



Mamma Mia! - Villa Toscana continued



the seeds in question were permitted varieties.

But tales of mama's arrival and her equally adventurous departure from Turin meant riotous laughter at the welcome party as the locals joined in the speeches and songs.

Song, food and wine are at the heart of the Villa Toscana experience. The kitchen, and what it produces, is as magnificent as the setting and there is the wood fired pizza oven that Giorgio labours over, producing pizza, panini and other treats using tea tree, which he says is the best wood in the world for the job.

The private guest suite occupies 100 sq m and has two bedrooms and all facilities. It also features the magnificent joinery and shutters, the antiques, and the Italian decor, that contribute to the whole ambiance of the Villa.



On the still party night, with the sea, the bays and the twinkling lights of Whitianga reflecting below one could well be on the Italian Riviera, except there is also the beauty of the bush and the Coromandel hills, which offer the choice of the quiet and solitude that is difficult to find in Europe.

Giorgio had long wanted to live in New Zealand and scoured the country before settling in Whitianga. But his idea was not as unique as he thought. It turned out his neighbour also came from Turin, his interest in New Zealand first sparked by a chance encounter with a New Zealand Soldier during the war.

Giorgio's dream of living in New Zealand has now come true. He and Margherita, who is a native of Tuscany and an accomplished artist outside the kitchen, are making it their mission to introduce to those who don't know them the joys of the Italian way – the love of life, generous hospitality and food and wine that is as near to heaven as Villa Toscana itself must seem to guests who ascend the winding road through the hills that form the backdrop to the sparkling waters of Mercury Bay.

In the low season Villa Toscana costs \$390 for two, including breakfast. The suite sleeps four and extra people are \$50 each. Giorgio's boat, the 9.75m Mamma Mia is available for game fishing.



Getting there

What better way to arrive at Villa Toscana than in the red sports car. It wasn't a Ferrari, but the new MX-5 surely caught Margherita's eye... your car is how you say... "Fancy" were her words of greeting.

The trip from Auckland was perfect. Brilliant sunshine, light traffic and interesting roads, and that hopefully growing characteristic, slower drivers who are happy to pull over and let others pass, but then perhaps a little red bullet like the MX-5 just brings out the best in people.

It's a fact of life that bends don't really exist for the MX-5, except for the fun factor they can provide. And the latest model is definitely a step up in terms of the space in the cabin and the delights of a six-speed gearbox. Room in the boot is at something of a premium, but it is more than adequate for two people on the road.

Perhaps the most surprising element of the car was its comfort and performance on a return trip undertaken in continuous rain. Forget those experiences in older generation two-seaters. The air-conditioning kept the cabin comfortable and the windows clear. Not a drop of rain entered and the noise levels matched those of a hardtop car.

Yes the MX-5 is a perfect little car. I definitely think I deserve one.

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