

TRAVEL

For Andrew Sanger this Shakespearean setting was a picture of romance

IN FAIR Verona we lay our scene, entering the stage on an evening flight. First Act: check in at the Palazzo Victoria, a fabulously restored 15th-century palace, and head straight to Piazza Erbe, the exquisite square in the heart of the old city. Soon we are at outdoor tables sipping big, cool glasses of prosecco, the favourite local tipple.

All around rise floodlit medieval mansions like something from a fairytale. The piazza's marble paving, pale pink and creamy white, gleams in the moonlight.

There could hardly be a better setting for the greatest love story ever told. William Shakespeare never came here himself, but someone must have told him that everything about Verona makes this a town for lovers — of all ages.

The town's historic centre, almost completely traffic-free, is a maze of charming cobbled lanes and narrow shopping streets lined with chic, stylish boutiques. Turn any corner and there in front of you are majestic squares, ornate courtyards, handsomely fortified palaces and Baroque churches. There's also a grand 19th-century synagogue (the local community, unusually, is mixed Ashkenazi and Sephardi).

Visitors flock to Juliet's House, hidden away in a courtyard. It's perhaps surprising that couples want their pictures taken on its balcony — don't they know Romeo and Juliet ends in tragedy? There's plenty of proper sightsee-



Verona's river Adige almost encircles the historic centre offering a scene

ing, too. Verona's Roman ruins include some of the finest in Italy.

The 2,000-year-old arena, dominating spacious Piazza Bra on the edge of the old town, has survived almost intact.

Wander its eerie tunnels beneath the massive masonry, then climb ancient stone steps into the breathtakingly vast auditorium.

Prestigious concerts are staged here to this very day. Current book-

ings range from One Direction to Paul McCartney, as well as Verona's famous Opera Festival.

A loop of the wide, rushing river Adige almost encircles the historic centre, crossed by the majestic medieval brickwork of the fortified Scaligero bridge. Across the river, the Roman Theatre is a piece of impressive history that, like the arena, is still in constant use for open-air shows.

One of Verona's greatest attractions

All's fair in Verona

so romantic that surely Romeo and Juliet would have approved

is actually a neighbouring city: the train ride to Venice is an easy, affordable, essential outing. The arrival on a causeway across the lagoon is truly spectacular, and Venice station stands beside the Grand Canal. To avoid

queues and crowds, it's wise to book return rail tickets in advance from Rail Europe in the UK. Make sure to include a seat reservation.

Among Italians, Verona is best known, not for Shakespeare, but for

Verdi. The glamorous Opera Festival lasts all summer, and scores of the world's finest singers have taken part in the spectacular open-air performances.

This is the Festival's centenary year, so opera lovers are promised special treats. Among them, Plácido Domingo as Nabucco, singing baritone instead of tenor.

Also on Verona's opera programme this year is *Roméo et Juliette*.

Performed in the arena under the stars, that will be a midsummer night's dream come true.

GETTING THERE

FLY BA, Monarch, easyJet, Ryanair and flyBe fly from the UK to Verona. A shuttle bus runs from Verona airport to the town centre. www.aeroporto.verona.it/en

PACKAGE Kirker Holidays offer three nights B&B in a choice of four-star palace hotels in the historic centre from £498 per person, including return flights, private car transfers a booking service for guides, restaurant reservations, opera tickets. Tel: 020 7593 2282 www.kirkerholidays.com

RAIL Fares from Verona to Venice start at £39 return. To book, contact Rail Europe: 0844 848 4070 or www.raileurope.co.uk.

INFO Most sights and attractions in Verona are closed on Monday. www.tourism.verona.it/en