

## taking the leap



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Above: Former physio Luciana Masci and one-time opera tenor Michael Howard are now the husband-and-wife team behind Absolutely Abruzzo Tours.

### PHYSIO TO TOUR GUIDE

**Luciana Masci, founder of Absolutely Abruzzo Tours.**

It's 7.30am in Italy and Luciana Masci is much too chirpy for this hour of the day. We're speaking

via Skype, a method of communication that is becoming more familiar to Masci now that she spends six months of the year in the Abruzzo region of central Italy. "It's a beautiful autumn day here," she says, adding they have "a lifestyle that's hard to beat".

Masci founded Absolutely Abruzzo Tours in 2004 with her husband, a former opera tenor, Michael Howard. The pair runs small-group tours in Abruzzo, three hours' drive east of Rome. Masci, a former physiotherapist, left her 22-year private practice in Brisbane to follow her passion and start the business.

"The pressures of running a practice added up over time," she says. "I ended up with both health and emotional problems. Sometimes, it takes coming

to a crossroads to force you to make a decision and move forward."

For Masci, the crossroads came in the form of a chance meeting with Howard in 2001. "Michael was my first boyfriend, when I was 19," she says. "He left for Germany to pursue his singing career and came back to Brisbane 20 years later to sing in an opera that I attended. I saw his name in the program and went backstage to say hello." The flame of romance was reignited and the pair remained in touch for the next three years while Howard resumed his singing career in Germany.

Then, in 2004, Masci decided to shut up shop in Brisbane and head to Europe to start a new life and a business with Howard. With Howard's singing career winding down, the couple married and returned to Abruzzo to be with Masci's family and set up their travel business.

"It's always hard to close one door of your life and open another, but it's the best thing I did," Masci says. "It was a risk, but there weren't a lot of overheads so we could avoid going into debt. Now everyone tells me how lucky I am, but the harder you work, the luckier you become." 