



TRAVEL SPECIAL

Questi Giorni

On Days Like These

Story and photography by Ian Kuah

HOW TO ENJOY THE VERY BEST OF ITALIAN LIFESTYLE – AND IN SOMEONE ELSE’S FERRARI

Of all the famous sportscar marques in the world, Ferrari is arguably the most evocative. The red cars create a huge amount of emotion among owners and followers – *la passione*, as the Italians say.

Red Travel, an independent company that gives Ferrari enthusiasts, who may or may not be Ferrari owners, the chance to drive the current Ferrari models in Italy as part of a wider experience, takes the Ferrari driving experience to new heights.

According to Red Travel, Italy is home to many of the world’s finest works of art and is also a bastion of haute couture. With this in mind, the company sets out to offer three couples per week a unique driving experience against a backdrop of the finest art, architecture, good food, wine and spa boutique hotels that Italy has to offer.

“The seeds of the idea were sown in the summer of 2003,” Red Travel’s founder Andrea Levy told us. “We realised that there was a gap in the market for a really exclusive tour revolving around the latest Ferrari models. It would have been too easy to do a tour of the South of France or America in Ferraris, and this would be missing half the point.

“As an Italian company, we would like to show our clients the culture and country that nurtures the mindset behind the Ferrari brand. Italy is a unique country and we wanted to showcase the very best of what it has to offer.”

Going deeper into the initial concept, the team realised that while thousands of tourists visit Rome and Florence every year, Red Travel had to make the experience unique. It was not about visiting Rome, Florence or Tuscany per se, but rather about doing it in a certain way. Staying in

the best hotels, eating in the best restaurants, shopping in the best areas – and joining all the dots on the map with a Ferrari.

The Red Travel team spent a lot of time researching sparsely trafficked cross-country routes between the chosen five-star spa hotels in Rome, Florence and Siena. Relative lack of traffic, good road surfaces and breathtaking scenery were priorities, and the route has been so well planned that you will only encounter 10 sets of traffic lights on the near 300km journey from Rome to Florence.

The Tour Director driving an Alfa Romeo GTV Spider leads the way and sets the pace, allowing the guests to settle in and get used to the operation of the Ferraris. He is the arbiter of his guests’ driving abilities and will gradually step up the pace when and where he judges it is safe to do so.





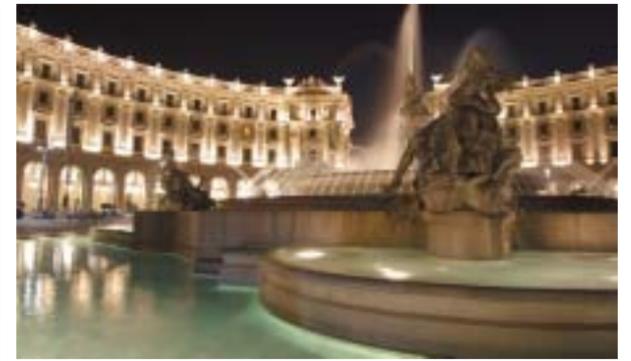
The Hotels

In the course of the eight-day tour, you will drive a total of 1000km in three Ferraris, and everyone will get the chance to drive all the cars. To ensure there is enough time for the other activities and for relaxation in the spa, for instance, Red Travel makes sure the hotels are approximately 250km apart.

The Tour starts in Rome where you will be picked up at the airport and shuttled to the five-star Exedra Hotel situated on the Piazza Republica in the heart of the city. Here you can relax and on the second day take in some of Rome's attractions. The third day is the first day of driving, and the guests are ferried to Ladispoli on the coast where they meet their steeds for the first time. Driving on some of the most picturesque Tuscany roads, and part of the Mille Miglia route, leads to the Fonteverdi Terme Hotel and Spa in San Casciano dei Bagni, a historical spa town.

On the fifth day, the Tour heads for Florence and the Villa Il Poggiale. The seventh day takes in Pisa on the way back to Rome where the final stop is the Posta Vecchia Hotel on the coast and near the airport. Once the home of Prince Orsini's family, this magnificent villa was latterly the subject of an expensive and loving restoration by the Getty family.

"While we recommend a structure to the eight-day tour, we are flexible. So long as all the parties agree on what they want to do, we can change the arrangements within the set price of 9500 euros per person," Andrea explained. "We have three Russian couples coming soon who want to play golf every day. This is no problem as all of them want the same thing. Of course, if some of the guests want something radically different, including say private jets or yachts as part of the experience, then that will be extra. But we are always open to suggestions."



The People

Andrea Levy, the ideas man behind Red Travel, is a partner in Momo-Levy, a communications company that counts international brands like Rolls-Royce, Bacardi and British American Tobacco among its clients. With offices in Italy and England, Momo-Levy works in six languages, including Japanese.

The Cars

The F430 is Ferrari's latest masterpiece and this is quite frankly one of the very best sports cars in the world. It's the star of the Red Travel show, and is complemented by a F360 Modena Spider and 575 Maranello - soon to be replaced by an F430 Spider and 575GTC.

The F430's 90° V8 flat-plane crank motor is completely new and develops 490bhp at 8500rpm with 465Nm (343lb ft) of torque at 5250rpm produced by the new 4305cc engine. Top speed is 315km/h (196mph) with 0-100km/h (0-62mph) in 4.0sec. The latest incarnation of the F1 clutchless paddleshift transmission made by Magneti Marelli is significantly superior to the previous generation unit. Faster and smoother, it makes lightning upshifts under full throttle, and when you are driving normally, so long as you feather the throttle during an upshift as you would in a manual car, the gearchange is seamless.

Completely new suspension with adaptive damping and Ferrari's brilliant E-Diff electronic differential help the new car deploy its power safely. Despite the challenging bumpy roads and sometimes off-cambered corners, the F430 felt extremely stable and sure-footed.

The steering and chassis relationship is a very direct and linear one and where the F360 can feel nervous and edgy at times, the F430 gives you confidence. You quickly feel at one with this car and while you can never relax completely in such an involving machine. ↪





its user-friendliness soon puts you at ease. The power steering is well-nigh perfect, striking that elusive balance between describing the road surface while insulating you from surface imperfections. The ride is also surprisingly good for a mid-engined supercar: taut but able to soak up small and large bumps with perfect bounce and rebound control.

Some may think that moving the Start button to the F1-style steering wheel is pretentious, but the 'manettino' switch (as it is called by Ferrari racing drivers) alters the gearshift, engine e-gas

electronic throttle response and traction control protocols from a gentle setting for snow and ice to low-grip road surfaces like gravel; to the normal Sport position; to the faster and more aggressive Race setting. It can also be disengaged entirely for the race track, removing traction and all other electronic stability aids.

It works brilliantly in the real world, tailoring the car's responses to your mood and road conditions. So when this fantastic motor reaches its crescendo between 7000 and 8500rpm, and upshifts like lightning, there is no getting away

from the fact that this is a red-blooded, race-bred Ferrari. *Bellissimo!*

On the challenging hilly Tuscany roads, the 575 just managed to keep its composure with the more nimble V8s, but on the long straights and fast sweeping curves of the main roads the big four-cam V12 under the 575's long nose quickly asserted its superiority. There is no substitute for cubic inches and with 5748cc and 515bhp at 7250rpm, any gap the lighter mid-engined cars had initially opened up was quickly reined in.

Torque is something the 575M has in abundance: 588Nm (434lb ft) at 5250rpm to be exact. Since much of that is available much lower down in the rev band, and easily accessible with the advent of the F1 paddleshift system for the V12 car, travelling quickly with little effort is a given.

Some existing Ferrari owners may want to take part in this tour. Rather than bringing their own cars to Italy, they can avail themselves of the Red Travel cars and not worry about shipping, insurance and other logistical inconveniences.

Red Travel is a unique concept that integrates the passion of Ferrari driving with some of the best lifestyle establishments Italy has to offer, and the tour is to be commended for the way the Ferrari thread is intricately woven into the richly-coloured tapestry of Italy.

In the company's own words, 'Touching the soul of Italy' is one of Red Travel's objectives for its tours. In the course of this, guests will also come to understand the mentality and emotions that nurture the Ferrari spirit and feel the emotions that create *la passione*.

The American Academy of Hospitality Sciences certainly seems to agree with this as it has just conferred Red Travel with its prestigious Star Diamond Award for 2005. 



For more information about how you can enjoy the very best of Italian lifestyle with Red Travel, email your name, address and contact details to stephenc@trmg.co.uk. Red Travel offers a variety of tour options from two-day tours at 2450 euros per person up to the eight-day Red Style Tour at 8000 euros per person.