooking the verdant farmland beneath. The other is a one-hundred-metre-long beauty, favoured by ardent swimmers.

The hotel describes itself in classical terms befitting Sicily's Greco-Roman past; calling its offering Olympian, its treats Dionysian and claiming the long one hundred metre pool is reminiscent of pools of the classical age used to train Olympians. Whilst this may feel a tad hyperbolic, there is unmistakably a lingering sense of history here. It is there in the stone arches and the sandstone cloisters and Moorish lamps. It is there in the rooms in the main courtyard which were once the cells of the monks and are now thankfully, a touch more glamorous. And it is certainly there in the unspoilt landscape which, when there isn't a car in sight, can sometimes feel as though you have stepped back in time.

Rooms

The hotel is spread out over 26 suites and eight villas. All are airy and refined; with each suite boasting a private patio and two containing private pools. The aesthetic is stripped back but elevated and the classical inspiration for the destination is apparent in its use of stone, wood, marble, white linens and soft gauzy muslins on the bed canopies.

We stayed in one of the eight villas and it was without doubt the best hotel room we stayed in during our honeymoon road trip. Opening our patio doors, at the foot of our bed, out on to our private pool, where we could take a morning dip or spend the afternoon reading a book or an evening sharing a bottle of bubbles and a pizza (which we did) was its own unique brand of total luxury, our own private oasis. For any honeymooning couples, an Il San Corrado villa is a must.

Food & Drink

The hotel's gourmet fine dining restaurant, Principe di Belludia, is an extremely sophisticated affair. It's dark green aesthetic, which carries through from the bar and main reception area proves a neat counterpoint to the sandy hues of the stone walls and blends in beautifully with the verdant surroundings of its outside dining area, in the lush shadow of the old chapel. It is where breakfast is also served – a standard but very high-quality buffet affair- but it is dinner which truly allows the gastronomic creations of chef Martin Lazarov to truly shine.

We had a truly wonderful tasting menu here, which showcased Lazarov's talents. There were novel and brilliant accents, like cubed jellied beetroot, parmesan Chantilly cream tartlets, artfully deconstructed pizza and melt-in-the-mouth squid with truffle. All of it came with a note perfect wine pairing – with all bottles, much like the food itself- sourced locally. The true gem here was also the service, which was superlative and genuinely warm and made the evening truly special.

For more casual dining, the poolside restaurant Casa Pasta is lively and atmospheric. The food here is a tad steep price wise when you compare the offerings to Principe di Belludia, but while my husband had a disappointing pizza, I did have a knockout Pasta alla Norma: a traditional Sicilian dish with tomato and aubergine.

The bar, which sits within the main building en route to Principe di Belludia is a charming spot. We spent time here, playing snooker and perusing the very chic library, but our only regret was that it wasn't as full with guests as it should have been. One supposes the lure of the outside spaces was too great. It perhaps comes alive in the colder months, where one can also lose oneself in the hotel's extremely tempting wine cellar, Cantina, which hosts private dinners and tastings...

Principe di Belludia

The story

While the building which houses Il San Corrado is ancient indeed, the hotel itself was only opened in April of last year after a three-year renovation. It is the first resort of its kind in the region and has quickly been engulfed by the Relais & Chateaux brand for its stunning renovation of a historic property.

Eco-friendly

Sustainability and a love of, and respect for, the land, is at the heart of everything at Il San Corrado. This is especially evident in the food and drink concept. Chef Martin Lazarov is a true eco trailblazer on the Italian and international food scene. A sterling champion of sustainable cooking, he will only work with fish from responsible, safeguarded providers and will only accept meat and vegetable from organic farmers who follow the seasons. As much as possible is sourced locally, not least the olive oil, which is produced on site.

Family Friendly

Il San Corrado is defiantly a grown-up affair, populated mostly by fellow honeymooners and couples of all ages. Yet that is not to say that children are not welcome, nor un-catered for. Most rooms would accommodate cots and the villas are equipped for families. There is also, in the summer months, the hotel's brilliant beach club roughly twenty minutes' drive away that, while exuding a refined adult atmosphere, is definitely a family friendly offering.

Spa

For a classically-inspired hotel, you know the spa is of upmost importance. They offer everything here. There is a state-of-the-art gym (my husband informs me it's great, I am more of a read-ten-books-on-vacation kinda gal) a Hammam spa, Finnish spa, frigidarium, solarium, steam room, yoga pavilion and even tennis courts. There is also a packed menu of incredible treatments, from peels to mud wraps, massages to waxes and manicures.

Location

The delights of the Val di Noto are all around you. Hop in a car and you can explore some of the most magical Sicilian towns; from majestic Noto to the quietly beautiful winding streets of Ragusa. Both are giants of Sicilian Baroque and a must see while in the area. There are also the winding streets of hilltop Modica, which comes alive at night (beware parking on a Saturday or Sunday eve) bustling with locals and live music spilling out of restaurants and bars.

The beauty of Il San Corrado is that you can immerse yourself in all of this, the sights, smells and sounds of vibrant Sicily but once you've re-entered those hotel gates; you are back to your oasis of calm.

Il San Corrado is just over an hour's drive from Catania Airport with flights several times a week from London on EasyJet and British Airways.

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