

Deliziosa! My dream Sicilian cookery course

Kate Quill goes on a culinary pilgrimage to Palermo and learns to cook like a local

At a table set with flowers and fine china, I am tucking into my second helping of pasta. It is a baking summer's day and the blinding light bouncing off the Mediterranean is flooding the elegant white dining room. The table hums with conversation, clinking cutlery and tinkling wine glasses. Counting our hosts,

Gioacchino and Nicoletta Lanza Tomasi, the Duke and Duchess of Palma, we were strangers until this morning, but after a few hours and a cookery class with Nicoletta were nattering like old friends.

It is part bookish pilgrimage, part culinary curiosity, that has brought me here; to the last home of my literary hero Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, one of Italy's greatest writers. He shuffled off this mortal coil in 1957, but his presence is alive

in this palazzo in the old Arab quarter of Palermo, Sicily, and its innumerable rooms of books and paintings. "A house of which one knew every room wasn't worth living in," he wrote in his most acclaimed work, *The Leopard*, set in Sicily during unification. It is a line that keeps running through my head while I'm here.

Lampedusa and Gioacchino, the duke, were very distant cousins and the pair grew close enough that Lampedusa legally adopted him. Gioacchino inherited the Palazzo Lanza Tomasi and, with Nicoletta, moved here permanently in 2007. She converted the dilapidated upper floors into 12 simple self-catering holiday apartments — known as Butera 28 Apartments — and



The Capo food market in Palermo

Flying daily from London Heathrow, with service you'll enjoy

Experience Business Class from*
£ 3,219



Late deals

UK

Boutique stay in Bath

Had enough of January already? Stay at Bath's Broad Street Townhouse this month and you'll be well placed to warm up in the city's thermal spa or delve into the shops' sales. The 11-room boutique — built in classic Bath stone but given a stylish millennial makeover inside, complete with speakeasy bar — is also offering discounts: 25 per cent reductions on all stays before January 30. B&B doubles cost from £105 if you add the "Jan2520" code when booking (broadstreettownhouse.co.uk).

Cornish self-catering

You'll need to move fast to bag a stay at Captain's View, an eight-person luxury

self-catering townhouse in Falmouth, close to the National Maritime Museum. It's available through Cornish Gems and one-week stays from January 25 or February 1 have been reduced by 20 per cent to £911. Four pale-hued bedrooms adjoin open-plan living spaces and a courtyard garden with that titular view over the boat-dotted River Fal (cornishgems.com).

Dog-friendly Devon cottage

Two dogs per stay are welcome at Ford Mill Shippen, a two-person barn conversion near the heritage fishing village of Clovelly in north Devon. Saving up to £81, seven nights' self-catering for four costs from £265 beginning on February 1, 22 or 29 with Holiday Cottages (holidaycottages.co.uk). You'll have access to the surrounding ten acres, lake, fishable river and a giant chess set, while the Royal Horticultural Society's garden Rosemoor is near by.

SHORT-HAUL

Take in Maltese culture

Saga has knocked £300 off a ten-night group tour of Malta flying from Gatwick on March 19. Costing £999pp, including flights, half-board, portage and guiding, the two-centre Heart of the Mediterranean journey promises Neolithic temples, heroic tales from the Second World War, a guided walk along coastal salt pans and free time on the rural island of Gozo (travel.saga.co.uk).

Beat the crowds to Corfu

Reduced by 15 per cent if you book before January 31, Destinology has spring trips to Corfu from £549pp, including flights from Gatwick, private transfers and half-board at MarBella Corfu, a resort in the Greek island's southeast. It has six restaurants serving different cuisines,

plus a private beach where snorkelling is available. You must travel between April 18 and May 1, when temperatures usually reach 20C but the tourist throngs have yet to arrive (destinology.co.uk).

Amalfi Coast glamour

At Casa Angelina, a whitewashed cliffside hotel on the Amalfi Coast, lounges feature colourful Murano glass sculptures, and every bedroom includes an iPad to borrow during your stay. Afternoon sorbets and poolside prosciutto are offered before rooftop dinners of lobster spaghetti or pizza cooked in a wood-fired oven, and there's a spa and private beach to enjoy. The mercury tips 18C in April, throughout which the Luxury Holiday Company has savings of up to £350pp on four nights' B&B — now from £1,320pp, including flights and private transfers — if you book before February 29 (theluxuryholidaycompany.com).



A pool at Casa Angelina on the Amalfi Coast



began running a one-day cooking course that focusing on Sicilian dishes.

Our morning began with a trip to Palermo's 1,000-year-old Capo food market. Shopping on the narrow street of rundown façades and shabby baroque churches was an unhurried process. Nicoletta exchanged hugs and pleasantries with the traders and went on to buy enough for a banquet: olive-wood-fired bread from Monreale, strings of red onions, peppers, melon, oranges and swordfish.

Back at Via Butera, we ascended the marble stairway to the private wing. "By the way, if you see someone wandering around in his underpants, don't be alarmed — it's my husband," Nicoletta briskly announced. Duly warned, we made our way through to the garden, where we picked herbs and jasmine petals before gathering in Nicoletta's blue-and-white-tiled kitchen.

On the menu for lunch were panelle (fried savoury chickpea biscuits), fusilli

pasta with a pistachio pesto sauce, swordfish involtini (filled with anchovies, pine nuts, currants and parsley paste), a pepper salad and a cinnamon-infused cantaloupe melon pudding. All were prepared from scratch.

Nicoletta possesses the energy of an elite athlete and the multitasking skills of an air traffic controller. Within minutes we were given jobs and put to work. Time flew by and soon we were toasting our efforts with wine while Nicoletta told us about the history of the palazzo and the Di Lampedusa and Lanza families.

After lunch she showed us the superb collection of paintings, porcelain and furniture — including, thrillingly, Di Lampedusa's library and the original typed manuscript of his novel *The Leopard*.

Di Lampedusa and fabulous food are not, of course, the only reasons to come to Palermo. The city has been under Phoenician, Greek, Roman, Arab, Norman and Spanish rule and is a

palimpsest of architectural and cultural treasures. Choose your season, though, and go as late or as early in the year as you can. Nicoletta recommends visiting in November or early December; the weather is temperate and the city has emptied and slowed down.

The growth in summer visitors has led to trendy galleries springing up alongside brash fast-food joints, rising property prices and naff cocktail bars. Perhaps we should remember *The Leopard's* much-quoted advice from Tancredi to his uncle, the prince: "For things to remain the same, everything must change."

Need to know

Kate Quill was a guest of Butera 28 Apartments. A one-day Cooking with the Duchess course, including lunch and a tour of the palazzo, costs £127pp. Self-catering apartments sleeping two to six at Via Butera from £68 (butera28.it). Fly to Palermo with Easyjet or Ryanair



The cookery class

Experience Royal Brunei Airlines 787 Dreamliner with our warm hospitality and personal service onboard one of the world's youngest fleets. Our state-of-the-art inflight entertainment system is equipped with a 15.4" touchscreen monitor and our contour seats fully recline to a flatbed for a peaceful rest.

Return Business from £*

Melbourne / Brisbane

✈ 3,219

✈ Full-service airline experience

✈ One of the world's youngest fleets

🎧 State-of-the-art entertainment system

Fly RB with a seamless, one stop connection through Brunei to Melbourne and Brisbane

Book now on www.flyRB.com

*Valid for sale until 31 March 2020 and for travel until 30 November 2020. Flights are inclusive of taxes and surcharges. Subject to seat availability. Conditions apply.

ROYALBRUNEIAIRLINES

ROYALBRUNEIAIR

ROYALBRUNEIAIR

ROYAL BRUNEI
AIRLINES

Tour Moscow and St Petersburg

The six-night, culture-focused Russian Highlights group tour is part of Tucan Travel's January sale. First comes Moscow, with its red-brick Kremlin towers abutting iconic onion domes, followed by St Petersburg's neoclassical architecture and Venetian-style canal network. Reduced by up to 29 per cent, departures on April 17 and May 1, 15 and 29 cost from £447pp, including B&B, transport and guiding. The tour code is EEHR (tucantravel.com).

LONG HAUL

Surfing in Sri Lanka

Ticket to Ride's new Surf House on Sri Lanka's southwest coast pledges affordable luxury. Think in-house butlers, good meals and a rooftop bar, while the professional coaching atop warm-water waves is followed by surf-specific yoga. Book to stay before April 30 and bag seven nights for the

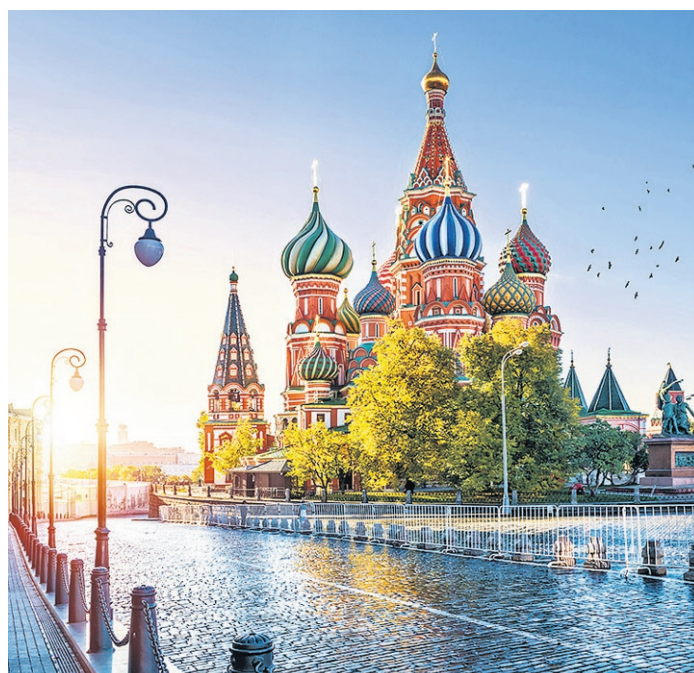
price of five. During this period the surf-course package costs from £424pp (a saving of £164pp) including half-board, equipment rental and a daily yoga class. Quote the code "7FOR5" when booking (tickettoridegroup.com).

Safari and sea in Kenya

Turquoise Holidays has savings of up to £1,050pp on Kenya trips that combine safari and seaside. Based at luxury Hemingways lodges, it features three nights' all-inclusive in the animal-rich Masai Mara game reserve, four nights' half-board on a beach beside the Watamu Marine National Park and a night's B&B in Nairobi at either end. Prices are from £2,695pp, including all flights and transfers. The offer is valid for travel before April 15 or between November 1 and December 19 (turquoiseholidays.co.uk).

Caribbean for less

Among the potential activities at the Tamarind hotel on western Barbados's



Visit St Basil's Cathedral in Moscow during a Russian Highlights tour

ritzy Platinum Coast are stand-up paddleboarding, golf on nearby courses and rum-shop tours. Alternatively, you could just make use of the three pools, crescent-shaped beach and spa. Discounted by up to 35 per cent, seven nights' all-inclusive costs from £1,999pp, including flights from Gatwick and transfers, departing on February 4 (kenwoodtravel.co.uk).

Stay in style in Dubai

When visiting the world's most over-the-top city, you may as well stay somewhere extravagant. Below its huge arches and arabesque domes, the island resort Atlantis, The Palm hoards a bevy of high-class restaurants, and entertainment from shark walks to a 17-hectare water park. Book this month and stays between May 11 and September 20 are half-price. Best at Travel has five nights' half-board from £957pp, including flights via Abu Dhabi, departing on May 13 (bestattravel.co.uk). **Richard Mellor**