

One to remember

As the brains behind travel and lifestyle management company Nota Bene, **Anthony Lassman** knows his way around the world. But no matter where he goes, there's one country that's forever in his thoughts



formalities), I either go for a swim if it's a resort hotel or start driving the concierge mad if we're in a city! And then it's usually a glass of champagne and something to eat.

What makes a good hotel a really great one?

People make a great hotel. Obviously design, location and style are important but it's how you're being looked after, and the welcome, that really count. A beautiful hotel without the right team or service is like a beautiful person without personality. It needs a great manager, top people in guest relations and restaurant managerial positions, and each department functioning correctly. Food and beverage have to be able to follow guest requirements and deliver them in a timely way; housekeeping the same; the reception and concierge desks must be efficient

and answer phones on time. Guests should not be disturbed any more than absolutely necessary. The operation needs to be seamless and appear effortless. And finally, fellow guests are important too, since they help create ambience and set the tone.

Which is the one country you keep going back to?

Italy. I love hearing the language, I love the food and wines, and I love the sheer diversity of its cities, countryside and coast. I love Venice in winter, Milan in October, Rome almost anytime. For relaxing I love Capri, Panarea, Positano (ideally in June or early July); Milan for shopping; Bologna, Liguria and the Venetia lagoon for food; Tuscany's Val d'Orcia as well as Tuscany for countryside; the Veneto for the unique buildings of Palladio...

PACKING LIGHT – ANTHONY'S ESSENTIALS

1. My Canon G11 camera, which I cannot be without
2. Wash bag, underwear, swimwear/gym kit, shoes
3. White shirts of different fabrics for day/evening
4. At least one jacket
5. A pair of jeans, a pair of trousers, a pair of shorts

Previous spread: **The Amalfi Coast** as seen from Ravello.

Left: **The Belmond Hotel Splendido in Portofino** comes complete with a heated saltwater infinity pool.

Below: **Sardinia's Costa Smeralda** is one of the most expensive places to buy real estate in Europe.

Next spread: **The gardens at the Villa Cimbrone**.

What led you to set up Nota Bene?

No better reason than a challenge from my wife, who knew how obsessed I was with quality and details in travel, with great hotels, and with places possessing an X factor. It started, without a business plan or strategy, as a publishing company. We printed what are now seen as iconic destination review books, which have almost become collectors' items.

What qualities does a good travel and lifestyle manager need?

A love of people, a passion for what they do, a sound travel knowledge, and skill in coming up with a great idea. And above all, being able to deliver superior client service.

From a certain destination to a particular type of holiday, what are the emerging trends in luxury travel right now?

The trends remain firstly for the glamour spots and the world-class hotels, villas, restaurants and beach clubs – so, places like St Barths, Tulum, the Seychelles, the Maldives, Capri, Corsica, the Amalfi Coast and Sicily.

We are also seeing a lot more top-end experiential travel to places like Argentina with Uruguay; Mexico with Guatemala; and Hong Kong with the Philippines. And, closer to home, the Dodecanese islands of Greece with the Turkish Riviera, and mainland Sicily with the Aeolian Islands are also popular.

What makes a great holiday?

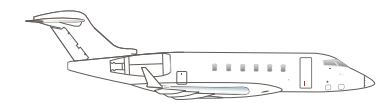
Transportation is key. When you can jump on a plane or a boat and not have to worry about schedules or check-in, you can pack two days into one. For example, you could be breakfasting in Istanbul, fly privately down to Bodrum for lunch, and take a powerboat to Patmos for dinner. This is the kind of thing Nota Bene does for its clientele: it's what makes travel bespoke, exciting and indulgent. And this is a trend among the higher-end demographic: shorter, faster-moving trips often booked at the last minute.

What's the first thing you do when you arrive at a new destination?

Check out the room and make sure I have the view and space I expected. For me the right accommodation and the right orientation are key. Once satisfied (and I hate any check-in



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Describe your perfect Italian long weekend.

Fly to Naples on Thursday, with a car waiting for the drive to Positano and lunch on a sunny terrace overlooking the sea. Then up to Ravello, the most beautiful hilltop village of the Amalfi Coast, and the Villa Cimbrone's gardens to take in that unforgettable view with an aperitif overlooking the bay of Minori down below. Then dinner at my favourite restaurant, Da Lorenzo in Scala across the hillside, before heading back to Positano for a nightcap.

Spend Friday morning sunning and swimming. Stroll around town for a little shopping before lunching on the freshest of seafood with a perfect bottle of Fiano d'Avelino and a nap at the edge of the sea. As the afternoon sun starts to cool, have your luggage placed on a waiting speedboat for the 40-minute crossing to Capri. A short nap followed by dinner at a favourite restaurant in town where the owners and hosts know what you like and just bring the food. Not having to pore over menus or wine lists is a great luxury.

On Saturday morning, take in the colours, the fragrant flowers, the sunshine. And then a relaxed lunch overlooking the bay and the island of Ischia in the distance, followed by an afternoon massage and a stroll through the piazzetta and down to the shopping streets. Then a late dinner, Caprese-style.

On Sunday morning I'd take the boat to Reccomone to see my favourite hostess Anna, the proprietress of La Conca del Sogno. I will leave it all to Anna and be confident of eating like a god at my regular table at the edge of the sea, before heading back by boat to Naples where the car will be waiting for the drive to the airport. I cannot think of a better way of spending a long weekend.

Is there anywhere you haven't been that you'd like to visit?

I have several destinations on my 2016 agenda that I have not been to and really want to visit. These include Namibia, Sumba (Indonesia) and Norway.

Anthony Lassman is the founder of Nota Bene.
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