

**W**hile we might have laughed at the notion of a dance holiday a decade ago, they are becoming more popular these days, regardless of age or gender. Not only does a dance holiday get you fit - whether you have two left feet or have been dancing since birth - it is also a great way to meet like-minded people and make new friends. Since I am easily enticed by alternative holidays, I was eager to learn how to dance away from home. In my search online there was no shortage of exotic destinations catering to dance holidays. It seems the trend has really taken off, as you can choose from European resorts, holidays across North and South America, the Caribbean and even cruises.

Initially, I was tempted by a week of tango, but friends recommended salsa would be more appealing for my energetic persona. Fiery, romantic, sexy and fun, it seems salsa is the dance of the moment. Its popularity is evident in the

60 dance holidays held worldwide every year, while Ireland is just as taken by the dance, with classes every night of the week. While I expected to travel to Cuba or Spain for my salsa experience, I was delighted to see a week intensive course was being held in one of my favourite countries. What could be better than learning to dance in idyllic Italy, where in between classes I could devour bowlfuls of tortellini and gelato?

The setting was a rustic countryside house - La Rogaia - owned by a lovely German family in the rolling hills of Umbria. We were to learn to dance salsa from one of the most sought-after instructors in the world. Edie the Salsa Freak runs legendary salsa boot camps and is renowned for her entertaining way of teaching rhythm, technique and elegance. Super-fit and super-nice, she had come to Italy to pass on her passion and skill of salsa dancing to a dozen eager students. The challenge of this holiday was not just about learning to dance, but



also going on holiday alone. Our group was a mixture of singletons and couples of various nationalities (Swiss, German, South African, Italian, American, Irish), age groups (25-60+) and professions (social workers, IT specialists, teachers, nurses) and all different dance levels. The meet and greet night was important to get to know everyone in the group, since we would invariably be getting 'up close and personal' with each other during the week. Thankfully Edie gave strict warnings to everyone not to come to class without 'showering well beforehand

and using plenty of deodorant'. We floated to bed with high hopes as the salsa goddess assured us knowing how to dance well would boost our confidence, and our luck with the opposite sex!

From that first day we were put through our paces. Mornings began with a light breakfast followed by a three-hour salsa class. Most of this was focused on mastering the basic steps and styling, before pairing up with the men. Edie described this first introduction as 'beginner's hell', and she was not far wrong. There was plenty of falling over and stepping on each other's toes. As the windows steamed up from our sweaty moves, I struggled through the intense practice. I resigned myself to the fact that from the beginners class, the only way is up. Luckily our group was made up of just 12 students, so we received a lot of individual attention. When the going got tough, it was all about giving each other high tens to keep our moods from deflating.

# SOME LIKE IT HOT

*If you love to travel and you love to dance, combining the two could be an enthralling experience, as [Karen Creed](#) found out in Italy.*





Unbeknownst to me before this salsa week, there are in fact various styles of salsa that have emerged as the music has spread around the world: Cuban, Puerto Rican, LA and New York. All are based on the same rhythms but with varying steps, body movements and turns. Edie was teaching us LA style – which is all about extravagant moves. As I tried a sharp kick, triple turn and a dip, I could envisage how amusing it would look recreating this in a Dublin nightclub. Edie made it seem effortless, whereas I almost needed an oxygen mask after trying such a dramatic stunt.

Fortunately I found a favourite salsa move, which I managed to perfect by the end of the week. As simple as the cross turn was, it actually made me look like a good dancer. While some of the group had arrived in couples, we continuously switched partners which allowed the beginners to improve faster. Naturally the 12 of us became quite close from all the

time we were spending together. It was an energetic mix of people - from the vivacious Andreas and Ingrid to smooth movers Ingo and Katharina, delightful beginners Axel and Daniel and natural born movers, Lindsay, Karin and Susanne.

Every class was followed by much-needed stretching and meditation. The afternoons were ours to explore the nearby area or practice our salsa. Needless to say my legs were getting the workout that I hoped they would from a week of dancing. Most days I took it easy and ventured to the picturesque towns of Cortona, Perugia or Orvieto to soak up some Italian culture.

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This usually entailed sitting in a café with a glass of wine or ice-cream. When I had the energy I joined the advanced salsa class in the evenings. Seeing how it is done by

the fiery professionals reminded me why I had come to this week and how much I had to learn. Sensual and spontaneous, just watching Edie and her partner Fraser work their moves was enough to evoke an irrepressible urge to keep practising my salsa moves.

The opportunity to dance in La Rogaia was never-ending, with salsa dancing again at night after a leisurely four-course dinner. Some nights we switched to other forms of dancing (like La Bachata and La Rueda) while a few times we ventured to the local salsa clubs for some real fun on the dancefloor. With everyone performing to the hot rhythms and cool beats, you could see why salsa is one of the world's most addictive and

energetic dances. I should have felt intimidated by the professional dancers, but I still took to the shiny parquet floor to show off my new moves. Even with several wrong turns and accidental elbowing, I survived more than a few songs. While I was admittedly not very good, I was having a ball.

On the first day, Edie had asked us to write down our goal for the week. Being the overly-ambitious beginner I scribbled down that I wanted ‘to master the art of salsa’. Unfortunately I won't be entering any salsa dancing competitions just yet. But I did achieve the all-important basics. And more importantly I met a fantastic group of people, and discovered a whole new world of music. With just one week of salsa behind me, I am looking to do another one very soon. Even if you dance regularly at home, taking dance classes in a new and exotic setting is an incredible experience.

• *The next salsa week will be held in La Rogaia in April/May 2009. La Rogaia also holds other holidays including cooking and tango dancing. The next tango dancing holiday will take place from the 3rd to the 10th of May, 2008. For more information check out [www.larogaia.com](http://www.larogaia.com) or [www.tango-holidays.com](http://www.tango-holidays.com) For more information about Edie and the dates of her salsa boot camps check out [www.salsafreak.com](http://www.salsafreak.com)*