

# WHERE TO GO...

...for a bite of la dolce vita

IT'S GOT TO BE TUSCANY

YES

NO

WANT TO BAG AN ITALIAN BILLIONAIRE?

WANT A BLOCKBUSTER CLASSIC?

YES

NO

YES

NO



## CASTIGLION DEL BOSCO

Make like a Medici at C d B (to old hands and oligarchs), a 4,500-acre private estate in the oil-painting-perfect Val d'Orcia. It started as a sort of bazillionaires' timeshare, but now non-members can rent the 17th- and 18th-century farmhouses (Ferragamo's CEO is partial to the one by the castle ruins). Rustic and sumptuous, they all have huge fireplaces and furniture carved by local craftsmen, plus flashy walk-in closets, flatscreen TVs and cashmere rugs thrown about the place. The details are an OCD dream: the pot pourri is no mere mash-up of petals – it's made from a 17th-century Florentine pharmacy's recipe. Of course it is. Keep busy, if you wish – there's a winery, an 18-hole golf course and a spa (they do a facial with champagne, gold powder and caviar), plus a fitness centre with wraparound glass so you can do crunches while watching wild boar frolic in the valley below.

Or rest on your laurels and do nothing: count butterflies in your private garden, loll in your own infinity pool and congratulate yourself on your excellent taste.

### BOOK IT

Double, from £282  
Website [castigliondelbosco.com](http://castigliondelbosco.com)  
Tel 00 39 0577 191 3001

## CASTELLO DI CASOLE

Castello di Casole is an American idea of Tuscany. But put away that sneer. It's owned by US hotel group Timbers Resorts, which means a ton of money has been funnelled into sprucing up this very grand 11th-century villa to its former, frescoed glory. It also means that everything – bedrooms, pool, grounds, food portions, smiles – is big, big, big. Which rather suits this grand corner of Italy. And if the place, with its dappled sunlight and forest views, feels cinematic, you might be sensing the vapours of its former owner, Italian film director Luchino Visconti, who lived here in the Sixties. Pretend you're Sophia Loren in the fabulous bedrooms, decked out in autumnal hues: a burnt-amber linen sofa, brick tiles, exposed beams and reassuringly huge bathrooms. There's pilates in a former chapel, day trips to Siena, and bike riding on the dusty tracks that score the estate. But, gosh, doesn't that sound exhausting?

Best lie by the pool and sip a Bellini, delivered almost telepathically, while you mull over the success of this particular American invasion.

### BOOK IT

Double, from £330  
Website [castellodicasole.com](http://castellodicasole.com)  
Tel 00 39 0577 961 508

## VILLA D'ESTE

Shelley had it on the nose. 'This lake exceeds anything I ever beheld in beauty,' he wrote about Lake Como and, wowzers, wasn't he right? Villa d'Este is Como's leading lady, a stately sort that perches politely, proudly, on the very edge of the water – immaculately turned out and coiffed to the nines, with colonnaded terraces, gothic grottos and formal gardens stuffed with statues. It's the sort of place where you might have a Barbara Cartland romance (in a good way). It has hosted everyone – Alfred Hitchcock, Greta Garbo, Liz Taylor, Bette Davis – so one wonders what the villa makes of her newish neighbour, George Clooney, who has been known to fill his Riva with visiting Hollywood chums and bomb up and down the lake. Rooms are stately, not state-of-the-art, but this is not the point. To stay here is to step back in time. Where else can you eat champagne risotto for breakfast, watch Italy's finest examples of *la bella figura* around the floating pool, and flop onto your Como-brocade-silk bed and stare up at 17th-century oil paintings? *Bellissima!*

### BOOK IT

Double, from £234  
Website [villadeste.com](http://villadeste.com)  
Tel 00 39 031 3481

## EREMO DELLA GIUBILIANA

They're a religious folk, those Sicilians – you can barely take a step without falling over an old chapel or crumbling monastery. How clever, then, of Vincenza Jolanda Nifosi, the heir to the aristocratic Nifosi family, to convert this 15th-century convent into a heavenly bolthole. The reception, full of artfully placed heirlooms, was once a chapel and the nuns' cells have been born again as beautiful bedrooms. The food's enough to make an ascetic faint: breakfasts of the sweetest ricotta in the refectory, and garden dinners served under ancient quince trees. Salvatore, Vincenza's son, is a god among guides, shuttling guests in his 4WD (or six-seater Cessna) to the Unesco-listed Eremo Valley to sip aqua minerale from streams, dip in rock pools and breathe great lungfuls of fig-scented air. Nearby are the baroque splendours of Syracuse and knock-your-socks-off catacombs. One for savvy travellers, yes, but the hotel also lures leggy Italians in barely there swimwear. The nuns would not have approved.

### BOOK IT

Double, from £158  
Website [eremodellagiubiliana.it](http://eremodellagiubiliana.it)  
Tel 00 39 0932 669 119