

Get a Buzz from Tuscany

WHEN Melbourne Buzz McCarthy Cavalier was 22 and on a camping holiday in Italy, she told her travelling companions she loved the place so much, she planned to buy a house there.

"They said, 'Oh yeah, pull the other one'," she says. "But I was determined."

It took her 20 years, but Buzz finally bought the Tuscan mansion of her dreams with partner David.

"It was falling down. It had no roof, no electricity or plumbing, no kitchen or bathroom. God knows how they (the previous owners) lived there," she says. "It was a massive renovation job."

That was 18 years ago and now Buzz runs an annual food tour to Tuscany, based at her villa — I Cinghiali (the wild boars) — near Caprignana in northern Tuscany.

The 11-day tour, limited to eight to 10 people, includes market and restaurant visits, classes and picnics, visits to villages, towns and cities in the region, and walks in the surrounding hills. And there is plenty of time to sit on the terrace at the end of the day with a glass of wine and admire the view.

NSW-based chef Georgina Adamson conducts cooking classes in the property's restored barn and prepares all meals eaten at the villa.

This year's tour is from May 24 to



June 3, and costs \$4900 a person (not including airfares to Italy), including transport, classes, accommodation and almost all meals, with pick-up and drop-off at Pisa.

Outside tour times, the five-bedroom villa and studio barn are available for rent, at \$2800 and \$1250 a week respectively. One couple has been back seven times.

"We are usually there only once or twice a year, so I didn't want the house to stand empty for 10 months. 'Houses have souls,'" Buzz says.

She, David and son Hugo spent an idyllic year at the house in 2001.

"Hugo, who was 10, trundled off to a local school, starting the year not speaking a word of Italian. By the



Mama mia: A huge mortadella (left) and the farmhouse I Cinghiali (bottom) which Buzz McCarthy (below) bought 18 years ago.



end of the year he was fluent and now he's doing VCE Italian at 15."

The decision to spend the year in Italy came when Buzz was diagnosed with breast cancer and had a mastectomy. The trip was her "prize" for beating the disease.

"The food and the lifestyle are so healthy. Our neighbour, Carlo, invited us to his great aunt's 100th birthday party — and she wasn't the oldest there."

Buzz also shares her time between Melbourne, working as a corporate results coach, and country Victoria.

She has written an autobiography, *Interlude with Wild Boars: Journeys in Northern Tuscany*.

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