

# SLEEP: ITALIAN VILLAS

A WEEK IN A TUSCAN VILLA MIGHT SOUND LIKE THE CLASSIC ITALIAN HOLIDAY, BUT THERE ARE PLENTY OF OTHER REGIONS TO DISCOVER — FROM PUGLIA AND LE MARCHE TO UMBRIA.

WORDS BY RHIANNON BATTEN

## TUSCANY

QUINTESSENTIAL VILLA TERRITORY, Tuscany has an age-old appeal that isn't likely to change any time soon. With Florence as its capital, a strong claim to be the birthplace of the Italian Renaissance and vine- and olive-covered hillsides to amble through, few other regions can match its all-round appeal. Yet while this also has its downsides, not least the struggle to find a spot of solitude in the busy summer months, there are some benefits to the region's popularity. Faced with increasing competition, many villa owners have upped the stakes in recent years. If style is as important to you as the setting, Tuscany is a safe bet.

### WE RECOMMEND:

#### CASA GLYN

That this is one of the more humble properties on specialist operator Merrion Charles' books says a lot about the high standards of villas in Tuscany. Sleeping five and packed with character (and subtle references to the owner's interest in North and East African design), the comfort factor here is extremely high.

What sets this villa apart, though, is its location. Set in relatively unspoilt northern Tuscany with striking views of the Apuan Alps and the Carrara hills, although it makes a good base for exploring more obvious sights such as Florence and Siena. It's also within easy meandering distance of the Cinque Terre and its great seafood restaurants, walks in the Appenine hills and the cultural — and foodie — attractions of Lucca, Parma and Modena. The villa ticks all the right boxes for those who want to just stay put and unwind, with a pizza oven, elegant swimming pool, lovely gardens and a sun-soaked, south-facing terrace. Ask beforehand to arrange to play the owner's piano.

From €1,600 (£1,356) a week.

Casa Glyn, Cotto, Lunigiana, Tuscany.

T: 020 3326 1213. [www.merrioncharles.com](http://www.merrioncharles.com)

■ **X-factor:** With three en suite bedrooms, a deftly equipped kitchen and plenty of space inside and out, Casa Glyn is the perfect family retreat.

### FOR FOODIES:

#### HUMILIS CASELLACCIA

Restored farm buildings may be two-a-euro in these parts, but there aren't many in the same league as Humilis Casellaccia. Sleeping up to 19 in contemporary style, apart from its gorgeous, slimline swimming pool, the main USP here is the kitchen. Guests can book the services of local cook Marcella Libertini, who's said to have inspired a former guest, the late River Café founder Rose Gray. The nearby villages of Pienza, Montalcino and Montepulciano are renowned for their pecorino, olive oil and red wines.

From £5,700 a week.

Humilis Casellaccia, Val d'Orcia, Tuscany.

T: 01886 853920. [www.globalartichoke.co.uk](http://www.globalartichoke.co.uk)

### FOR ROMANTICS:

#### VILLA RIGNANA

The Italian equivalent of staying in a minor stately home, Villa Rignana was once a monastery but now sees service as a large villa, sleeping up to 20. Decorated with family heirlooms and surrounded by vineyards and kitchen gardens, it also has its own chapel, making it popular for wedding parties.

From €12,000 (£10,000) a week.

Villa Rignana, Via di Rignana 7, Greve in Chianti, Florence.

T: 00 39 055 852 137. [www.villarignana.com](http://www.villarignana.com) >>

Image: Frank Lukaseck/Getty



Blooming clover and cypress trees, Val d'Orcia

Below left: Humilis Casellaccia kitchen

Below right: view from Casa Glyn



## UMBRIA

WITH ITS MEDIEVAL architecture, rolling pennine countryside and characterful hilltop villages, it's surprising that landlocked Umbria, right in the centre of Italy, has largely managed to avoid the mass tourism that so much of the rest of the country grapples with. If you want to pose by the Colosseum or gaze at Botticelli's handiwork in the Uffizi, Rome and Florence are an easy day-trip away, but there's plenty to see closer to home. Art fans should head to Assisi, Perugia and Arezzo to see works by Piero della Francesca and Giotto, while those interested in more earthy pleasures can explore the region's many Orvieto-producing vineyards.



■ **WE RECOMMEND:**  
**CASA CAIDOMINICI**

The vast scale of this beautiful 15th-century stone farmhouse can be initially off-putting. Sensitively restored by Umbrian craftsmen using traditional materials and techniques, the villa sleeps up to 16 in total. The accommodation is spread between three self-sufficient areas, making it ideal for groups of friends or families who want to holiday together but still retain a smattering of independence.

Inside, beyond an impressive double-height hall, are eight bedrooms, three kitchens, five living areas, a formal dining room, a bar and games rooms. Beautifully finished with luxury touches at every turn, the villa's amenities mix resolutely modern, contemporary design with period features such as old stone fireplaces and exposed beams, which gives it extra charm.

Outside, there's a formal garden and terraces to explore, tennis and bocce (boules) courts to challenge fellow guests to a game on and quiet nooks in which to sit and enjoy a glass of chilled Orvieto. Try to get first dibs on the stone picnic table on top of the hill behind the house — it comes with glorious 360-degree views of the surrounding countryside.

From £5,915 a week.

Casa Caidominici, Località Piscinale, Pietralunga, Umbria.

T: 020 7193 7782. [www.to-tuscany.com](http://www.to-tuscany.com)

■ **X-factor:** The villa's large infinity pool is the perfect place to wallow away an afternoon, as good for soaking up the surrounding views as it is the Umbrian sunshine.

Image: Fantuz/Olimpio/SIME/4Corners Images



🏠 **FOR VIEWS:**  
**CASA DEL CONTE**

Standing proudly on a hilltop overlooking the Tiber Valley, this 18th-century farmhouse is part of an estate incorporating lovely gardens, olive groves, fruit orchards and wheat fields. Sleeping 10, the interior has an air of informal grandeur, helped along by antiques, open fireplaces and beamed ceilings. There's also a pool and a bocce court.

From £4,410 a week.

Casa del Conte, near Todi, Umbria, Italy. T: 020 7359 3938.

[www.realholidays.co.uk](http://www.realholidays.co.uk)

👨‍👩‍👧 **FOR FAMILIES:**  
**LAGUSCELLO**

Another restored farmhouse property, Laguscello is great for groups or families, with its contemporary design, and private pool and garden. Food-lovers, meanwhile, will be impressed with the outdoor pizza oven. Sleeping up to eight people, it's just 15 minutes' drive from Orvieto and is surrounded in the summer by fields of sunflowers. From £1,450 a week. Laguscello, near Osteria di Biagio, Orvieto, Umbria, Italy.

T: 01825 722 532.

[www.laguscello.co.uk](http://www.laguscello.co.uk) >>



## PUGLIA

TUCKED IN THE far south-east — the heel of Italy's 'boot' — Puglia has a distinct character. Its sun-soaked olive groves, charming towns, archaeological sites and culinary traditions have been influenced by its Mediterranean neighbours and many invaders, from the ancient Greeks and Romans to the Normans and Spanish Bourbons. The Baroque architecture of Bari, Brindisi and Lecce attracts design fans, as do the *trulli* — circular stone houses unique to the region; Alberobello has such a high concentration of them that it's listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Puglia's real claim to fame, however, is its beaches. Some of Italy's best are found on the 500 miles or so of coastline.

**WE RECOMMEND:**

**MASSERIA LAMACOPPA**

Masseria Lamacoppa is a 17th-century manor house turned secluded contemporary villa. Sleeping up to eight, its interior is decorated with an eclectic mix of art and furniture that gives it a real edge over other local properties (rumour has it the property's guest book boasts some illustrious names). All the comforts you'd expect of a luxury villa are here, plus some you wouldn't — such as a dedicated gym and hammam. Make the most of the grounds, which include a walled courtyard filled with lemon trees, olive groves and acres of well-tended lawn to loll on.

From €9,380 (£7,882) a week. Masseria Lamacoppa, near Ostuni, Puglia, Italy. T: 020 7377 8518. [www.thinkpuglia.com](http://www.thinkpuglia.com)

■ **X-factor:** The pool is truly stunning, with a black lining and a swimmable channel that leads off into a huge, but very stylish, whirlpool bath.

**FOR ARCHITECTURE:**

**VILLA SANTORO**

Sleeping eight, there's plenty of space for a family or group without it being too rambling. Having been rebuilt by Austro-Italian architects Bricchi Marksteiner, there's more light inside than some other *trulli* properties. From €3,955 (£3,320) a week. Villa Santoro, Valle d'Itria, Puglia, Italy. E: [reservations@i-escape.com](mailto:reservations@i-escape.com). [www.i-escape.com](http://www.i-escape.com) >>

**FOR COUPLES:**

**MASSERIA ALCHIMIA**

A neat little hideaway, this whitewashed ex-convent has been transformed into 10 self-catering studios, each with furniture by Ron Arad, Charles and Ray Eames, and Philippe Starck. One-bedroom apartments from €195 (£164) for three nights. Masseria Alchimia, Fasano, Puglia, Italy. T: 00 39 335 6094647. [www.masseria-alchimia.it](http://www.masseria-alchimia.it)



Hammock by the pool at Masseria Lamacoppa

## LE MARCHE

ON THE COUNTRY'S 'calf', hugging the coast between Emilia Romagna, Abruzzo and Umbria, Le Marche has been largely neglected by British visitors, often because they associate it with the overdeveloped resorts that still cling to parts of its coastline. Yet Le Marche is no longer a poor man's Tuscany. Those who once turned their nose up at the pretty countryside and architectural treasures such as the walled city of Urbino are now drawn by the promise of authentic Italian hospitality, picturesque towns and villages, and unspoilt countryside — all without the crowds of some better-known regions. If you know where to look, there are equally attractive stretches of coast to be found too.



■ **WE RECOMMEND:**

**CASA COLLE QUADRATO**

So magical is the setting and atmosphere that you're likely to resolve to up sticks and move here. Surrounded by ancient oak and walnut trees, and on the edge of the Sibillini National Park, the place epitomises relaxation. One for traditionalists, the style here is on the homely side of glamorous, with a huge Aga, vast stone fireplace, comfy sofas to sink into, carved wooden headboards and a sun-dappled terrace for lazy lunches al fresco. Sleeping six in the main house and two more in an adjacent cottage, there's also a dramatic infinity swimming pool with stunning views out across rolling countryside. *From £2,300 a week. Casa Colle Quadrato, Marnacchia, Le Marche, Italy. T: 00 39 338 855 4653. [www.italiancountryhouse.com](http://www.italiancountryhouse.com)*

■ **X-factor:** It's full of touches adding character, like the sumptuous copper bathtub, created from an old cauldron once used to make *vino cotto*.

■ **FOR VINOPHILES:**

**CASA GIULIA**

Recently restored this stylish country house sleeps eight, has a great pool and a brilliantly equipped kitchen for those keen to make the most of the local produce. There's also a small vineyard from which the owners make wine. *From £1,200 a week. Casa Giulia, Near Mogliano, Le Marche, Italy. T: 08450 569440. [www.marcheholidayhomes.co.uk](http://www.marcheholidayhomes.co.uk)*

■ **FOR SECLUSION:**

**CASALE OLICCHIA**

Classic in style, Casale Olicchia is worth grabbing for the sheer peace. Set within its own grounds, eight guests can relax and enjoy spectacular views across the valley or dip into its pool without fear of interruption. *From £1,650 a week. Casale Olicchia, near Santa Vittoria, Le Marche, Italy. T: 01622 775217. [www.cottagestocastles.com](http://www.cottagestocastles.com)* □

