

# Christmas in Chiasso Barletti

If holiday shopping is on your agenda, treat yourself to a stroll down one of Lucca's oldest and most enchanting lanes, little Chiasso Barletti, between Via Santa Lucia and Via Fillungo. This tiny medieval alleyway is one of Lucca's narrowest, its tall sides extending so snugly that one can barely see the sky. During these winter days, you can see it decked out in holiday splendor just as our photographer has presented it, on the cover of *Grapevine* this month.

In recent years there has been increasing enthusiasm by businesses, to set up shop here—especially small, specialized, and very unique ones. After an exotic tea emporium opened several years ago, the *Chocolat* candy shop and *Pantera-Brancoli* news agent moved here from another part of town. Last year the decision was made to inaugurate the street for Christmas, so now this is a happy tradition! The red carpet has been laid down for the holidays and many shoppers and visitors peek into the alleyway to discover its charms. To our delight, an English language bookshop has recently opened (named *Etta's Bookshop*, after the owner's cat). We wish them luck and invite readers to stop in, take a look, buy a book!

The other shops to be discovered, depending on your personal taste and inclinations, are: *Be-clothing store*, *Casamica-Immobiliare*, *Ali Babà Doner Kebab*, *Fat Mama vintage clothing*, *Elena Camilla Bertellotti Contemporary hand-made jewelry*, *Arte Al 24 art gallery*, *Rossoramina Handmade Pottery*, and *4EZ scooters/clothing*.

A tidbit of history: The word *chiasso* originally referred to a narrow alley with walls jutting out over the street itself. If you look up it seems the houses are tilting inward, yet they have been there for hundreds of years. For hygienic reasons, in 1308 the city fathers decided to close the street. The Barletti family, owners of property here, collaborated with the closure and the street was named in their honor.

— by Norma Jean Bishop

— photos (Christmas 2019) by Thomas S. England

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