



Il Borro

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Castello delle Serre

SPECIAL REPORT: LUXURY LODGINGS IN TUSCANY

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Under The Tuscan Spell: Great Places to Stay

Tuscany. Just saying the word conjures up images of a lush landscape, lovely hilltop towns, and rolling vineyards. This is the region where travelers dream of enjoying a glass of wine while viewing an iconic sunset after a long day of touring or possibly doing nothing at all. Tuscany is a place where time slows down and your senses ramp up.

So it's natural that the place you stay is key to the Tuscan dream vacation. There's no shortage of luxurious places to stay. Here are four luxury properties that I've had the good fortune to visit and inspect over the past year.

Il Borro

Il Borro is a place like no other. Truly. Located in the upper *Val d'Arno*, a short hour-long drive from Florence.



The entrance alone is transcendent. The gates open to welcome you, and as you drive along the cypress tree-lined driveway, you are greeted by the horses grazing in their corral at the stables. Already you are dreaming of packing a picnic and heading off on a horseback ride through the vineyards.

Il Borro is an ancient village filled with tree-lined streets, alleyways, old stone houses, olive groves, vines and

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a Castle is a Castle

When I dream of Tuscany, "the castle" is usually in my visions. "The castle" is now shorthand for *Castello delle Serre*. For a place I only first visited a year ago, it has truly become a home away from home. The fact that I have returned three times in a year (twice for some R&R after filming episodes of the TV series) and also sent my parents for a visit should tell you how special I think this place is.

First, let's start with the location. You probably haven't heard of the little town (population: 1,600) of *Serre di Rapolano* and thankfully most visitors to Tuscany don't know about it either. The town is decidedly authentic and devoid of tourists, except for mainly Italians who visit the refreshing hot springs here, *Terme San Giovanni*. Serre is perfectly positioned as an ideal base to explore Tuscany, easily accessible to *Cortona*, *Montalcino* and even *Chianti*.

And then there's the structure: a castle is a castle, after all. The foundation dates to just after the fall of the Roman Empire. It played an important role when Serre di Rapolano was part of the *Via Francigena*, the ancient pilgrimage

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Tuscany is 8,900 square miles.

Tuscan Spell *continued from page 1*

countryside. It is Tuscany in miniature, where the atmosphere changes according to the rhythm of the seasons, giving you the opportunity to laze by the pool in the summer or, in wintertime, to enjoy some quite time by the fireplace in one of the 38 suites.

The main villa stands at the top of the hill and the *borgo*, (which means village) lies across a stone bridge, all surrounded by 1700 acres of wonder. In the village you will find an impressive selection of artisanal workshops such as a shoemaker, a goldsmith, a tailor and an embroiderer.

Since 1993 *Ferruccio Ferragamo* and his family including *Salvatore* and *Vittoria* have tended to this little piece of history where local craftsmen assisted in renovating and restoring this majestic estate. The story of winemaking in this land is deeply rooted in the past and a stay here is not complete without visiting the magnificent old wine cellars and the *Wine&Art Gallery*, a space dedicated to the history of wine.

The atmosphere is quite unique. Here guests can walk among the old workshops, ride through the estate lands, or pamper themselves in the modern spa complete with a swimming pool looking out over the hills. While staying at Il Borro guests may choose between the village suites and the beautifully restored villas. The décor is decidedly and purposefully rustic chic. The luxury accommodations and hospitality are



Il Borro

integrated with a state-of-the-art farm, which is taking admirable steps towards conversion to organic, eco-sustainable farming.

For dining, the choice between the *Osteria del Borro* and *Il Borro Tuscan Bistro* introduces guests to the style of Executive Chef *Andrea Campani*, focusing

on modern Tuscan dishes such as *Pecorino* flan or barbecued beef with rosemary potatoes. And of course, Il Borro produces its own selection of wines.

You will feel like the guest of the Ferragamo family and have the unique experience of staying in a tiny but luxurious Tuscan village.

Il Borro
Località Borro, 1
Loro Ciuffenna
(39) 055 977053
www.ilborro.it

Rates: Start at 336€ nightly for a room and include breakfast. Villas start at 1500€ per night.

Relais La Corte dei Papi

Cortona is famous for its Etruscan heritage but its more recent claim to fame is as the home of *Bramasole*, the villa author Frances Mayes fixed up and subject of her ultra-famous book, *Under the Tuscan Sun*.

Relais La Corte dei Papi, in the hills just a

few miles from the center of Cortona, is an oasis of serenity. In my opinion, the most essential feature of this hotel is the owner and general manager, *David Papi*. La Corte Dei Papi has been in his family since the 17th century and they are tirelessly dedicated to thoughtfully expanding this exclusive hotel.

David greets each guest personally and his enthusiasm for life, along with his passion for hospitality, quickly turns his guests into lifelong friends. This



vintage home, steeped in tradition and heritage, is run by a family who is always on hand to welcome their guests and feel no request is too small.



Relais La Corte dei Papi

What originally began as a farmhouse has since been converted into a boutique hotel,

now about 12 years old. With only 15 rooms and suites, a stay here is an intimate one. The standout accommodations are the Spa Suites where the decor combines traditional Tuscan design with the modern concept of well-being. In these elegant and spacious suites you will find a luxury private spa equipped with Turkish bath complete with multi-sensory showers, aromatherapy, chromo therapy and music along with an incredibly large Jacuzzi.

Nearby guests can discover some of the most beautiful towns in Tuscany and Umbria with Florence, *San Gimignano* and *Siena* just an hour away by car or train and historic towns such

The movie *The English Patient*

as *Perugia, Assisi* and *Spello* only 30 miles way.

There is a gorgeous pool, a gourmet restaurant (often with live music) and so many activities here, such as cooking classes, wine cellar tour and tasting, wellness in the spa, that this property is quickly becoming a favorite. It is an ideal option to consider taking over privately for a wedding or a special event. At Relais La Corte dei Papi you will truly feel like you have come to your Tuscan home!

Relais La Corte dei Papi

Località Pergo Dogana, 12
Pergo di Cortona
(39) 0575 614109
www.lacortedeipapi.com

Rates: Start at 200€ per night for a deluxe room and 485€ for a deluxe cottage or spa suite. All include breakfast.



Relais Borgo Santo Pietro

Located in *Chiusdino* approximately 45 minutes from *Siena*, *Relais Borgo Santo Pietro* is a luxury 5-star boutique hotel created by Jeanette and Claus Thottrup that opened to the public in 2008. Well travelled, the Danish couple discovered the property in 2001 and were immediately drawn to the energy here and the excitement of what they could create here. Their involvement in the day-to-day operations is inspiring and hands-on.

Set on 200 acres along the Merse River, with peace and privacy in mind, this stunning property boasts lush gardens,

bicycle paths and has space dedicated to beekeeping, poultry and some 300 sheep. The décor inside has been lovingly curated with antiques, custom linens and oozes sophisticated charm.

While guests will be delighted with any of the twenty accommodations, the two brand new pool suites are my favorite. Completely private, each has its own terrace and generously sized salt-water pools. With a king bed, separate living room and bathroom with both a walk-in shower and a freestanding tub begging to be soaked in, I imagine guests here will struggle with a reason to ever leave their suite.

But, when they do, they will find so much to see, do and explore around the grounds. Two nights could never



Relais Borgo Santo Pietro

be enough time here to sample all of the activities offered. Guests can choose from the spa, which creates natural products using local and seasonal plants and herbs, artisanal cheese making, wine tasting, the Borgo Cooking School with local chef *Mamma Olga*, flower arranging classes and art lessons by the

river and art lessons with the artist-in-residence.

The food is, as you would expect, sublime. You may choose to dine at *Meo Modo*, a one Michelin star restaurant with a beautiful terrace for outdoor dining or, for a more casual meal, *Sull'Albero Trattoria, Brasserie and Bar* which, on Monday evenings, hosts

a farmer's market where guests are invited to choose their fresh meat and fish, cheese and seasonal produce then watch it being prepared. It is a fun and festive way to mingle with other guests and then dine under the stars.

With interiors that rival the captivating exterior landscape, this property's warm staff is ready to welcome you.

Relais Borgo Santo Pietro

Borgo Santo Pietro, 110
Località Palazzetto
Chiusdino
(39) 0577 751222
www.borgosantopietro.com

Rates: Starts at 535€ nightly with breakfast.



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was filmed in *Arezzo* and *Pienza*.

Toscana Resort Castelfalfi

Located in the remote Tuscan village of *Montaione* between Florence and *Volterra* lies the *Toscana Resort Castelfalfi*, which houses the 5-star *Hotel Il Castelfalfi*. This hotel is technically the new kid on the block having opened in 2017. Housing 120 suites highlighting contemporary Italian decor, this property is perfect for the guest who wants a modern state-of-the-art resort in an historic Tuscan landscape, and what a landscape it is! The sunset is a nightly event that will leave you breathless.



Toscana Resort Castelfalfi

The active guest will enjoy swimming pools, tennis courts, bike rentals and a beauty area, which offers yoga and fitness classes.

Castelfalfi is the new and exclusive destination for those looking for somewhere with irresistible charm and contemporary design. Somewhere that offers hospitality and fine cuisine, a prestigious golf course and numerous sporting activities, all immersed in natural surroundings.

Toscana Resort Castelfalfi

Località Castelfalfi

Montaione

(39) 0571 891000

www.castelfalfi.com

Rates: Start at 340€ per night, with breakfast included.

—Kelly Millington

Kelly Millington is a luxury travel advisor who designs and plans highly personalized travel experiences for her clients that are unique, creative and described as "spectacular." Through her vast network and global connections, she is able to match her clients with the finest choices for the best value.

For more information, visit www.kellymillingtontravel.com

Il Castelfalfi's warm hospitality lends itself to enjoying all that the property has to offer. An evening *aperitivo* can be enjoyed in the chic lobby bar or out on the terrace or perhaps at the pool bar. Budding chefs will enjoy, as we did, learning to cook Italian classics in a class in the open free-standing kitchen of the fine dining restaurant, *La Via del Sale*.

The beauty of this hotel is that it is encompassed within a large estate. On this grand estate of 2,700 acres you will find an ancient *borgo* with apartments of many sizes and lovely little shops including a gelateria. The estate also offers some truly gorgeous *casali*, traditional country villas with one to four bedrooms, that can be rented.

Golf lovers will rejoice that here you will also find Tuscany's largest golf course. *The Golf Castelfalfi Club* boasts the 18-hole Mountain Course and also the 9-hole Lake Course, both designed

by the award-winning architects Moroder and Preissmann.

For those wishing to pursue other activities, there is no shortage

of those here.



1€ = \$1.17 at press time

There are seven UNESCO

Tranquil Elegance at A Medici Villa

When visiting Italy, there's the inevitable pull between countryside and city. Nowhere more so than Tuscany where stunning and vibrant landscapes and the dynamic, age-old city of art (Florence) both beckon. People, I think I have found a solution! *Villa Medicea Di Lilliano*, an historic-meets-modern property set on a quiet country road, just seven miles from Florence, boasting stunning views of the *Duomo* in the distance. With six villas, it is ideal for families or groups of friends and with truly spectacular spaces (garden, terrace, banquet hall), magical for weddings and other events.

The estate started life as an 11th-century watch tower before becoming a *Medici* family home centuries later thanks to *Grand Duke Ferdinando II*. When the Medicis eventually died out, the *Malenchini* family of Florence bought the estate, now known for its production of *Chianti*, *Chianti Colli Fiorentini* and the super Tuscan *Bruzzico*. The family matriarch who still lives here during the summer might give you a personal tour of the tiny Medici chapel and elegant Oriental room.

Chances are though that you will be greeted by the charismatic *Eric Veroliemeulen*, the Dutch-born managing director who has been nicknamed "the revolution" by the owners. Eric has put the estate on the map as one of the most spectacular wedding venues in Tuscany. It is one



Clockwise: The main historic villa; Eric Veroliemeulen; a wedding; La Corte dining room; La Torre pool



of the only properties in and around Florence that has a special license to hold a civil ceremony on the property instead of in a traditional town hall.

Always two steps ahead in what guests need, Eric often has surprises up his sleeve. When he was showing me around the picturesque main courtyard, I saw an artist with a beard and a beret, painting a colorful scene at an easel. He looked like something out of a movie, and at first I thought, "My God does Eric think of everything, he even set up this mannequin!" Turns out the artist was real!

While the estate is steeped in history, the accommodations here are thoroughly modern and spacious. I spent a few days in *La Corte*, a 5-suite villa that sleeps 12. Suites can be

rented on their own or the villa can be rented in its entirety. Every room is airy and luxurious, the bathrooms are huge and have both showers and tubs, the private courtyard feels like a sanctuary and my dream in life is now to have a lime green modern kitchen like the one here. Nearby the *La Torre* villas are five elegant townhouses, side-by-side, offering one to three bedrooms each. Both *La Corte* and *La Torre* have that one thing key to a family vacation: a swimming pool!

Eric is quite simply in the business of making Tuscan dreams come true from morning — fresh juice and bread for breakfast delivered in a beautiful wooden box — to night, with a romantic dinner for two in the candlelit

courtyard, prepared by local chef *Sabrina Piantini*, who has cooked for Sting, whose villa is nearby. Eric's staff can arrange for cooking classes, wine tasting, cellar tours and local excursions.

If you can't make it to the estate for a stay, be sure to stop by for wine tasting and to buy delicious olive oil from the estate shop.

Villa Medicea Di Lilliano
Azienda Agricola Malenchini
Via Lilliano e Meoli, 82 (Grassina)
Bagno a Ripoli
(39) 055 642602
www.medicivilla.com

Rates: The *La Torre* villas range in price from 140 to 570€ per night, depending on season. The entire *La Corte* villa (5 bedrooms) ranges from 700 to 950€ per night. Three-night minimum.



World Heritage sites in Tuscany.

The Magic of Tuscan

In the past year, I revisited two special places that remind me what a transformative experience visiting the Terme (hot springs) of Tuscany can be. *Terme di Saturnia* and *Adler Terme* are two luxury properties that are built around ancient healing waters. There's a reason the ancient Romans, as well as modern-day Italians, believe so strongly in the medicinal power of this H₂O. I'm always trying to find something new for readers, so rarely return to the same places, but both Saturnia and Adler Terme were calling me back to refresh my mind, body and spirit.

Soaking in Saturnia

For me, *Saturnia* equates to a spiritual experience. The very first issue of *Dream of Italy*, published 16 years ago, featured *Terme di Saturnia Spa & Golf Resort* as the cover story. Saturnia was my first hot springs experience and remains the one closest to my heart. This small town lies in the heart of wild and gorgeous *Maremma* on the Tuscan coast, a place to get away from everyone and everything.

Legend tells of Saturn, God of the Harvest, striking a volcanic crater with a mighty thunderbolt, causing a river of warm, mineral-infused waters to rush over the valley of Saturnia. Etruscans and ancient Romans were the first to extol the health properties of the water that gushes up from the center of the Earth at a rate of 130 gallons per second and at a constant temperature of 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. I was a believer the first time I sat in the water years ago and no longer felt the pain from a recent car accident.

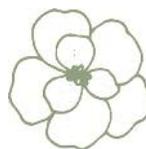
Italian spas are all about preventative and restorative health so Saturnia offers a full program of nutrition, detox, fitness and medical

services. Practitioners offer every kind of treatment imaginable in 53 treatment rooms. I enjoyed reflexology with *Stefania* so much that I went for two sessions.

The feng shui at Saturnia promotes a sense of well-being; the buildings, constructed from

local Travertine, reflect the soft colors of sunset and the Ralph Lauren-like décor feels elegant and simple. The public spaces, especially the bar/lounge that hosts nightly entertainment, are open and airy and look out at the main pool.

I love that here it is perfectly fine to spend your whole day in bathing suit and robe, simply moving from your lounge chair to the pool and back. One welcome addition since my last visit:



"noodle" floats that you can hold onto in the pool. Breaking for a simple, fresh but sit-down lunch is the Italian way and you can dine on the deck next to the pool.

If you choose to be more active, guided

hikes, tennis and golf await. One day I took a drive to the picturesque seaside town of *Monte Argentario* for some ocean air. I've visited Maremma several times before but my God, the drive there had me simply speechless at the beauty and I stopped several time to snap photos. This is a part of Italy you need to see with your own eyes.

Every spa resort I visit invariably gets compared to Saturnia. I will say nothing I've experienced compares to the water here. Maybe Saturn added a mysterious, magical ingredient. Come here and experience it for yourself.

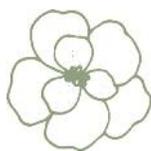
Terme di Saturnia SPA & Golf Resort

Saturnia

(39) 0564 600111

www.termedisaturnia.it

Rates: Starts at 393€ per person, per night for the Rebalance program, which includes breakfast, a morning hike, use of the pools and facilities.



Most of the *Maremma* is former

Hot Spring Resorts

Beauty at Adler Thermae

The *Val d'Orcia*, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, could surely be called one of the most stunning corners of Italy. The views alone — of Cypress-lined country roads and expanses of vineyards and olive grove — make *Adler Thermae* worth a visit. But of course, there's the water. *Bagno Vignoni*, a tiny *frazione* of 30 people that was once on the ancient pilgrimage route of *Via Francigena*, houses a rectangular pool in the center of the village, which contains the original source of the water that feeds the springs at the Adler Thermae.



The modern pools at the resort shimmer turquoise in the sunlight and take on a green glow as the sun goes down. The point of course is to spend as much time as possible soaking in the warm water, rich in sulphur, bicarbonate and ferrous compounds, and relaxing. What I love about this property is that there are so many relaxing spots to zen out. My favorite is the new olive wood Finnish sauna *Panoramica*, sitting on a perch overlooking the property.

But relaxing isn't the only game in town; Adler Thermae is very much an active resort, for adults as well as kids. There are dozens of organized activities each week from hikes and tours of nearby towns like *Pienza* to wine tasting in the property's lovely new on-site winery. You can take out mountain bikes or spend some time on the outdoor treadmill with one of the

best views in the world. Most guests come for a week or two and it is easy to understand why, there's so much to



do on site and the best of Tuscany within a few miles.

Adler Thermae is always on the cutting edge of health and wellness. During my first visit in 2007, I had an eye-opening consultation with a German doctor revealing some medical issues I'm not sure traditional medicine would have caught. The *Adler Med* medical spa recently opened their own in-house lab for blood tests and food intolerance tests. Those in search of maximum health can plan a stay with a fasting mimicking diet

championed by Valter Longo.

Of course, spas are meant to pamper beauty wise and everything from peels and scrubs to massages and wine baths, yes in *Brunello*, are on offer. Adler recently relaunched their cosmetics line that uses the active ingredients in the water here.

Each of the large, luxury guest rooms offers either a balcony or patio, keeping guests within eye shot of the water they came to worship.

The food rivals the best of any local trattoria and some lighter dishes satisfy even those looking to lose weight.

The menu includes everything from custom made fresh juice and crepes in the morning to a buffet of antipasti and freshly baked breads in the evening. The dining room atrium opens to the sky when the weather is nice.

Hotel Adler Thermae Spa & Relax Resort

Strada di Bagno Vignoni

San Quirico d'Orcia

(39) 0577 889000

www.adler-thermae.com

Rates: Rooms start 183€ with breakfast only, and 208€ with half board. Weekly packages start at 1285€ with breakfast.



marshland that was drained.

A Castle is A Castle *continued from page 1*

route from Canterbury to Rome. Local landowners, the *Gori Martini* family, owned the castle for 528 years until *Contessa Giselda Biagini Gori Martini* got into a bit of gambling debt in Monte Carlo and sold the spread to Italian-American restaurateur *Salvatore Gangale* in 1994.

The true magic of Castello delle Serre is in the people.

Salvatore Gangale, the former proprietor of *Salvatore's Cucina Italiana* in San Diego and Sun Valley, Idaho, spent 11 years meticulously renovating the castle with his son, *Antonio*. The father-son duo now warmly welcome their guests and were recently joined by Antonio's lovely fiancé *Kaci*. *Fabio*, a native of *Bologna*, rounds out the team; be sure to ask him for a personal look at his eclectic art collection which hangs in one of the main castle salons.

It is that chemistry of Italian hospitality and American sensibilities that makes you feel like you're visiting your friends from back home who just happened to buy a castle in Tuscany.

"Our guests are taken aback at how fluent we are in both cultures, how we can explain everyday Italian life to them and put them at ease when trying new things here in Tuscany," Antonio explains.

There are 20 rooms total in the castle, tower and villa on the grounds; each one is unique. The stuff of royal dreams, the *Contessa Suite* was the private bedroom of the last owner. I could stare at the cherubs painted on the super high ceilings for a lifetime. The old watchtower houses the two-floor *Tower Suite* which boasts its own

private rooftop with 360-degree views. I'd venture to say it is one of the best hotel rooms in all of Italy. Even the deluxe suites, without fancy names, are spacious and charming and have special features like my favorite #102 which has wood-beamed ceilings and



Contessa Suite



Tower Suite overlooking pool

doors that lead to a private outdoor patio.

Plan for some downtime when visiting the castle. Why? The pool. Beautiful and refreshing, it is set in a peaceful garden where you can look out over the church bell tower, the crenels on the top of the castle and the countryside.

To get the full castle experience, be sure to experience a family dinner. Several times a week, Sal makes a special pre-fixe menu (there's one seating) complemented by local Tuscan wines. If you're lucky, you will revel in the taste of Sal's most delectable dish –

rosette – homemade pasta sheets filled with gruyere and *prosciutto cotto* and baked in cream and *Parmigiano*. *Mamma Mia!* Still dreaming of it. Another great part of family dinner is the chance to meet fellow guests from all over the world.

On another evening, you must venture down the road to *Agriturismo Ischieto* for dinner. The fanciful flavors of the food are only matched by the romantic setting. The owners are descendants of the local share croppers who work for the Gori Martini family. The farmhouse has been beautifully restored. *Fiorenzo* tends to the land, his wife cooks in the kitchen and grandmother *Marina* milks the sheep for their fresh *ricotta*. Order the *pici* pasta with *ragu*, *ravioli* with truffles or any dish made from local *Cinta Senese* pigs.



Sal, Fabio, Kaci, Antonio



Sunset



Sal, Kathy, Antonio

If you are celebrating a special occasion, Castello delle Serre is definitely the place to go. The castle exudes romance and is a great place for a wedding too; a recent ceremony/party was featured in *Martha Stewart Weddings*.

When you visit the castle, be sure to tell the Gangales that I say hello and that I will be visiting again soon.

Castello delle Serre

Piazza XX Settembre, 1
Serre di Rapolano
www.castellodelleserre.com
(39) 338 7315802

Rates: Start at 240€ nightly for a standard double and up to 650€ per night for the three-bedroom villa on the grounds. Includes breakfast.

A castle is fortified; a palace is not.