

See rose-tinted Rimini

A night of unusual celebrations proves to be just one of the attractions of Emilia-Romagna's cinematic riviera, as REBECCA FORD discovers

IT'S A HOT summer night and I'm sitting in the courtyard of a restaurant eating a plate of strozzapreti ("strangled priest"), strips of handmade pasta that are a speciality in Emilia-Romagna.

Suddenly the warm air fills with the Goldfinger theme and in comes a large masked lady wearing a cape. My fork stops in mid-air as she launches into a burlesque routine, removing first her cloak then gloves and dress to finish in a swirl of three tiny tassels and a cloud of golden dust.

I'm in the resort of Rimini for its annual La Notte Rosa (Pink Night) celebrations, Italy's most spectacular summer beach party where you have to expect the unexpected. When the masked lady is followed by a male magician in tights and an eye-poppingly large codpiece (a ruse, I think, to distract from his unintentionally hilarious tricks) I begin to feel as if I've been cast as an extra in some surreal film.

Which is appropriate really as Rimini was the birthplace of Italian film director Federico Fellini, whose films had a fantastical quality. He would surely have loved Pink Night.

The celebrations started seven years ago, the brainchild of the mayor. I'd assumed by the title it was a gay event but apparently pink was chosen because the mayor wanted to celebrate women.

It was such a success it grew into a giant summer party and now towns all along the region's 70-mile coastline deck themselves out in pink tulle and join in. At midnight fireworks are let off all along the

Adriatic riviera.

With live music, pink cocktails, rose-tinted fountains and crowds sporting pink T-shirts and Stetsons (yes, that includes the men) it's a bit like New Year's Eve crossed with a giant stag and hen party but with a family feel.

The heart of the action is Rimini's sumptuous Grand Hotel in Parco Federico Fellini which hosts a private party for the region's glitterati and is bathed in pink lights. Built in 1908, the Grand was instrumental in turning

Rimini into a smart resort which attracted the jet set; although the town is no longer as glitzy as it was, the Grand can still pull in guests such as Sting, Bruce Willis and Sharon Stone. Fellini was captivated by its glamour and often featured it in his films.

The director resolved that when he was rich he'd keep a suite at the Grand. He was true to his word, staying there whenever he was in town and living la dolce vita (the title of his iconic film) for real.

The marbled reception is all chandeliers and wood and has a book filled with Fellini's sketches: they're rather unsettling and full of weapons, violence and naked women with grim faces. A far cry from Anita Ekberg frolicking in the Trevi Fountain in the 1960 movie.

The beach and the bars are the main attraction in Rimini although the town does have a small historic centre with a well-preserved Roman archway and a cathedral with artworks by Renaissance masters Giotto and Piero della Francesca

THE morning after Pink Night I get up early and hop on a train for the hour's journey north to Ravenna, a town that is one of Italy's cultural jewels (among stiff competition).

Picturesque and prosperous, Ravenna was built on a lagoon on the Adriatic, a bit like Venice, though the waters have long since receded. It was capital of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century, then later capital of the kingdom of the Goths and of the Byzantine Empire in Europe.

East met West, cultures melded and artistic traditions evolved. If you were wealthy you endowed churches not with great paintings, as in Renaissance times, but mosaics. Although the town's eight Unesco-listed buildings look sober from the outside, with a conspicuous lack of Hollywood sheen, inside they dazzle like polished gems.

This is evident soon after I meet my guide Paola and she takes me

into the small Mausoleum of Galla Placidia which was built around 425 AD and intended as the tomb of a powerful Roman woman.

Practically every inch of it is covered with deep blue and gold mosaics: toga-clad saints trip across the walls, dainty doves sip from a bird bath and stars twinkle from a sapphire sky. It's easy to see how these mosaics inspired the artist Gustav Klimt to create his lavishly gilded paintings.

A few minutes away is the Basilica of San Vitale, a



6th-century church with more stunning mosaics, this time in shades of shimmering green and gold. One scene depicts the Byzantine Emperor Justinian with his retinue.

All are shown from head to sandaled toe except for one man whose face alone peeps out. "That's the banker who paid for the mosaics," says Paola. "He seems to have been added later."

Obviously he wanted more than a walk-on part in history: Fellini would surely have understood.



● **GETTING THERE**

Ryanair (0871 246 0000/ryanair.com) offers return flights to Rimini from Stansted from £70. *Hotel Trieste Rimini* (dialling from the UK: 0039 5415 7343/hoteltriesterimini.it) offers doubles from £71 per night (two sharing), room only. *Grand Hotel* (5415 6000/grandhotelrimini.com) offers doubles from £88 per night (two sharing), room only.

La Notte Rosa (lanotterosa.it) is on July 6, 2012.

Emilia-Romagna tourism:

emiliaromagnaturismo.it/en

Rimini tourism: rimiturismo.it



PARTY TIME: Crowds of revellers enjoying Pink Night in Rimini

Scandinavia's leafy gem : PAGES 72 & 73





LA DOLCE VITA: The stylish Grand Hotel and, inset, film director Federico Fellini

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