

The idea of returning to your family home – no matter what your age – is a comforting one. A kitchen that’s always warm, extra helpings of home cooking and people fussing over you all day long. This is the ethos behind Palazzo Margherita, the hotel that film director Francis Ford Coppola adoringly created in Bernalda, in the Basilicata region of southern Italy where his father grew up.

The centre of an Italian home is, without a doubt, the kitchen. And Palazzo Margherita takes food incredibly seriously. It is here, where our chef Mariella is teaching our group, how to make pasta the southern Italian way: with semolina and water.

Once we’ve found the optimum consistency, with Mariella’s motherly guidance we craft orecchiette, which translates to ‘small ear’ because of its shape, by pushing flattened pieces

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of dough over our thumbs; shell-like cavatelli by smoothing a ball of dough into a curved shape and flicking it away; and hollow filei tubes with a metal skewer. ‘Look, I’m making a kebab!’ quips one of the guests.

A dusting of flour over our rustic-looking attempts and they’re ready for the pan. While they bubble away, Mariella tackles the sauce, using a copper pan to fry up onions and cherry tomatoes from the Palazzo’s garden – everything guests consume here is organic and grown locally, if not within the grounds. With salt, basil and some of the pasta water, she grates some creamy Caciocotta cheese into the mix before throwing in the rest of the pasta and letting it boil down into a vibrant red sauce.

The simple recipe – without garlic – tastes →

Bernalda bella

Take your next holiday the way the father of acclaimed film director Francis Ford Coppola lived – at Palazzo Margherita, in the charming countryside of southern Italy

WORDS: CLARE VOOHT



COURTYARD GARDEN, PHOTO BY GUNDOLF PFOTENHAUER

FROM TOP: SALON (SCREENING ROOM) LISA LIMER; COURTYARD GARDEN AND BATHROOM, PHOTOS BY GUNDOLF PFOTENHAUER

→ the opposite of simple. The sweet tomato juice has saturated the pasta, which, it turns out, we haven't done a half-bad job on, and the cheese has added depth and an element of indulgence. Matched with a glass of Aglianico del Vulture – a red wine also from Basilicata – the dish confirms that food tastes better when you travel to it, rather than the other way around.

A wander around the Palazzo's garden will give you more insight into the ingredients favoured by the chefs. Pomegranate trees arch above beds of lettuce, parsley and red and green chilli. Scents range from citrus to earthy rosemary as you pass through the garden.

Between vegetable patches is a four-seater table under a vine-entwined pergola, where guests can eat. In keeping with the family home idea, you can eat your meals anywhere you want. If not under the pergola, try lunch on a sun lounger by the secluded outdoor swimming pool; an aperitif on a bench by a baroque fountain that just so happens to be Coppola's favourite reading spot; or dessert while propped up in bed by substantial pillows.

After our efforts in the kitchen, my friend and I decide the best place for our Margherita cake dessert is in our Garden Suite, where we are staying for the weekend. One of the more secluded suites, it opens out onto the garden, and is just close enough to hear the soothing sound of the fountain when the windows are open.

The room's impact is all in the detail: a handwritten welcome note from Rosella, the hotel's general manager, next to a bowl of almonds and a silver nutcracker; the bathroom soap is wrapped in white paper and a white ribbon hallmarked with the red hotel emblem; the Apple TV is loaded with 132 films, mostly by Italian directors, hand picked by Coppola.

There's also a list of 15 films made by Francis and Sofia, including classics such as *Lost in Translation* and *The Godfather*. We pick Coppola senior's 2009 drama *Tetro*, by which time our desserts have arrived under silver cloches. The signature cake is a chocolate and black cherry delight, topped with a sprig of mint



'Explore Bernalda or visit the nearby white sandy beaches looking out to the Ionian Sea'

and edible flowers; all in the detail.

After a peaceful night wrapped in soft white sheets and a morning dip in the white Devon & Devon rolltop bath, enhanced with bath oil made by Santa Maria Novella – one of the world's oldest pharmacies in Florence – I'm ready for breakfast. Like other meals at Palazzo Margherita, it is an important event.

We decide to have this meal in the courtyard. Restored to its former 19th-century glory in a purposeful style that makes it look almost like a film set, it's another nod to the world of the

silver screen. Just-squeezed orange juice is brought out to us, followed by cappuccino – the pattern in the milk, which matches the pattern on the cups, is another touching detail.

After that, it's croissants, toast made from fresh-baked bread, ricotta, a fruit platter of kiwi, banana, pear, plum and apple cut and arranged into a fan in the middle, strawberry, apricot and fig jam – of course all made on the premises, with the figs plucked from the tree opposite where we're sitting. Then come the scrambled eggs, with ham and mozzarella, and a plate stacked high with three types of cake: apple, mascarpone, and chocolate and amaretti.

We ask for mint tea, and the mint is picked immediately from the garden, to arrive in a teapot within minutes. It's the freshest and most flavoursome mint tea I've ever tasted.

If you can tear yourself away from the motherly embrace of Palazzo Margherita – or more to the point, move after such a hearty meal – the hotel has bicycles for guests. Explore Bernalda or visit the nearby white sandy beaches looking out to the Ionian Sea. The city of Matera, 40 minutes away, is also worth a visit for its ancient cave dwellings, and the hotel can arrange for a driver to take you there.

When you return, the best way to end the day is with dinner and a film screening in the opulent Salon. As the hotel has only seven suites and two rooms, chances are you'll get this all to yourself. We chose gritty Naples Mafia movie *Gomorra*, accompanied by a starter of creamy mozzarella with local grilled eggplant, followed by lamb baked in a pot with lampascioni (hyacinth bulbs). Paired with the attentive service and a bottle of red – Primitivo from Puglia – this has all the makings of the best TV dinner of your life. ☑

Rooms cost from £375 per night, and suites from £550. Palazzo Margherita offers a three-day Dolce Vita package, including cooking classes and trips to Matera starting at £478, excluding accommodation. Palazzo Margherita, Corso Umberto 64, 75012 Bernalda, Italy (0039 0835 549060; coppolaresorts.com) Easyjet offers flights from London Gatwick to Bari from £63.98 return (easyjet.com).



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: IMAGE BY GUNDOLF PFOTENHAUER SUITE 8, PASTA AND COURTYARD GARDEN, IMAGES BY GUNDOLF PFOTENHAUER