

The Surprising Italy

The Surprising Italy: Galileo's Moons

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The other day, as I was walking down *Corso Fogazzaro* in [Vicenza](#), I found a secret place.



Well, perhaps it is not so secret, as I am sure that all the people who live and work in the vicinity would know about it. But, the fact of the matter was that there was no-one in there when I found it and every time that I have been back since it has remained devoid of people and it always seems completely untouched by daily life.

This place is like the perfect secret garden. Actually 'like' is really unnecessary here. This place is the perfect secret

garden which has been planted and cultivated over many years and it still contains a number of rare shrubs and trees. At the same time, it seems completely left to its own devices and as you walk around you see how the vegetation has lost its manicured appearance and is slowly growing into a wild state.

The most important thing is that right in the middle of the garden is this.



A wonderful contraption called 'Galileo's Moons' – an art installation which is also one of the most ingenious musical

instrument I have ever seen, as the large disks hanging from the arches sway in the wind, hit or touch each other and produce a melodious jingle-jangle which is very relaxing and makes you want to spend as much time there as you possibly could.



Now, how did I find this place?!

You see, one of the best things about Vicenza is its architecture. You walk down the street and on both sides you are surrounded by grand palatial buildings which are very palladian in their appearance (well, most of them were, in fact, built by [Palladio](#), whaddayaknow?!).

Most of these palatial buildings though are closed to the public, because they are either private abodes (converted into flats or inhabited just by one family who has all that space and splendour to themselves) or have been turned into business premises.

So, as you walk down the street, you see these tall beautiful facades with windows covered by whimsical wrought iron

gratings and with really high arched entrances the access to which, most of the time, is blocked by fortified gates. Sometimes though the gates are left open and as you pass by you can catch a glimpse of a long vaulted corridor with pebbly or slated floor leading from the entrance into a large courtyard, which often has been turned into a lush garden.



Now, Vicenza is a very green city with trees, bushes and flowers in every front yard and on every street. But in terms of park spaces or simply open spaces where to go and sit on the verdant grass and blissfully while an hour or two, things are not quite that great. It's true, there is the amazing [Parco Querini](#) with its free-running roosters, hens, bunnies, ducks and nutrias, but after you have been there as many times as I have been, you start craving a bit of a change in scenery and if you don't drive (just like I don't), there doesn't seem to be another green pleasant space where to go without having to walk too far.

We do happen to have a small garden where we live, but every time I've been there in the past year and a half I have been viciously bitten by a wild horde of ferocious mosquitoes, so this year I am not going there until we have hired someone to come and spray it with a mosquito-killer, -repellent or whatever there is to get rid of mosquitoes humanly (or for all I care and for all I have suffered, even inhumanly).



As such, every time that I pass by the *palazzi* in the historic centre of Vicenza, I crane my neck as much as I can, obviously always making an effort not to appear too nosy to the passers-by (because appearances matter in Italy, you know!) and I try to steal a glance of the hidden gardens in their protected courtyards.

So, on that particular day, I was walking down *Corso Fogazzaro* and I had just passed by the splendid **Church of the Carmine**, when to my left I saw a palatial building with an open front gate. A small sign on the wall indicated that this was the building of the Institute of Wine and Viticulture, so, realising that this wasn't a private residence I felt emboldened and walked through the open gate, across the corridor with its really high arched ceiling and found myself in the courtyard.

And this is where my secret garden was waiting for me.



A white magnolia stellata tree waived at me with its beautiful star-shaped blooms.



Beyond it the Galileo's Moons installation was gently playing its ever-changing music in the breeze.



It was a beautiful moment!

If you are in Vicenza, make sure that you find this place and enjoy its music for a little bit. It is a very peaceful environment, so if you have been feeling stressed, this is just the spot to relax. Bear in mind that the garden really has not been tended for a while. For example, when I went back there with a friend to take the pictures for this blog post, I was just trying to get a really nice image, when my friend said: 'Don't move. There is a dead bird right behind you.'

And, yes, there was a pigeon which had been there for a while. So the place really feels like it is getting back to its wild state.

The Galileo's Moons and the music they make in the wind are worth it though. The installation is the work of the artist Margherita Michelazzo. Its four arches originally supported 38 disks. As it has been there since 2009 the installation has started to corrode and a few of the disks have fallen off their strings and you can see them among the white pebbles of the floor. In a way, it is like the installation has become part of the cycle of nature too, by slowly losing its original shine and by shedding the components which were not strong enough to withstand the passage of times.

It is still one of the best works of art I have ever seen. It is in a perfect unison with its environment – both complementing its original function as a place of beauty and relaxation and making it surpass its natural limitations by turning it into a concert hall where music is performed by the wind. With its 900 kg, it is a heavy, static structure, yet it moves so easily with every blow of the breeze and with every turn of the Earth.

Coming across it was definitely one of my most favourite surprising moments in Italy so far.


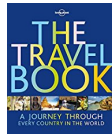
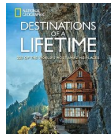



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