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PLACES TO STAY The best country hotels in Tuscany and Umbria

Storm the gates of the most beautiful Tuscan castles and Umbrian walled villages

BY LEE MARSHALL
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Time was, to stay in rural Tuscany was either to rent a villa or stay in a draughty castle that had been turned into a “luxury hotel” with Medieval plumbing. How different things are now. Since its first cautious steps in the 1990s, the new Tuscan country hotel scene has come on apace. Some of those who have opened stylish places to stay amidst the region’s cypress-studded hills are wine producers, some come from the world of fashion, while others arrived here from far-flung lands and simply fell in love with the place. The result is a varied offering that stretches from whole rural villages transformed into resort hotels to small boutique offerings within the walls of charming hilltop towns. Here we harvest some of our favourites.



MATTIA AQUILA

2. Toscana Resort Castelfalfi

A 50-minute drive from both Pisa and Florence yet surrounded by unspoilt Tuscan countryside, this ancient 1,100-hectare working estate comprises vineyards, olive groves, a borgo (village), hotel, spa and golf course. It was bought by Indonesian entrepreneur Sri Prakash Lohia last year who hasn’t wasted any time in going full throttle on improvements, from a refresh of the rooms (choose between the stone-coloured modern new-build or more traditional interiors in the old tobacco warehouse across the road) to a new kids’ club and adventure park with zip lines, a climbing wall and archery. A short stroll away, the borgo has a peaceful garden, a church and a medieval castle which houses La Rocca restaurant (the views from the terrace at sunset are magical). Other excellent dining spots include casual trattoria Il Rosmarino for pizza, fine dining La Via del Sale and the Country Club House, which makes for a lovely lunch (the octopus pasta is delicious). There are masses to do – catch-and-release carp fishing on the lake, falconry with a Harris hawk, cooking classes – which means that once you check in, there’s little reason to leave. *Emma Love*

Address: Località Castelfalfi, 50050 Montaione

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