

My Educational Stage at Rocco Forte Villa Igia, October 2023



My time as a stagiaire with Rocco Forte was extraordinary from start to finish. This trip began on 14th October 2023, when Jupiter and I flew into Palermo Airport and were swiftly transferred to Villa Igia. Here we were greeted by their poised and friendly front of house staff; people who quickly became some of our greatest allies throughout our stay. We were immediately immersed into the great and lively culture of the property. We toured the beautiful and historic house with the guest relations team and then once settled within our room, we set off to explore the city.

Our first evening was a whirlwind of taking in the city, visiting historical monuments such as Teatro Massimo and the historic quarter. This enabled us to better understand the place we would call home for the next few days, and it was incredible to see the rich Sicilian culture and the pride the locals have for their city. I believe this to be crucial when working anywhere new as we were able to understand the history and the foundations of the city before working within one of the region's most iconic properties.



The next morning, we were down to the reception at 9am sharp, ready to begin our Stage. We were walked to the restaurant, where we began our day shadowing the team within the Florio restaurant as they efficiently manoeuvred through the breakfast service. As breakfast calmed, I was able to gain a better insight into their operations by discussing the booking systems and reservations forecasting with the host team. A good first step into understanding the broader perspective of the property.

The lunch service was then spent with the team in the pool bar, a very different service style, with more tableside interaction and casual dining options. This service was interesting to witness as it showcased the variety the property offers its guests. After this, we migrated to the bar, to position ourselves both on the floor and behind the bar. From an outsider perspective, the heritage of the bar as well as the superb hospitality made this appear as the beating heart of the hotel at night. The staff here were incredibly knowledgeable and showcased their menu to me with ease, explaining how their standards smoothly integrate within the boundaries of standards set by auditing bodies such as LQA. An aspect, I found particularly insightful, coming from a property also audited within the same set of standards.



The second day, orientation. This was spent with Giorgia Sicari, PA to the GM. I found this day to be very educational, as we began to learn more about the history of the property, the incorporation of this property into the Rocco Forte brand and goals for the future of this property.



Then, just like that we were into day 3; a morning spent with Front Office and an afternoon with Concierge. During this shift, I was able to gain a better understanding of their departmental processes and better understand their guest facing standards. I particularly enjoyed learning about the pre-arrival processes and planning from the concierge side which in turn allows for a seamless guest journey from start to finish.

By day four, I felt much more confident in my basic Italian vocabulary, a wholly different aspect of this educational trip.

These basic greetings and phrases were being used throughout my shifts. During day 4, we spent our time within the property's kitchens, these phrases were used plentifully to give reassurance of my contentment. We helped prepare for the lunch service and were shown to the various kitchens around the property. I found their kitchens to be full of a very joyful and upbeat brigade of chefs, who effectively showed me my mise-en-place tasks; whilst I continued to ask them questions about their menus and the processes which lead to their dish creation and seasonal ingredient choices. When service began, I was able to shadow one of their Chef De Parties to the Pool Bar restaurant to have a better understanding of their different sections and service operations. After this we cleaned down for lunch and finished our shift as the shift changeover happened within the kitchen too.



The next day was with housekeeping. This was another of the most crucial days of the week, regarding my understanding of the operations of the property. Also, one of the most interesting days as, this was our chance to see the variety of rooms the property has to offer. As I shadowed the Assistant Head Housekeeper, I was able to gain understanding of the intricacies which enabled their standard of luxury to be met so consistently and as we went throughout the property checking the rooms for arrivals, I was able to see even more of the history of the property.

The final shift of the stage was with the events department. I was intrigued to learn more about the variety of events a property of this size can offer and to also understand their revenue prospects further. Spending the morning within their offices, I found it very insightful to spend some time with their sales manager, who explained how they are integrated with the other Rocco Forte property in Sicily. This morning also enabled me to better understand their corporate goals and the wider scope of the Rocco Forte group. The afternoon was then spent shadowing and assisting with the final preparations for a wedding which was to take place later that day. Once again, it was great to witness and be able to appreciate all the small details



The 7th day of the trip was our last day before travelling back to the UK. For this we set out to explore the region again, we ventured to the local beach and explored the hotel some more. Taking in the scenery and reflecting on our experiences of the week prior. I made so many incredible memories and learnt so much throughout this week and cannot thank the Gold Service Scholarship, Lydia and Rocco Forte enough for the opportunity.

