



Live La Dolce Vita at These Stunning Tuscan Hotels and Villas

A host of high-end hotels are changing the landscape in this rural corner of Italy.

By **Lee Marshall** | May 01, 2021

Editor's Note: Travel might be complicated right now, but use our inspirational trip ideas to plan ahead for your next bucket-list adventure. Those who choose to travel are strongly encouraged to check local government restrictions, rules, and safety measures related to COVID-19 and take personal comfort levels and health conditions into consideration before departure.

When I began reporting on the Italian travel scene back in the mid 1990s, well before I moved from Rome to the Umbrian town of Città della Pieve, [Tuscany](#) was something of an alternative destination. I still remember a piece I wrote for a travel magazine in 2002, in which I was unable to unreservedly recommend a single hotel in the Val d'Orcia. Yet in just two decades, that stunning, UNESCO-listed stretch of [Tuscan countryside](#) has shifted from an ultra-niche walking and cycling destination to a kind of Italian El Dorado. Between 1998 and 2019, the last pre-COVID year, overnight stays increased fivefold.



From left: Lunch at Rosewood Castiglion del Bosco, a guest room at the hotel. | CREDIT: FEDERICO GIAMEI

"Last year was a boom season for us," said Margherita Ramella of La Pescaia Resort, a hotel in southern Tuscany, "and 2021 is shaping up to be even better. People are looking for places away from the crowds, with lots of alfresco corners to relax in."

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One popular model to emerge over the past decade or so involves a hotelier taking over a depopulated village, or a cluster of farm estate buildings, and reimagining it—often complete with a trattoria, a bar, even its own shops. Sometimes this *"borgo"* is at the center of a large, still active agricultural estate, as at Castiglion del Bosco, Castello di Casole, or Borgo San Felice—the latter being one of the few estate resorts to open its doors before the turn of the millennium. At around that time, some smaller properties also made their debuts—boutique charmers like Castello di Vicarello, Borgo Santo Pietro, Fontelunga, and the Val d'Orcia bolt-hole La Bandita.



But even in the years that have passed since that first wave of resorts in the region, there's been an evolution. It's been driven partly by the fact that growing numbers of guests are old Tuscany hands who don't want to stay in a gated community that insulates them from artisans, village bars, wineries, and summer festivities.

The Tuscan country hotel 2.0 is increasingly permeable—but also increasingly aware that its guests may arrive making comparisons with similar resorts all over the world, from Chile to Bangkok. Simply offering a suite decorated with faded Renaissance frescoes is no longer enough—today's travelers expect world-class service and amenities, too.

What follows is my pick of the properties that are either new to the scene or have made big changes in recent years. I also offer a list of honorable mentions. All conjure up their own dream version of Tuscany. But in this region where landscape is culture, where ever since the Medicis a virtuous feedback loop has existed between locals and visitors, dreams are often indistinguishable from the real thing.

Borgo San Felice: A Tuscan Veteran Gets a Makeover

It says something about Tuscan pride, taste, and building standards that farmworkers' housing should lend itself so readily to becoming a luxury Relais & Châteaux resort, but so it has proved at Borgo San Felice. This once-thriving settlement on a big estate in the heart of the Chianti Classico wine region, which opened as a hotel in 1990, is once again ready for prime time after a three-year renovation that added 11 guest rooms and suites, bringing the total to 60. The previously rather staid décor was refreshed by design studio ArchFlorence in a style that exudes Tuscan heraldic class, but is also bright and contemporary (the capacious spa, housed in the former olive mill, is a particular delight).



The piazza at Borgo San Felice—one of several Tuscan properties set on former farm estates. | CREDIT: FEDERICO CIAMEI

Grapes are still off-loaded near the main piazza of this working wine estate, while the Borgo's agricultural remit is combined with a social mission in a horticultural project that pairs diversely abled youths with retired farmers from the area. The resort's informal Osteria del Grigio and the Michelin-starred fine-dining restaurant Poggio Rosso are both helmed by young Colombian chef Juan Quintero, who pays homage to hearty Tuscan traditions in dishes like a risotto with wild boar and black kale. And Borgo San Felice has another new arrow to its quiver. It poached one of Italy's most professional general managers—Danilo Guerrini, formerly of the legendary Tuscan seaside resort Il Pellicano—who has taken standards of service to the very highest level. borgosanfelice.it; doubles from \$618.

Rosewood Castiglion Del Bosco: The "Ne Plus Ultra" of Tuscan Estate Hotels

Launched in 2008, the accommodation arm of fashion scion Massimo Ferragamo's vast Brunello di Montalcino wine estate in the Val d'Orcia was initially conceived as a private club, where suites and villas would be used by members. A financial crisis put a stop to that idea, but there was a silver lining. In 2015, Rosewood took on its management, and today Castiglion del Bosco is the benchmark example of the Tuscan estate hotel.



A quiet dip at Rosewood Castiglion del Bosco, in Montalcino. | CREDIT: FEDERICO CIAMEI

Dating back eight centuries, the property centers on the *borgo*: a small village where workers' accommodations, stables, and a winery were initially converted into 23 roomy suites. Interiors are done in an elegant Tuscan country style with a vaguely French touch; that aesthetic extends to the 11 villas on the estate, some within walking distance of the *borgo*, some up to three miles away.

Open all year, unlike the suites (which operate from around Easter until mid-November), these three-to-six-bedroom refuges, most with fireplaces and private pools, are the ultimate venue for a family or group of friends. Two recent updates have raised the resort's already strong game.

One is the arrival of Matteo Temperini, a fiercely talented Tuscan chef who made a name for himself when he guided the restaurant of Amalfi Coast hotel Le Sirenuse to its first Michelin star. The other will be the July unveiling of 19 new suites and a panoramic infinity pool—the resort's second—on a hillside site next to the *borgo*. But what really makes Castiglion del Bosco special was there from the start: it's a stunning slice of Tuscany 40 times the size of Vatican City, where you can wander all day—perhaps on a truffle-hunting or foraging expedition—without ever leaving the estate. rosewoodhotels.com; doubles from \$854.

The Best of the Rest

Borgo Pignano: Located near Volterra, this property follows the classic model of a refurbished farming hamlet centered around an 18th century villa, with a rather fine restaurant that leans heavily on the resort's own organic produce. Noblesse oblige on a 750-acre estate with an embarrassment of accommodation options. There are 14 rooms and suites in the main building, plus several standalone properties on the grounds, including the new two bedroom villa La vandaia, which has a private pool. The décor throughout is reassuringly old-school, even grandmotherly—if your grandmother happens to be a contessa, that is. *Doubles from \$423.*

COMO Castello del Nero: Taken over by Christina Ong's COMO group ahead of the 2019 season, this 50-room property felt, on an August 2019 visit, like it hadn't quite ironed out all the creases—especially on the service front. Its 2020 closure in the face of the pandemic nixed a return visit. But this historic Chianti estate, with its Renaissance frescoes, formal gardens, and pared back, airy bedrooms courtesy of Italian designer Paola Navone, is still a lovely setting for a week of rest and relaxation. The resort's Shambhala Retreat Spa—one of the few in Tuscany worthy of the "spa resort" name—will be fully up and running in time for the start of the 2021 season. *Doubles from \$847.*

Fontelunga: Owner-managers Paolo Kastelec and Philip Robinson created a benchmark for the new Tuscan country-house hotel when they opened in 2000/ It wasn't just the flair and fun of Robinson's bold, old-meets-new design scheme that charmed, but the fact that whenever you arrived, you felt as though you'd walked into a party. *Doubles from \$269.*

Borgo69: Just half a mile from Fontelunga lies Kastelec and Robinson's new project. Here, 12 one-, two-, and three-bedroom villa suites straight out of a coffee-table book on "new Tuscan country style" cluster around a huge swimming pool and vegetable garden. A nearby farm building has been imaginatively converted into the Emporio di Ines, a deli-restaurant and store showcasing local artisanal food producers. *Doubles from \$330.*

Il Borro Ferruccio: Ferragamo's estate near Arezzo, which centers on a crazily cute village turned resort, unveiled 20 new suites in 2019, housed in a series of converted Medici era farmhouses. *Doubles from \$415.*

La Bandita Countryhouse: In a stunning, isolated hilltop location in the Val d'Orcia, you'll find this minimalist eightroom temple to contemporary Tuscan chic, where New York creatives and international sophisticates lounge around a pool with the most stunning view. *Doubles from \$305.*

L'Andana: This place gained fame as the Tuscan outpost of French super-chef Alain Ducasse, drawing a gourmet crowd to a five-star resort amid the sweeping coastal vistas of the Maremma. Ducasse has since said adieu, replaced in 2016 by Enrico Bartolini, one of Italy's most dynamic and irrepressible culinary talents. The hotel now holds one of the nine Michelin stars awarded to Bartolini's six Italian restaurants. Food aside, L'Andana is a smart, 47-room country resort with a stylish urban edge, thanks to the interior design of former AD Italia editor Ettore Mocchetti. But the place is still deeply rooted in the traditions of the area —as reflected in the activities, which include cooking classes, wine tasting, and horseback riding.. *Doubles from \$435.*

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