



Life is Suite in Rimini

by JACK BELLAMY

DAY one in the Big Brother-style i-SUITE hotel, overlooking 15 kilometres of Italian beachfront.

Jack is in the bathroom watching football on a giant flatscreen TV mounted in the floor-to-ceiling mirror.

The toilet is square – not a good match for Jack’s all-too-round backside.

Jack enters the lounge and presses a button, expecting the light to come on – instead the balcony curtain swishes back to reveal a spectacular view of the Adriatic Sea lapping white sands.

Chuckling joggers and cyclists look up at the naked Englishman struggling with 2010 technology.

Big Brother is watching you, indeed...

Wimp

I was staying at the i-SUITE in Rimini, Italy. This tall white hotel has leapfrogged the modern and landed way into the future.

It looks especially alien looming over thousands of older establishments.

This resort has been saying “buongiorno” to generations of holidaymakers for more than 160 years. But none offers the experience provided by this 21st Century folly.

It really is the closest you will get to living in the Big Brother house and you don’t even have to share it with annoying strangers.

The ground-floor swimming pool starts inside the hotel but snakes outside. It is heated to 35C, so even in winter you can jump straight in rather than looking like a wimp

and dipping your toes. The brainchild of architects Giovanni Quadrelli and Simone Micheli, the i-SUITE is so futuristic James Bond would be well at home.

My third-floor room had no door – instead a credit card pass enabled me to push through the wall into my suite.

As well as three TV screens – one set in the mirror on the ceiling, so you can watch Dr Who

while lying flat on your back – the rooms are equipped with a personal media centre with wi-fi and computer.

But I was there to escape that world, so instead headed to the wellness centre on the sixth floor to make use of the sauna, Turkish bath, tanning lamp, ice machine and pool.

Clean and pink, I was ready to venture outside – from the future and into the past.

As you stride centurion-like under the Roman Arch of Augustus, built in 27 BC, at the end of Via Flaminia, you enter Rimini proper.

One of the highlights here is the Surgeon’s House, a recently restored mosaic-tiled dwelling from the Second Century AD.

You can even peer down on the bones of Romans buried here. Having seen some of the wonderful instruments available to the surgeons back then – now part of an exhibition in Museo della Citta – I wasn’t surprised so many had met their end.

Rimini also played a huge part in the 13th Century Renaissance and there are paintings here by Giotto and Piero Della Francesca, plus the sculpture of the Dead Christ supported by four angels by Giovanni Bellini.

Appetite roaring, I headed to the spectacular fish restaurant Molo22. It practically shimmers in the new marina, tempting you with mouth-watering seafood dishes and views. Fish soup, stuffed cuttlefish, crabs and prawns – delicious.

If you prefer meat, Brodo di Giuggole in Via Soardi served up the best steak and lamb chops I have ever tasted – and I have tasted a lot. Everything including the bread is made fresh in the restaurant and the service is warm and sincere.

It’s worth heading a little

outside Rimini to dig up the gems buried there.

The small town of Santarcangelo di Romagna sits on subterranean cave networks. And in the old cloth-printing workshop, Antica Tintoria Marchi, is a mangle built to a Leonardo da Vinci design.

Lycra

Made in 1635, it was powered by a man walking inside it like a hamster in a wheel, shuttling a five-and-a-half tonne stone to and fro. If that doesn’t get the creases out of your tablecloth, give up.

Beyond Santarcangelo lies San Leo and its castle in the sky. Sweaty cyclists in glistening Lycra huff and puff along the winding mountain road to this hill-top fortress, stronghold of the Malatesta’s rulers.

It dominates the Marecchia Valley – no mean feat, as the whole place is pretty impressive. Once the scene of battles between the Dukes of Urbino and their enemies, the only invaders now are bugs and wasps.

The torture chamber

here is where pain used to be meted out – a lot more severe than the “punishments” given out on BB.

Murderous-looking racks and spiked chairs are not for the squeamish, although Ugo, our guide, seemed to have a glint in his eye as he turned the wheel and explained how the sounds of victims’ screams would carry through the fortress.

When it was converted into a jail, its most famous prisoner was Count Alessandro di Cagliostro, a notorious conman, occultist and alchemist.

Now his cell – a stone box with a barred window – is open to the public. His story is worthy of a follow-up by Da Vinci Code author Dan Brown.

His guards were warned not to make eye contact with him for fear of being seduced by his powers. He survived five years encased at the top of this mountain before succumbing to madness and syphilis.

Tourist

To recover from these horrors, I plonked myself down in the neat little restaurant Osteria La Corte.

But the Sangiovese di Romagna wine served here was as far from “plonk” as you can get.

Served in wide-topped glasses allowing the wine to breathe the cool mountain air, it went down a treat with a salad of red cabbage, orange and pine nuts. And the wonderful grilled meat and vegetables. And the Zuppa Inglese – fresh pear, kiwi and strawberries. Goes great with absolutely anything in fact.

I needed the sustenance, as there were still many tourist tasks to complete.

There’s the old fish market in Rimini’s Cavour Square, the painted fishing village of Borgo San Giuliano, and the Malatesta Temple – one of the masterpieces of Renaissance art.

Rimini has a sleek

marina and more than 500 bars catering for anyone seeking a lively break in the sun. It is also popular with 18-35-year-old Europeans, including British stag and hen groups.

Rimini is rightly famous for its gently-sloping white beach, all nine miles of it, populated with 40,000 rainbow-coloured sun umbrellas shimmering in the Adriatic sun like drawing pins in a cork notice board.

It is sectioned into allotments featuring kiddies' rides and keep-fit areas.

You have to pay a daily rate to go in these, although there are a couple of free public areas.

The Italians treat their beaches like gardens, raking the sand and straightening the furniture and plants every night after closing. June to September is, rather obviously, the best time to visit, although the seafront and bars are packed with Italians throughout August – especially when Rome shuts up shop and everyone heads to the coast.

But by this point in the holiday, Jack has been evicted and must leave this wonderful place, with only his “best bits” as souvenirs.



FACT FILE

■ JACK stayed at the i-SUITE Hotel, where a double room with breakfast costs from around £160.

For more information and to book, see i-suite.it or call 001 39 0541 309671.

■ Ryanair flies to Rimini from Stansted with fares from £13.99 one-way including taxes. See ryanair.com to book.

Also, visit rimiturismo.it for further information on Rimini.



WHITE HOT: The tall i-Suite Hotel in Rimini will take you back to the future



HEAVEN WHERE
DA VINCI MEETS
BIG BROTHER

**OLD AND
NEW:** Rimini
offers traditional
Italian culture and
15km of beach