

Celebrate in Cortona

Jane McNeill takes a trip to this stunning part of Tuscany to find out why it is such a special place to get married

Italy is one of the most romantic and picturesque countries in the world and offers myriad opportunities to couples who want a very special wedding. There can be very few places as exquisite a backdrop as the Etruscan town of Cortona. The views towards and from the small town are breathtaking and quite simply magical in any season.



The Big Event

However, getting married in Italy has its own special challenges as well. That's where The Big Event comes in. Based in Cortona, (famous for the bestselling book and film *Under The Tuscan Sun*) it offers wedding and special event planning services from Florence to Rome, covering all of Tuscany and Umbria and Lazio. It has access to excellent contacts, resources and supplier relationships, increasing

buying power and saving money. It is effectively a one-stop service to take the headache out of organising a wedding overseas.

'Our service is bespoke and very personal, no two weddings are alike,' explains English-born Rosie McGrath Panchini, Chief Executive, 'Our style leans towards contemporary, elegant weddings in the most memorable locations in Italy, including stunning places like Cortona.'

'Every aspect is covered from organising the documents and interpreters for the ceremony, sourcing fabulous venues, co-ordinating with caterers and advising you on the wonderful local products and wines for the reception. We have personally selected the best floral decorators, hair stylists, musicians and photographers and we negotiate and book on your behalf wonderful accommodation.

'With our experience we are aware of potential complications and can therefore avoid them', says Rosie. 'Many of my clients appreciate not having to negotiate the planning process alone and with our help they can focus on the more glamorous and fun parts of arranging their dream wedding in Italy.'



Villa di Piazzano

Rosie works closely with many prestigious venues: just five metres from Cortona at the end of an impressive drive, lined with cypress trees is the breathtaking Villa di Piazzano. As soon as you arrive you are transported back in time. It was built over 600 years ago as the hunting lodge of Cardinal Silvio Passerini who was the treasurer of the Vatican and hugely influential due to the protection of the Medici Family. It later became a convent and in the last two centuries operated as a tobacco and wine growing estate. Today the villa, now a beautiful hotel, and its gardens are protected by the Environmental Authorities due to its historic importance.

The structure of the villa is a perfect example of Italian style. The simple noble façade articulated by grey stone work in *pietra serena* features sixteenth-century doorways which open into a homely entrance hall and living room. In every corner there are wonderful artifacts and antiques collected by the Wimpole family, who own and restored the villa in the late 1990s and work hard to ensure guests and wedding parties are looked after down to the last detail.

Another very special place is Hotel San Michele in the historic heart of Cortona. It is an elegantly modernised Renaissance *palazzo* that, in the 18th century, housed the Etruscan Academy.

Intelligently and tastefully restored, it has standard double rooms, superior double rooms and suites with bathroom, Jacuzzi, telephone, satellite TV, fridge and air conditioning. A wall painting in the San Michele hotel depicts the Madonna and Child

seated on a throne and accompanied by four saints. The historian Della Cella mentions 'a wonderful fresco showing the enthroned Madonna and Child, surrounded by saints'.

The fresco's delicacy of line, the purity of the drawing and the beauty of the colours are reminiscent of the best painters of Raphael's day. Even though the figure of the Madonna is 14th century, the plasticity of her fine oval face and the steadiness of her gaze, lead one to think that we could be dealing with a painter from Masaccio's school'.



Hotel San Michele

Tuscany is undoubtedly one region in Italy that conjures up romantic views and by having Cortona as the setting for your wedding day there will be happy memories that will stay with you, your family and friends for years and years to come.

CONTACTS
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