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SEPTEMBER 2006 £3.75

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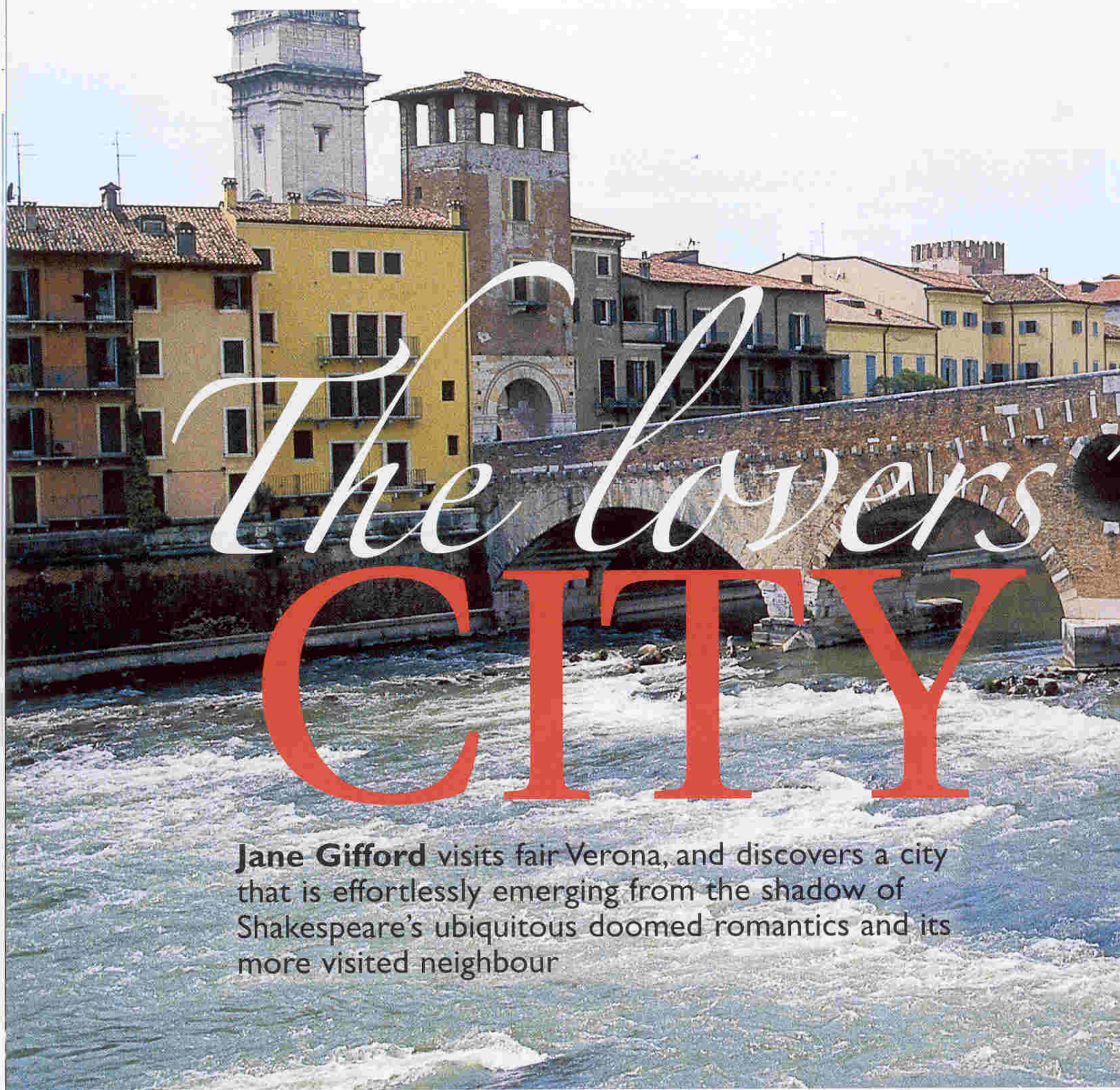
FAIR VERONA

Fall in love with the Veneto's
irresistible romance capital

SECRET ITALY

- Be the first to discover Ponza's *island paradise*
- Get off the *beaten track* in forgotten Cilento
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The Lovers CITY

Jane Gifford visits fair Verona, and discovers a city that is effortlessly emerging from the shadow of Shakespeare's ubiquitous doomed romantics and its more visited neighbour

From prehistoric fossils to a colossal Roman amphitheatre, from medieval castles and Renaissance palaces, to cutting-edge fashion, the Veronese are proud to say they have it all. The city is prosperous, stylish and pedestrian-friendly.

Mix a tale of tragic love between Romeo and Giulietta with saints, relics and plenty of opera. Add swallows, cypress trees and misty distant mountains and make the

weather hot. Put leafy shade over riverside walks, quiet terraces and busy streets, then pour out some of the city's excellent local wines – Valpolicella from vineyards to the north and Soave from fertile hillsides to the east – and you will begin to get some of the real flavour of Verona.

If you only have a few days to spare, it's good to know that by basing yourself within the old town walls, all this is comfortably accessible on foot, with no need to hurry



Images: Janie Gifford

and plenty of time for people-watching from any of hundreds of excellent bars, cafes and restaurants along the way. Within easy reach of Lake Garda and the Dolomites for stunning scenery, water-sports and winter skiing and close to Venice for the sea, the citizens of Verona have good reason to be smug.

First settled by Goths, then claimed by Rome, Verona is at the junction of three important Roman roads – Via Postumia

linking Mediterranean Genoa with the Venetian Lagoon; Via Gallica leading to France; and Via Claudia Augusta leading to Austria. The city has often been the prize in wars between Rome and tribes from France, Austria, Germany and Hungary. King Charlemagne claimed it for the Holy Roman Empire and his son Pipin's tomb is at San Zeno.

The city gained major prosperity through the Scaligeri, a family of rich wool merchants named Della Scala, who »

Above: The Ponte Pietra which crosses the Adige river dates from Roman times

A WEEKEND IN VERONA

Right: The verdant cypress trees of the Giardino Giusti
Below: Roman excavations on Via Leoni



created a dynasty that held power in the region between 1260 and 1387, dubbed Verona's golden age. The poet Dante found refuge at court here between 1301 and 1304. Verona chose Venice as an ally in 1405 and remained part of the Most Serene Republic until it was occupied by Napoleon in 1796.

All of the bridges spanning the Adige around Verona were destroyed by the Germans at the end of World War II. They have been lovingly restored using material salvaged from the river. The Roman god is back on Ponte Pietra, the oldest of Verona's bridges, and today's citizens are proud to be at the centre of the most prosperous region in Italy. Industry is booming but with a strong emphasis on respect for the

environment and the quality of life.

By far the most popular square to see and be seen in Verona is Piazza Brà, the name a corruption of the German for wide – *breit*. Fashionable restaurants line the Liston, a grand wide pavement from 1786 specifically designed for showing off. Via Mazzini (or Via Nuova) leads off Piazza Bra for expensive window-shopping, with maximum opportunity to admire your reflection, stepping out on the ubiquitous red marble pavements. It is still lively well after midnight.

At Antica Bottega del Vino off Via Mazzini, they have been serving wine since 1890 and they take it very seriously. Original mottoes running round the room read, "Water is the enemy of wine. So if you're into water, you'd better leave now". The wine is superb, the

THE BEST OF VERONA

1. Catch an opera

Built at the beginning of the 1st century AD, Verona's Roman arena is the third biggest in Italy and a truly memorable setting for an opera. The season runs through July and August. For

tickets visit www.arena.it or call +39 045 8005151.

2. Liveliest shopping district

The Corsa Porta Borsari, running beneath the titular gate, is the city's shopping





banter lively and the cuisine traditional. It's a successful formula – there's one in New York now.

THE ULTIMATE OPERA HOUSE

Piazza Bra is dominated by Verona's most famous centrepiece, the 2,000-year-old Roman Arena, internationally important historic monument and famous venue for summer seasons of lavish opera. A seat on the red marble steps ringing the high amphitheatre is relatively inexpensive (around €25). Picnics are unpacked in a friendly festival atmosphere while bottoms polish fossilised ammonites in the stone. At dusk, those on the steps light candles to add extra magic to the proceedings.



“VISIT PIAZZA ERBE AND MARVEL AT THE MASSIVELY ORNATE MAFFEI PALACE”

Visit Piazza Erbe and marvel at the massively ornate Maffei Palace and the frescoes on Case Mazzanti. Built over the site of the Roman forum, this lovely square was the centre of city life before larger Piazza Brà rose to prominence. Verona is often called ‘the painted city’ for its many frescoes and for the rich colours of its buildings – yellows from local limestone and reds from local clay.

Castelvecchio, the last stronghold of the Scaligeri, is an impressive medieval fortress with a museum containing some of the best art in town. It is undergoing major

Above: The Lambert tower off Piazza dei Signori offers the best view in town.



epicentre, lined with shoe shops and exclusive boutiques. Look out for Medusa's head carved high above the pavement.

3. The best market

The site of the town's

forum during the Roman period, **Piazza delle Erbe** now plays host to the town's most boisterous market. Avoid the tourist tat on offer and there are some interesting bargains to be had.

4. Best city views

The 12th-century **Lamberti Tower**, just off the Piazza dei Signori, offers dizzying views of the city to anyone brave enough to take on its steps. It's open seven days a week and entrance is €2.

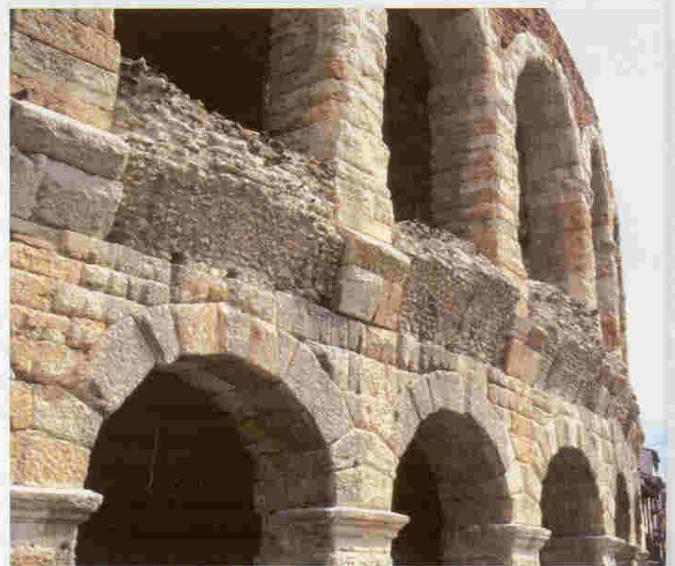


refurbishment at the moment so parts could be closed. When finished, you will be able to look out over Verona from the castle walls. On Ponte Scaligero, built in 1375, you are guarded by great fishtail battlements, the lasting emblem of the Ghibelline imperialists and a distinctive feature of the Scaligeri palaces.

Above: Looking across the city from the Lamberti tower **Right:** The Roman amphitheatre's **Opposite, clockwise from top left:** Frescoes in Piazza Erbe; a window above the Piazza del Signori; street entertainers; children in Piazza Bra

FISHING FOR SOULS

The Romanesque church of San Zeno is not far from Castelvechio. Zeno, a 4th-century bishop with African roots is Verona's Patron Saint. The present church is a medieval masterpiece guarded by two marble lions with fabulous 12th century sculpture and bronze relief panels depicting events from the bible and the lives of San Michael and San Zeno. The rose window represents the Wheel of Fortune. They say Verona will be safe, so long as dark-skinned San Zeno fishes



5. The perfect passeggiata

Do as the Veronese do and take a relaxing, leafy riverside amble beneath the towering hill of San Pietro, for a more laid back perspective of the city.

6. Best museum

The 14th-century fortress of Castelvechio at one end of the Ponte Scaligero is home to the fascinating Museo Civico d'Arte, which boasts classic works by Tintoretto, Pisanello and Bellini. Entrance is €4

7. Get some peace and quiet

The Church of San Zeno (on Piazza San Zeno) is the perfect place to escape the crowds. One of the most important Romanesque churches in the country,



“THE PLACE HAS BECOME A SHRINE TO THE HOPES AND WISHES OF THE LOVELORN”



for souls from the 13th-century crypt.

Casa Giullietta, with its famed balcony, is one of Verona's most publicised attractions, especially popular with parties of young teenagers. The arched gateway is completely covered in graffiti. A cult has grown up around the bronze statue of Juliet. Popular myth dictates that if you rub her breast it will bring luck in love. Links with any historic figures of Romeo and Juliet are arguably tenuous, but there »



it houses Mantegna's Renaissance masterpiece *Madonna and Saints* and one of the most impressive rose windows in northern Italy.

8. The best people watching

Pull up a pew and watch Verona's great and good go about their business outside the solid rank of spectacular palazzi on the bustling **Piazza Brà.**

9. Best winebar

The Veneto is one of Italy's foremost wine producing regions and the cavernous **Bottega del Vino** (Vicolo Scudo di Francia 3a; +39 045 8004535) wine cellar is a great place to sample some of its very finest produce.

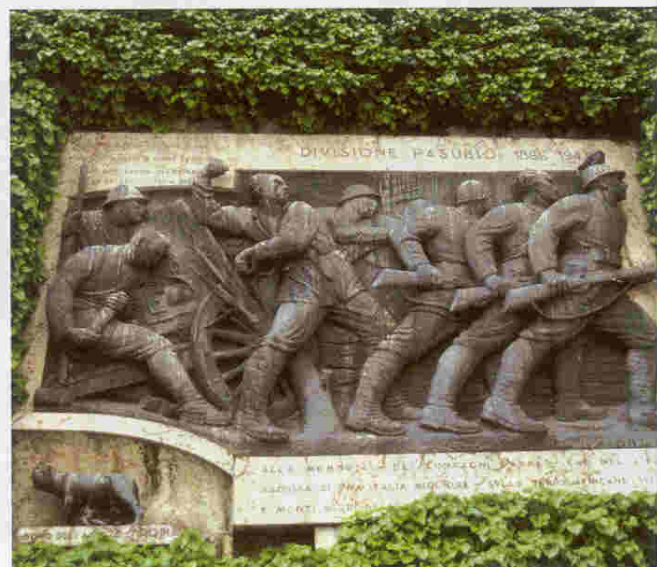


Above: The arena in Piazza Bra, one of Italy's most famous opera venues. Right: The war memorial on Via Pallone

is no doubt that the place has become a shrine to the hopes and wishes of the lovers.

The beautiful cypress-covered hill of San Pietro is where Verona began. A Roman theatre crowned with a massive temple was built here around 25BC. Seek out the shade in 15th century Giardino Giusti. This privately owned garden, attributed to Agostino Giusti, Knight of the Venetian Republic and Squire of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, is terraced to gently climb the hill, slowly revealing new panoramas across the palace and city. Goethe and Mozart loved its cypress avenues, mythological statues and quiet evergreen perfection.

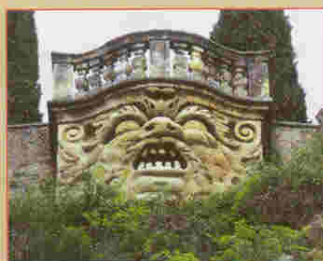
From its magnificent gardens and ancient ruins, to its irresistible gastronomy and wonderful shopping, Verona succeeds in being all things to all people. Although often overshadowed by neighbouring Venice, it is one of Italy's most elegant and intriguing cities – go out and discover it for yourself. **TIM**



NEXT MONTH ROME

10. Best gardens

The splendid **Giardino Giusti** (Via Giardino Giusti 2) offer cool evergreen simplicity and are an essential stop-off on any visit to the city. Look out for the labyrinth, the



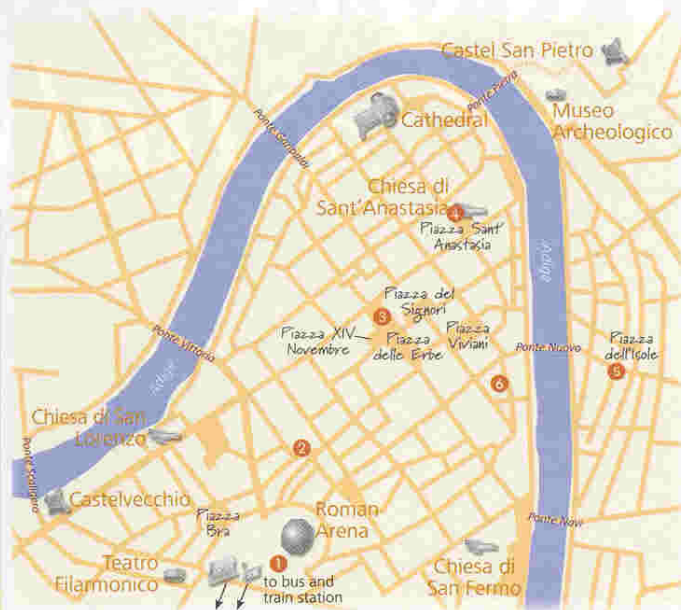
magnificent fountains and the urns of fruiting citrus trees.

11. Best Roman remains

Other than the amphitheatre, the ruins of the 1st century

Roman theatre on the **hill of San Pietro** are the city's best preserved Roman remains and well worth a visit for a glimpse into the city's past. Like the amphitheatre, it is still used for the occasional concert

essentials for information on renting or buying property in this area, turn to page 84



✈ GETTING THERE

Fly direct to Verona from **London Gatwick** with British Airways (08708 509850; www.britishairways.com) or to Venice from **London Stansted, East Midlands or Bristol** with Easyjet (08717 500100; www.easyjet.com) or from **London Gatwick, Birmingham or Manchester** with British Airways.



✈ GETTING AROUND

Verona is quite manageable on foot but has a well-organised bus network. Tickets are cheap but you must buy them from newsagents before you travel.

☀ WHEN TO GO

The city is at its busiest during the opera season between July and August. If you are a fan of opera and don't mind the crowds it is a must, but if not, you best plan your trip for **May or September**.

ℹ TOURIST INFORMATION

Verona tourist office: ① Via degli Alpini, 9; +39 045 8068680

THE ITALIAN MAGAZINE RECOMMENDS

WHERE TO STAY

• VALUE FOR MONEY

Locanda Catullo ② Via Valerio Catullo 1; +39 045 8002786) enjoys an excellent central location and has very cheap, if not too sophisticated, rooms. Double rooms start from €55.

• MID-RANGE

Situated in the heart of the old town, **Albergo Aurora** ③ Piazza XIV Novembre 2; +39 045 594717) is large but retains some character and the service is excellent. Double rooms start from €160.

• LUXURY

The **Due Torri Hotel Baglioni**

④ Piazza S. Anastasia 4; +39 045 8004130) is probably Verona's finest hotel. Centrally located, with huge rooms, perfect service and stunning furnishings, it is a memorable place to stay. Doubles from €200.

✕ WHERE TO EAT

• FAST FOOD

For a slice of pizza, your best bet is the excellent **Bella Napoli** (Via Marconi 14). The portions are huge and it stays open late.

• TYPICAL TRATTORIA

The **Trattoria all'Isolo** ⑤ Piazza dell'Isolo 5a; +39 045 594291) is an excellent choice for local, hearty specialties. The service is friendly and the prices reasonable. Meals from €25.

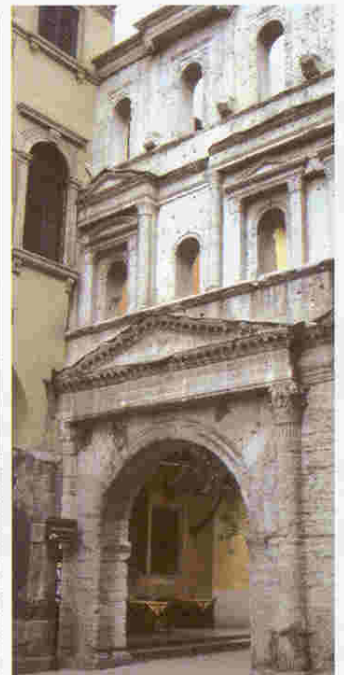
• GOURMET

Il Desco ⑥ Via Dietro San Sebastiano 7; +39 045 8010015) is not just one of the best restaurants in Verona but in all of Italy. The food is beautifully prepared but be warned, the prices are high. Meals from €125.

🏠 DAYTRIPS

Watersports enthusiasts should find time for a trip to **Lake Garda** which is about a 30 minute drive away. Sirmione (tourist office: Viale Marconi 8; +39 030 916114) on the lake's southern tip is a good base.

The attractive town of **Vicenza** (tourist office: Piazza dei Signori 8; +39 0444 544122), a short drive to the east, is famous for the magnificent villas on its outskirts built in the 16th century by Andrea Palladio.



JANE'S CHOICE



"Central and reasonably priced on a quiet old side-street close to Piazza Bra.

The owner, **Signor Armando**, adds to the charm."

• **Hotel Armando**; Via Dietro Pallone 1; +39 045 8000206

