

The Senses of Lucca

by Hannah Moss

I feel as though my senses are magnified being here in Lucca. Maybe it's because my brain is always on, always more alert because I'm in a foreign country. It's far easier to just open your mouth and speak in your native language or take the same route you take every morning when you're at home. But I'm on my toes here.

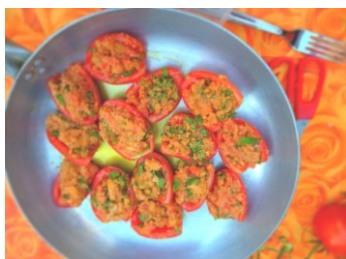
I need to watch my back when bikes and even cars come down these tiny streets and nearly pin me against a wall. This is the only thing I could ever find to complain about. It isn't even a complaint, really, merely an observation as I press my body into the stone walls or houses next to me to avoid being hit by a smart car. Truly, this is small compared with what my experience has been thus far and is overshadowed by all of the beauty that surrounds me.

For my senses, it's a feast. I guess **touch** is covered: trying not to be hit by cars and bikes.

This would lead me to **scent**. You can smell the jasmine trees on the Walls, especially when there is a gentle breeze in the summer. Perhaps people who live here are used to it, but to me it's intoxicating. Mixed with the scent of fresh bread wafting through the air it's all that much better.

A perfect segue to **taste**. This is a given: I am in Italy. The food is incredible. An example, you say? Before I came here, I hated tomatoes. I really tried, but could not stand them. Here, I eat them gladly, *willingly*, even. Everything is fresh and that is reflected in the care and precision the local markets and restaurants take in presenting their food.

Touch. I do have to come back to this one, as being pressed against a wall is not sufficient. I cannot keep my hands off of anything. The trees, the stones, the buildings.... There are thousands of years of history beneath my feet, over my head, to my left ... dare I say, to my right? There is no way I can keep my hands to myself. Every time I encounter a medieval ruin



or palace, I feel obliged to truly *encounter* it. I put my hand on it and place my ear up to listen. Maybe there is no sound, but the energy is unmistakable and the history is overwhelming. This is the city of Napoleon and Puccini. What a dichotomy: war and music in the same place. But, it's all here, right at my fingertips.

Seeing these monuments is just as unfathomable. When you walk along the Walls and look into the city, you feel as though you are in living in medieval times. I see new things every day!

A friend once said to me, "I wish I could see the world through your eyes. Everything is so exciting and beautiful to you." This was after I had commented on a trail a plane had left when it flew over the buildings. My secret is simple: Look up. So many things were purposely built above the ground and are just waiting up there for someone to see them. I told an Italian friend of mine this. He has lived here far longer than I have but has started seeing things he had never seen before. He is even pointing things out to *me* now! Look up.

I save **sound** for last because for me as a singer this sense is especially keen. Italy is the birthplace of opera and Italy does not let you forget that. When I first arrived, I was stunned by how imbedded opera is in the culture. At the station, trying frantically to remember my Italian, I got into a taxi with a driver who spoke no English. When he heard that I was here for an opera program, he started to sing *La donna è mobile* from *Rigoletto*. He knew all the words and for the next five minutes as we sang and soared through the streets, pinning people against walls, we spoke the same language.

The whole city is filled with music: the ring of bicycle bells when you're in their way or the cars rushing around outside the city blaring their horns (especially when Italy wins a *calcio* match). The language is musical. Someone told me to sit on the Walls and listen to how people here speak. It is a continuous flow of words as if they are singing. Every sentence is this string of beautiful sounds.

Five senses: Together they completely overwhelm us in this environment. It would seem that you can't distinguish one from another when each sound is engulfed in this culture. And yet, there is something to be said for sitting back and letting it all wash over you, distinguishing what you can and leaving the rest for next time.

— photos by Hannah Moss

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