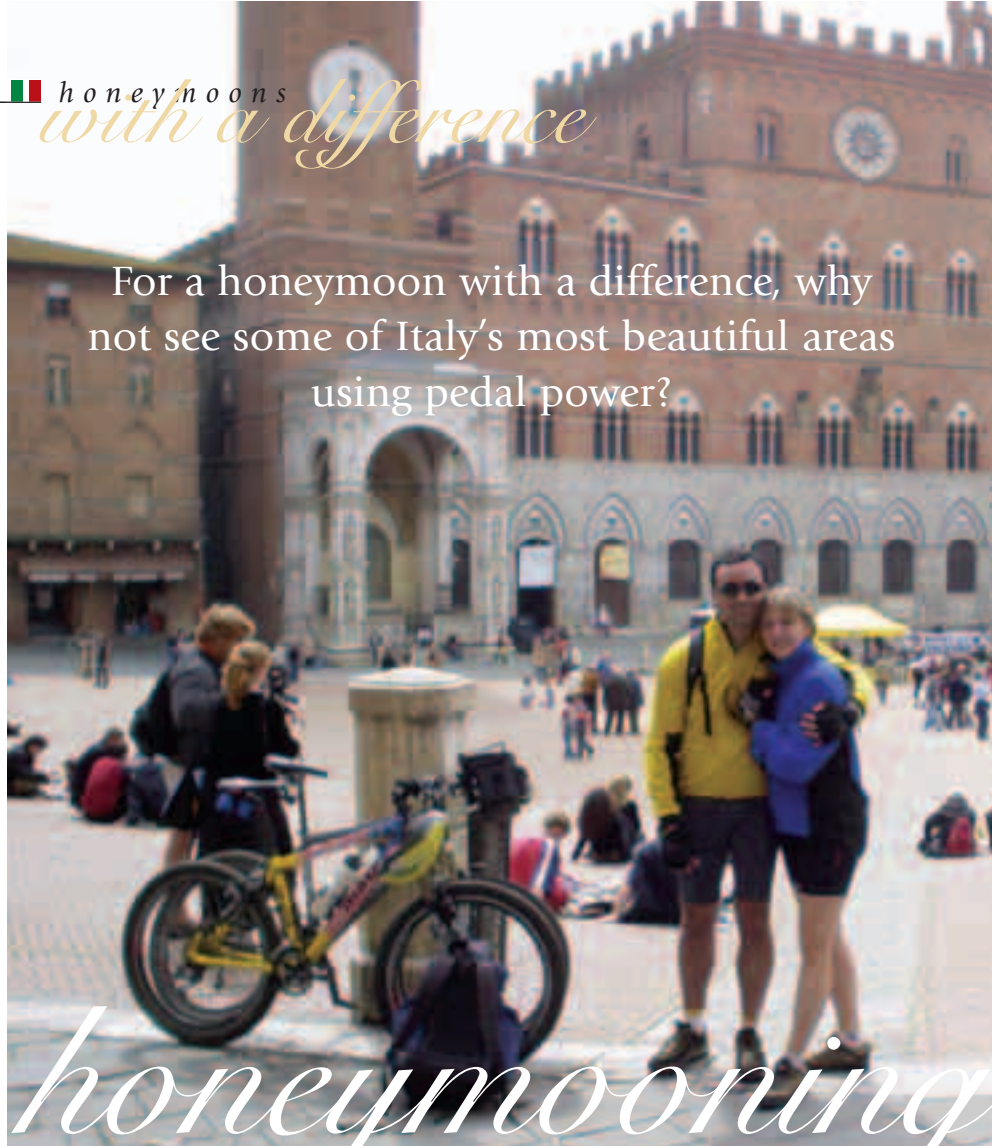


For a honeymoon with a difference, why not see some of Italy's most beautiful areas using pedal power?



honeymooning IN ITALY

WORDS: BONNIE BATES

on two wheels

ITALY is all about good food, good wine... and good form! Mild Mediterranean weather coupled with a variety of breathtaking landscapes makes this country one of the favourites for honeymooners from around the world. What better way to see secret spots, meet locals and work off the pasta than a biking honeymoon!

Sightseeing Italy by bike gives you the chance to reach those intriguing parts of town that the tour buses leave behind for the more popular landmarks. If you come to Italy equipped with your own bike, the Italian Railway (Trenitalia) welcomes bikers with a special bike car to store your wheels when travelling between cities. If you don't bring your own ride there are plenty of bike rental operations in all regions of Italy and they offer delivery and pick-up, plus on-call repair and rescue.

ON THE FLAT

Bike-friendly cities include Florence, Bologna, Mantova and Ferrara, to name just a few.

Ferrara is a particularly enchanting town, enclosed within medieval walls with very limited automobile traffic. After pedalling around town you can ride out to the Destra Po cycling road which runs along the banks of the Po River all the way to the Adriatic Sea (over 100 kilometres). There are small towns to visit along the way and the trail ends in spectacular Comacchio, a sort of mini-Venice. The Po Delta is an enormous Nature Reserve dotted with castles, fishing villages and there is full forest of Mediterranean pine trees, sand dunes and hundreds of species of wildlife, including graceful flamingos.

Bike and Boat is a great way to keep that bikini figure trim while you enjoy the Italian beaches. The north-eastern coastline is a popular place to travel this way as trips venture into Istria and the Croatian islands



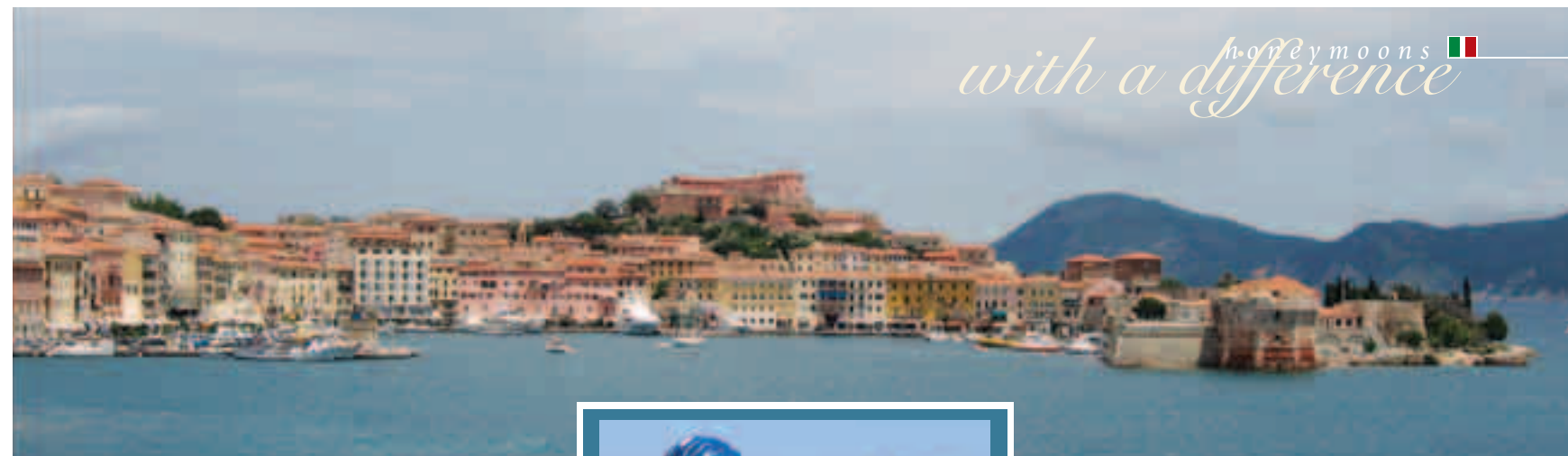
which display typical architecture reminiscent of Venetian domination there in the Middle Ages. Bikes are loaded onto the boat and each day leads to a different port. If you're too tired to pedal or just want to enjoy the sun, stay on the boat and you'll get to the next port with no effort at all!

GOING WITH THE CROWD

Expert road bikers can join in with the many bike clubs that meet early in the morning for their weekend ride. Members of the G.S. Grassina bike club in Florence start in the main square of town and split up according to level and how long they have to bike – lunch is usually on the table by one o'clock sharp! A stop along the way for a shot of espresso coffee and an occasional piece of focaccia break up the 80-100km average trip. Grassina is neighbours with Ponte a Ema, home town to Hall of Fame Italian roadbiker

IN ITALY

Gino Bartali, archrival of the infamous Fausto Coppi. Some of the vintage bikers such as Roberto Ferretti, nicknamed 'Ferro' (iron) for his strong character, still remember when Bartali, five times Grand Tour winner (two Tour de France and three Giro d'Italia) rode in the area in a post-war Italy. For racing fans who like to measure up to the local bikers, the annual 'Gran Fondo Gino Bartali' namesake race is held in May and the start and finish lines are right in downtown Ponte a Ema, which lies just outside the city walls of Florence.



Bike and boat!



DETAILS

Bonnie and Luca of My Weddings & More live in Florence and bike all around Italy and Europe. Luca is an active member of A.G. Ciclisti Grassina.

My Weddings & More offers wedding destination and travel services in Italy. The main office, located in Tuscany, is run by Bonnie and Luca who personally take care of all customers during their stay in the country.

As local residents, they offer important insights into the Italian lifestyle and give support and assistance 24/7. All couples planning their event with My Weddings & More can set up an online gift registry to enable those left at home to contribute to the event and give the gift of a lifetime.

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Bonnie and Luca

NOT JUST BIKING...

Every season brings some kind of culinary gift to savour and discover while biking in Italy. September welcomes porcini mushrooms which are abundant and flavourful, especially in Maremma, the south part of Tuscany. The island of Elba (above), off the coast of this region, is a safe haven for porcini as only the locals are left by the time the season begins and they never disclose their hunting grounds to strangers!

The island is small and has a variety of challenging trails for mountain bikers and well-kept paved roads for road bikers. Novice bikers will enjoy the central part of the island which is flat and the paved roads run through fields and small beach resort villages.

October brings truffles, a delicacy for the gourmet palate and exquisite when grated on noodles for that daily dosage of carbs.

November toasts vino novello wine, a trendy new wine which needs to be drunk while it's young, no later than February of the following year.

All 12 months of the year are ripe for biking and enjoying the 'boot' of the Mediterranean in healthy honeymoon style. Come here and indulge! [dreamitalianweddings.com](http://www.dreamitalianweddings.com)

Novice bikers will enjoy the central part of the island...

Another heavenly destination for mountain bikers is the Alps and particularly the Dolomites. Starting from Cortina d'Ampezzo, you can cross over into Austria and if the elevation change is too much for you, a train takes you back across the border to Dobbiaco. There's a fun mountain bike race here in July, the Cortina-Dobbiaco. Easy-going and family-oriented, this race is a good way to cool off when you're in Italy during the summer months.

One of the most popular road bike races in Italy, boasting 11,000 participants this year, is the 'Nove Colli' or 9 Hills race held in Cesenatico, home of the late biker Marco Pantani, nicknamed 'the Pirate'. Held in May every year, this race attracts a larger number of bikers and their families than any other race in Italy. Entertainment and events precede the race, which is always held on a Sunday.

FOR THE MORE ENERGETIC

The expert mountain biker's dream of rocks, cliffs and endless dirt roads comes true in the savage countryside of Sardinia. Dry and desolate, the Sardinian landscape is almost lunar, except on the plateaus which conceal natural wonders like the dwarf horses of La Giara, wind-mangled trees and shrubs, plus a wide variety of Mediterranean herbs and spices growing in the wild (rosemary, myrtle, mint, marjoram, thyme). Omnipotent peaks like Is Paucaris Mannu overlooking the bay of Cagliari, the capital of Sardinia, and Cuccuru Su Corvu, towering 471 metres above the turquoise waters of Cala Luna on the east coast of the island, make this destination a must for off-road fanatics.