

You know you're staying at the right place when Joaquin Cortes swaggers into the lobby of your hotel to pick up his room key, even if his bodyguard is eyeballing you for staring. The hotel in question is the Grand in Rimini, once used as a setting by the revered Italian film-maker Federico Fellini, and sometime haunt of the super-rich, kings, queens, presidents, rock stars and... Sting. Due for an overhaul in September 2005, it's the essence of faded 1930s Euro-grandeur, where the young Fellini got much of his inspiration by peeping through the hedges at the blue-blooded doings beyond.

Like the hotel, Rimini itself is undergoing something of a revamp. Since the 1970s it's been a cosy bucket and spade resort for European families, but is currently being hailed as the country's answer to Ibiza. While it might not yet have the ice-cool cachet of Ibiza Town (sorry San Antonio), and the abundance of amusement arcades and souvenir shops along the seafront makes it feel – on arrival, at least – a bit like Blackpool, Rimini is becoming increasingly popular with young, glamorous Italians, who head here for the hundreds of bars, clubs and beach parties.

If celebrity endorsement were needed, George Clooney regularly hits town to hang with the local Duccati/Harley biking fraternity, while Jay Kay of Jamiroquai moors his yacht in the sparkling new marina just outside the centre.

Parading is a time-honoured Italian art and there's no better way to do this in Rimini than on the 15m-mile long beach. It's packed with with bodies of every shape and size, so no need to worry if yours is less than perfect. However, most sport a very un-Blackpool-like tan so probably best to pay a visit to the spray-tanning booth before you arrive.

On summer nights, the beach comes alive as various *bagno*, literally "bath" but in this case, "beach bar", vie with each other to throw the best party in town. Entrance is free and you can dance 'til 1am to house, disco and, curiously, Men at Work, either on the sand, a podium or even the bar.

In the old part of town, there are dozens of bars and restaurants in the Pescaria, an old converted fish market set among Rimini's cobbled streets and 14th-century Renaissance buildings, which are all currently hot property.

Clubbing Rimini-style is to get seriously glammed up, although the age range is varied and you won't feel past it if your 25th birthday is a distant memory.

At Pascia (pronounced Pasha, but nothing to do with the Ibiza/London venues), a plush 3-storey club with a rooftop swimming pool, the music at the beginning of the night is mostly run-of-the-mill house and disco, but stick it out if you prefer something more down and dirty. There was a fantastic set from a DJ called Luca Agnelli the Saturday night I was there, and he plays throughout the summer, while Frankie Knuckles, Little Louis Vega and Dave Morales are all set to play the coming season.

A place to stay

The Grand Hotel

Take afternoon tea in the sumptuous gardens, laze by the pool or put your name down for one of the Sunday night summer parties on the hotel's private beach (grandhotelrimini.com).

Riviera Golf Resort

A super-cool minimalist hotel a 10-minute drive from Rimini in San Giovanni in Marignano. From the outside, it looks like a giant greenhouse but is, in fact, a collection of 32

individually designed rooms and suites, where just about everything is remote controlled and you can watch plasma TV from the bath at the end of your bed. There's an 82-metre pool, a spa with treatment rooms, a poolside bar, a restaurant and a party on the last Friday of every month. There's also a nine-hole golf course, but who needs golf? (rivieragolf.it)

The DuoMo, brainchild of designer-du-jour Ron Arad, is due to open in September 2005 in Rimini's old town. The adjoining bar NoMi is already the talk of those in the know. (hotelduomo.com)

Shopping

Via Dante and Via Ceccarini in Riccione, an up-and-coming coastal suburb about 10 minutes from Rimini, house all the designer names you've heard of, and some you haven't. Pick up brand names at tax-free prices from the shopping malls in and around San Marino, Europe's smallest republic, about a 30-minute drive from Rimini.

Eating and drinking

Sit and gaze out to sea on the sleek, circular deck at Molo 22 in the new boating marina, while you sip crisp Italian white wine and work your way through a seven-course seafood feast. (molo22.it)

Clubbing

Pascia (pasciariccione.it), Villa delle Rosa (villadellerose.net) and Byblos are all set in the hills above Riccione, so you'll need a car to get to them. If you're worried about who's going to stay sober, drinking and driving is more or less a given, although not something we would recommend, of course. All stay open until 6am.

Things to see

If you get tired of the beach and fancy a trip out of town, Verruchio is a lovely old hill town about an hour's drive inland from Rimini. There are breathtaking views of the surrounding countryside and a 13th-century fortress, the Rocca del Sasso, where you can see exhibits from down the ages, including a couple of gruesome-looking chastity belts.

Getting there

Ryanair (ryanair.com) flies to Bologna Forli from Stansted. There is a public bus service from the airport to Rimini, which takes about 50 minutes.