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WINE | SPIRITS | LIFESTYLE

# Italy's beating heart

THE PURIST'S GUIDE TO THE BEST WINE, FOOD & TRAVEL:  
TUSCANY TO PIEDMONT, BRUNELLO TO BAROLO



£10

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# Italy's top 10 wine hotels

BEAUTIFUL VISTAS, FINE FOOD AND WINE, TOTAL TRANQUILLITY...  
PUT IT ALL TOGETHER, AND YOU'VE GOT THE ULTIMATE DOLCE VITA.  
KICK BACK AND ENJOY OUR PICK OF ITALY'S FINEST WINERY-BASED HOTELS

Capofaro, in Sicily, overlooks vineyard and ocean,  
its 27 rooms each boasting  
a terrace stretching out to the sea



## Schloss Plars, South Tyrol

The mountainous South Tyrol boasts some of the most beguiling scenery in Europe, with charming towns and villages set against the dramatic Alpine backdrop and the air pure and clean. It is unmistakably Italian, although the hillsides are dotted with chalets, and the robust cuisine – a fusion of Alpine, Italian and central European dishes – sees dumplings, polenta, and Germanic dishes such as knödel, spaetzli and goulash sharing the menu with Veneto specialities such as pasta e fagioli.

Just outside Merano, Schloss Plars dates from the 14th century, but it was extensively renovated in the late 19th century and turned into a classic Tyrolean *castello*. It was bought by the Theiner family in 1911, and the estate was turned over to viticulture. Current owners Andreas and Irene Theiner oversee vineyards of Chardonnay, Merlot, Pinot Bianco, Schiava and Lagrein, planted on slopes 450m above Merano. Meanwhile the handsome *schloss* – with its covered walkways and infinity pool, terraces and verandas overlooking the snowy peaks of the Dolomites – is now a 12-room agriturismo. The rooms are generous and comfortable, with fine oak furniture and window bays stretching straight out to the vineyards; you can also visit the 100-year-old cellars. You can't dine at the hotel, but the area is rich in excellent restaurants, four with Michelin stars, including Gerhard Wieser's two-star Castel Fine Dining.

There are many reasons to love this part of Italy, not least the charm of the wines – the delicate but intense red Lagrein and Schiava, the whites with their fresh fruit and piercing acidity – and this fine, unassuming but upscale retreat is a perfect base for a gastronomic and vinous holiday.

From €162 per night  
schlossplars.com



The 12 rooms at the handsome Schloss Plars look out on to the Dolomites and the estate's vineyards, set 450m above the town of Merano

## Villa Cordevigo, Lake Garda, Verona

The wines of Bardolino, in the paradise that is the shore of Lake Garda, aren't nearly as famous as those of its neighbour Valpolicella (they can be difficult to find outside Italy), but if you're looking for a vineyard hotel in an exquisite setting – and within easy distance of Verona and Venice – Villa Cordevigo is perfect. The handsome buildings that make up the main part of the hotel date from the 17th and 18th centuries, but the core of the estate is Renaissance, and there has been a settlement in the town since Roman times. The villa, surrounded by cypress trees and 220ha of vines, exudes an old-world charm. The 33 rooms and suites are furnished in the grand style, with heavy gilt curtains and four-poster beds, all perfectly in keeping with the 300-year-old buildings. Guests can take advantage of all the lavish facilities of a modern five-star hotel, from wellness suite to pool; the one-Michelin-starred Oseleta restaurant alone is ample reason to visit, with chef Marco Marras putting an innovative spin on traditional Venetian cuisine.

While Bardolino might not be the most renowned Italian wine region, the hotel's owner, winery Vigneti Villabella, has vineyards in every spot of the Veneto:



Chiaretto, Valpolicella, Lugana, Custoza, Soave and Garda. As a result, guests at the villa will be spoiled for choice, in every way.

From €248 per night  
villacordevigo.com

The centre of Villa Cordevigo dates back to the 17th and 18th centuries and is furnished 'in the grand style'

## Palás Cerequio, Barolo, Piedmont

To say Palás Cerequio sits among the vines is an understatement: this fine Barolo manor house and its outbuildings look as if they have grown organically out of the vineyards, which cover every inch of available land north, south, east and west. Palás Cerequio is a hotel dedicated to Barolo; Cerequio itself is one of the most renowned Barolo crus and owner Michele Chiarlo one of its most respected producers. A two-hour drive southwest of Milan, this is, above all, a wine estate, its nine suites and rooms promising 'the luxury and magnetic charm of a total immersion in the world of Piedmont wine'.

Barolo nerds will find their interests amply catered for: precious documents are displayed in the 6,000-bottle cellar, including an original 1879 monograph by Lorenzo Fantini, the viticulturist who first named Barolo the 'king of wines'. Rooms are either classically luxurious or ultra-modern, with huge picture windows looking out over the vines; everything from Vespa hire and truffle hunts to in-room massage and a comprehensive tasting programme are on offer. And for the reopening – due as we went to press – Chiarlo has secured the services of the Michelin-starred chef Francesco Oberto to run the restaurant.

From €190 per night  
palascerequio.com



The nine-bedroom Palás Cerequio stands at the heart of one of Barolo's most renowned crus, immersing guests in the Piedmont wine scene



PHOTOS: ALEX FILZ





## Locanda dei Logi, San Gimignano, Tuscany

The three Logi brothers founded the Il Colombaio di Santa Chiara winery in 2000 and started renovating the old rectory and medieval church of San Gimignano in 2016. The town was previously ill-served when it came to hospitality, making Locanda dei Logi a welcome development. The hotel is surrounded by vineyards, the majority planted to Vernaccia di San Gimignano, the only white variety in Tuscany with DCG status. The old stone buildings have been beautifully and faithfully renovated, the six rooms are light and airy, and the public rooms open on to terraces overlooking the vines. There are opportunities for tastings and vineyard visits, and you're well placed for wider Tuscan excursions. Locanda dei Logi is run by a family that has been immersed in wine for generations; it's in a small town, with all the luxury but none of the opulence of the typical, international five-star hotel – and it's all the better for it.

From €235 per night  
[locandadeilogi.it](http://locandadeilogi.it)

Locanda dei Logi is a family-run boutique hotel, sympathetically restored from the original stone buildings



## Rosewood Castiglion del Bosco, Montalcino, Tuscany

When fashion mogul Massimo Ferragamo bought Castiglion del Bosco in 2003, it was a derelict feudal town; today, it's among Italy – even the world's – top wine resorts, a paradise of cypress-shaded enclaves and sympathetically restored ancient buildings. These include a medieval castle and the chapel of San Michele Arcangelo, with its priceless 14th-century fresco. There are also 62 hectares of Brunello di Montalcino vineyards, which yield very fine wine.

You have to negotiate several kilometres of dusty and potholed *strade bianche* to get to Castiglion del Bosco, which all adds to the sense that you've found an enchanted enclave in the hills – indeed, bewitched or not, there's little reason to leave.

The resort offers 42 suites, two restaurants (including the delightful Osteria La Canonica, a trattoria in what was the priest's house – his bread oven is now used for pizza), several bars, an infinity pool with views over the rolling Tuscan hills, a spa, a Tom Weiskopf-designed golf course and 11 villas, all restored to the peak of luxury. Most impressive of all is the way Ferragamo and his wife Chiara have preserved the integrity of the old estate. You might have arrived by Ferrari to stay at Tuscany's most exclusive (and expensive) wine resort, but as you stroll down the cobbled avenues towards the carefully preserved chapel, you feel the ghosts of the past are never far away.

From €934 per night  
[castigliondelbosco.com](http://castigliondelbosco.com)



Castiglion del Bosco has been completely renovated by the Ferragamo family, who turned a derelict town into one of the world's most luxurious wine resorts



## Castello di Buttrio, Udine, Friuli Venezia Giulia

Dotted with vineyards and villages that look as if they haven't changed in generations, the northeastern corner of Italy, a stone's throw from the Slovenian border, is a magical part of the country. Vines have been cultivated in Friuli since the Middle Ages; the Felluga family has been making wine here for more than 150 years and today farms some 250ha across the region.

When Marco Felluga bought the Castello di Buttrio in 1994, his intention was to restore it to its 17th-century glory. His daughter, winemaker Alessandra Felluga, began a project that included the recovery of historic vineyards, building a winery and opening a hotel in the castle. And what a hotel – from the vast baronial hall to the eight beautifully appointed bedrooms, history practically oozes from the stone walls.

Situated as it is on top of a hill, there are superb views across the vineyards and far beyond. Yet for all its splendour, there's something endearingly modest about Castello di Buttrio: the bistro, Osteria



al Castello di Buttrio, is intimate (and cosy in winter, with a blazing log fire) and specialises in local Friulian dishes. The wines made from local varieties – white Friulano and Ribolla Gialla, red Refosco and Pignolo – are characterised by intense fruit and acidity and are well sought after by wine lovers. Last year, Felluga started adding silk weave to the labels, to mark the recent discovery that the castle had in the past been used for breeding silkworms and was at the centre of silk production. It's a captivating place.

*From €250 per night  
castellodibuttrio.it*

Castello di Buttrio, restored by the current generation of its winemaking family, manages to offer a modest, intimate style of hospitality, despite its grand facade

## Venissa, Mazzorbo, Venice

The Bisol family of Prosecco fame has done more than anyone to revive Venice's winemaking tradition, searching out vineyards planted to the near-extinct Dorona di Venezia grape and making small quantities of very distinctive wine. Bisol's Venissa hotel on Mazzorbo island, 35–60 minutes by boat from Venice (depending on departure point), is set in a remote, ancient, walled vineyard that, via a bridge, gives access to the more bustling Burano.

Venissa is a boutique retreat, with five comfortably upscale rooms overlooking the lagoon; it's a charming, out-of-the-way place. Most compelling of all is its Michelin-starred restaurant run by Francesco Brutto, whose international reputation is based on the dishes he creates using only seasonal fish and seafood, along with vegetables from the hotel's gardens. The wines are unlike anything you'll taste in this part of Italy, in part because the grapes acquire salinity from *acqua alta* flooding and the salt in the atmosphere; Venissa Bianco and Venissa Rosso (made from Dorona and Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot respectively) are intense and savoury. The white in particular – with its extraordinary balance of salinity, luscious stone fruit, honey and acidity – is as strange and haunting as the fine old vineyard from which it comes.

*From €131 per night  
venissa.it*

With access to the bustling Burano but set on an island amid remote waterways, Venissa offers the best of Venice without the crowds



## Castello di Ama, Gaiole in Chianti, Tuscany

One of the most extraordinary estates in the Chianti Classico zone, Castello di Ama brings wine and hospitality together with some of the most celebrated names in modern art: Louise Bourgeois, Roni Horn and Anish Kapoor are the creators of just three of the 16 site-specific pieces that have been commissioned by owners Lorenza Sebasti and Marco Pallanti since 1999.

Castello di Ama is at the forefront of the renaissance of Chianti Classico; the estate's L'Apparita 2016 Merlot was awarded 100 points by critic Antonio Galloni. Its restaurant, Il Ristoro di Villa Pianigiani, looks out over the 75ha of vineyard and specialises in traditional Tuscan food, much of it grown in the estate's gardens. About an hour's drive south of Florence, the hotel is intimate, with five suites – one with an open fire – that offer splendid views over the rolling Chianti hills.

Above all, though, Castello di Ama is ideal for art lovers. The estate, Pallanti says, 'has three legs: landscape, wine and art, each one intimately connected with the other two'. Many of the pieces, such as Polish artist Mirosław Bałka's work amid the steel blending vats, are wine-specific. When she visited, Frances Morris, the director of London's Tate Modern, said, 'The lovely thing about this collection is that you have to seek the works out. It's the opposite of a sculpture park.'

*From €370 per night  
castellodiama.com*



Castello di Ama is known for its astonishing, site-specific art collection but is also an intimate hotel, featuring just five suites, with fine views over the Chianti hills





## Monaci delle Terre Nere, Zafferana Etnea, Sicily

In recent years, the slopes of the active volcano Mount Etna have formed one of the most dynamic wine-producing regions of Italy. Now the region is turning to oenotourism, too.

In 2007, Guido Coffa and his wife Ada Calabrese took over an 18th-century monastery and turned it into a fine hotel surrounded by 6ha of regional varieties Nerello Mascalese, Nerello Cappuccio, Catarratto and Carricante. Coffa's four renowned wines also include a Grenache; the variety was brought to the island centuries ago by the French and is known locally as U'Ranaci. The hotel itself boasts 27 rooms spread out around the 25ha estate; the buildings have been sensitively restored, and the rooms (as you'd expect of a Relais & Châteaux property) are generous, light and furnished to a peak of luxury. The newest rooms have been constructed with a variety of local materials – including volcanic stone – and decorated with modern artworks.

Between Taormina and Catania, the hotel is well



placed for beach excursions and horseback tours up to Etna's crater zone, though it's a pleasure just to stroll between the handsome buildings and tree-shaded pool. Another reason not to leave is the excellent, airy Locanda Nerello restaurant, which sources almost all of its ingredients from either the hotel's kitchen gardens or local producers. And the wine list is a treat, featuring Coffa's own estate wines, as well as an imaginative selection from all over Italy.

*From €331.50 per night  
monacidelletterenere.it*


Many of the ingredients for the restaurant at Monaci delle Terre Nere are sourced from the hotel's kitchen gardens



## Capofaro, Messina, Sicily

It's hard to conjure an image as evocative as the volcanic peaks of Salina island rising out of the Tyrrhenian Sea. The Tasca d'Almerita family, which owns five estates in Sicily, created Capofaro as an expression of love for wine and the sea; to stay at the resort is to immerse yourself in the essence of both.

The hotel – part of the dependably reassuring Relais & Châteaux collection – sits next to a 6ha volcanic vineyard planted with the island's indigenous grape Malvasia delle Lipari, which has its own appellation and produces both a dry and a sweet white. The resort overlooks vineyard and ocean, its 27 rooms each boasting a terrace stretching out to the sea. (Six of the rooms are in the former lighthouse-keeper's lodgings; the family bought the 19th-century lighthouse in 2017.) The restaurant practises 'zero-kilometre' cooking, with 70% of the ingredients sourced from the kitchen gardens. Salina is known as the 'green island' due to the fertility of its volcanic soils. The Capofaro property has a garden spa and private beach and all the other facilities of a top-class international resort, but it also has a timeless, natural charm thanks to the fact that you're on an almost-deserted island in an archipelago that has been celebrated by poets for millennia.

*From €310 per night  
capofaro.it* 



Set on the Tyrrhenian Sea, Capofaro sits next to a volcanic vineyard and offers rooms in a converted lighthouse, plus food sourced almost entirely from the estate