

A room with a cru

There's no better way to get to know Italy's rich and diverse winemaking culture than by staying at the wineries themselves. Our Italian experts choose their top 10 estates with rooms

Castello Banfi Montalcino, Tuscany

If location is everything, then the Borgo ('village') residence at Castello Banfi is in a stellar league. Sweeping hilltop views run uninterrupted across the estate vineyards to a classic Tuscan landscape beyond, while the medieval castle overlooks this converted 18th-century stone hamlet. Within the hamlet, 14 individual rooms and suites evoke an understated yet opulent, modern take on Tuscany's heritage, right down to the Sangiovese body lotion. A spectacularly sited pool, spa, taverna, enoteca, balsameria, glass museum and pergola garden, along with cooking and wine classes rooted in local, seasonal produce add to the sense of well-being. As do ample opportunities to visit and sample from

the estate wine cellars. Further afield, the concierge service will organise excursions such as chauffeured historical tours, helicopter and balloon flights, photography, trekking, cycling, gastronomic itineraries or simply taking a Ferrari for a ride. Then again, you may just want to lounge in the luxury of your room. *Rooms from €320.*
www.castellobanfiilborgo.com

Below: perched on the top of a hill near Montalcino, Castello Banfi has spectacular views of the stunning Tuscan countryside





Castiglion del Bosco

Montalcino, Tuscany

Also situated around a 'borgo' is the restored 800-year-old, 4,200-acre estate, now owned by Massimo Ferragamo. Previously solely a private club whose members pay over \$1m a year for six weeks' residency, it now offers high-end accommodation in a stunning, secluded setting. Luxury still comes at a price, of course, but the excellence here lies not just in the immaculate, quality furnishings of the 23 suites and nine villas (which themselves date back to the 18th century) but in the service and detail. Guests can choose from two restaurants – one formal, the other more 'osteria' style – a gym, pool, spa, golf course, cookery classes... and, of course, wine tastings. If that's not enough, there's guided hikes, horse riding, mountain biking and hunting on offer. In all likelihood, though, the setting – on top of a hill looking out to Montalcino (a 20-minute drive) – and the comfort on offer will mean you won't want to disturb yourself too much. Scenes from the visually spellbinding film *The English Patient* were filmed here, and the grounds are so stunning, and huge, that you could happily spend a day simply wandering around the estate. The only problem? One night won't be enough. *Rooms from €400.* www.castigliondelbosco.com

Relais Russiz Superiore

Capriva del Friuli, Friuli-Venezia Giulia
Collio is the most celebrated denomination in the far northeastern region of Friuli, thanks to its unique, world-class whites. Its renowned hill is covered with lush woods and beautiful vineyards, and thanks to its stunning wines, wild beauty and its location far from tourist routes, Collio is a



Above: Castiglion del Bosco (see also front cover) has a wealth of five-star facilities including an 18-hole golf course (left) designed by Tom Weiskopf

Below: the Relais Russiz Superiore in Collio



destination for savvy travellers and connoisseurs. One of the best places to stay is the intimate, five-star Relais Russiz Superiore – comfort without chintzy excess. Set on one of Italy's most esteemed estates, the relais is surrounded by vineyards and has six charming bedrooms, gracefully furnished in a chic country style, plus one elegant suite. Walk scenic trails through the vineyards or play golf on a course less than 2km away. There is no restaurant, but breakfast on the terrace with breathtaking views over the vineyards could be one of the high points of a spring or early autumn visit. *Rooms from €120.* www.marcofelluga.it/relais

Fattoria I Veroni

Pontassieve, Tuscany

For those looking for a simpler country getaway without the fuss of Michelin stars and fancy linens, but seeking a quiet vacation in which to relax in one of Italy's most beautiful countrysides, the I Veroni estate near Pontassieve ticks all the right boxes. One of the up-and-coming estates in Italy, I Veroni is just a 30-minute drive or a 15-minute train ride from Florence. A restored farmhouse that was once a watchtower of the noble Guidi Family, today it offers a pool and nine spacious 70m²



Above: the restaurant at Tenuta Venissa, owned by the Bisol family of Prosecco

farmhouse apartments with an equipped kitchen, television and two bathrooms each. Special attention has been paid to the selection of furniture and interior decor for each apartment, in an effort to preserve the atmosphere of an agricultural past. Bicycles are available – the estate sits in the middle of a maze of nature walks clearly marked for hikers and bicyclists alike. It is hard, though, to beat walking through the vineyards, overlooked by century-old holm oak, cypress and olive trees, while colourful pheasants are routinely flushed out, or scurry away at your sight. The winery is open for visits and owner Lorenzo Mariani's traditionally made, refreshing Chianti Rufina and Chianti Rufina Riserva, as well as an above average Vin Santo, are available to be tasted. After a busy day shopping and seeing the sites in Florence, I Veroni is just what the doctor ordered. *Rooms from €180.* www.iveroni.it

Tenuta Venissa

Venice, Veneto

The Bisol family has a deep appreciation for Venice's rich culture and history, and their wish was to help reclaim a bit of the city's forgotten past. With the creation of Tenuta Venissa, a charming, walled island hotel and restaurant, they look to have done just that. Located on the island of Mazzorbo, one of the small islands that dot Venice's lagoon, it is connected by a footbridge to the charming isle of Burano (famous for its lacework, characterised by colorful homes and crisscrossed by canals with small piazzas and cafes). The estate includes a restored walled vineyard where Dorona, an ancient native grape variety, has been replanted and is now being used to make wine. Made via a long maceration on the skins, the wine is thicker, more tannic and richer than the fresh white wines typical of Veneto; the first bottles are expected to be released next year. Bisol has not limited itself to replanting the ancient vineyard ScarpaVolo, but has



Above: fine dining at the Ristorante Venissa

Above right: a superb view from la Vecchia Quercia



also planted a large garden with local varieties of vegetables for its Ristorante Venissa, run by chef Paola Budel, who has trained in Italy and abroad with Michelin-starred chefs such as Gualtiero Marchesi and Michel Roux. The menu changes regularly and features local ingredients and specialties. The pretty restaurant's glass walls overlook the vineyard and lagoon, and breakfast is an especially worthwhile endeavour, with lots of fresh fruit, flaky, airy pastries and excellent coffee and jams. The rooms are comfortable, if not particularly spacious, and the whole place exudes a sense of charm and quiet far removed from the crowds that plague Venice or nearby Murano. Venissa is easily reached by Vaporetto (the Venice public ferry) or motorboat. *Rooms from €30.* www.venissa.it

La Vecchia Quercia

San Cipriano, Campania

The name Montevetrano is renowned in winemaking circles as one of southern Italy's most iconic wineries. It's also the name of the medieval castle on a hill in the Picentini mountains that stands above the winery, between the port of Salerno and the plain of Paestum. Silvia Imperato is the woman responsible for producing the award-winning wine that set a new standard for quality here when it was first produced in the 1990s. She lives in one of two handsome villas on the 26-hectare estate of vineyards, olive groves and woods. Her sister, Anna, has turned her villa, which is adjacent to Silvia's, into an attractive place to stay, complete with swimming pool and surrounded by vineyards. Anna is also a wonderful cook, so guests ➤



Right: Tenuta San Michele offers spectacular views to the crater of Mount Etna



Above: the restaurant at Borgo San Felice, which lies in an idyllic pastoral setting among the vineyards and olive groves in the heart of Chianti Classico

are treated to delicious breakfasts, and dinner on request. The estate is perfectly situated for exploring the Amalfi coast, the Cilento and the buffalo mozzarella farms of the Sele Valley. *Rooms from €120 per person.*
www.lavecchiaquercia.it

Tenuta San Michele

Santa Venerina, Sicily

Known as the Burgundy of the Mediterranean, Etna produces elegant and complex wines which have taken off over the past few years, and wine lovers are thronging to the area. 'Last year we had more than 19,000 visitors,' says Michele Scammacca, whose family has been making wines for more than 150 years at the San Michele estate on the steep western slopes at the foot of Mount Etna. To accommodate visitors looking to lodge among the ancient flora that surrounds Europe's highest active volcano, the family has converted two farm buildings into a country inn. Set among vineyards, the two self-catering apartments and 10 double rooms are decorated in a simple, relaxed style and all offer dazzling views of the smoking crater just 30km away and the distant Ionian Sea.

Rooms from €46 per person.
www.murgo.it

Borgo San Felice

Castelnuovo Berardenga, Tuscany

One of the best places to experience the elegant Tuscan countryside is the stunning Borgo San Felice. Appearing as if just neatly placed inside a Renaissance landscape painting, the hotel nestles among vineyards and olive groves in the heart of

Chianti Classico. It is housed in five luxuriously restored stone villas, and comprises an entire medieval hamlet that it shares with leading winery Agricola San Felice. Although the hotel offers all the amenities one would expect from five-star accommodation, its unique combination of *La Dolce Vita* flair combined with authenticity is the real allure: if many such renovated villages have become somewhat Disneyfied, Borgo San Felice remains happily and wholly Tuscan. *Rooms from €320.*
www.borgosanfelice.it

Zegla

Collio, Friuli-Venezia Giulia

The gentle hills on the Slovenian border provide great terroir for white wines. And Renato and Savina Keber's *agriturismo* at Zegla is one of the area's great crus. This rural guest house is set in the family's vineyards and is closely linked to the winery a few houses away. Savina has made it much more like a home than a hotel, with comfortable rooms enhanced by lovely detailing in natural fabrics and materials. Downstairs, the big

kitchen and dining room is a great place to meet local winemakers stopping in for a chat, a glass of fine wine and slice of ham. Savina makes sensational cakes and jams that she serves at breakfast and enchants the guests with her warmth and hospitality. *Website under construction.* POA savinaprincic@yahoo.it



Above: the rural guest house at Zegla, one of the top crus in the Collio region



Above: L'Albereta in Franciacorta is home to one of Italy's top chefs

L'Albereta e restaurant Gualtiero Marchesi

Erbusco, Lombardy

In the middle of the vineyards of Franciacorta lies L'Albereta, a magical fairy kingdom waiting to welcome world-weary travelling wine lovers looking for a slice of luxury coupled with warm hospitality. L'Albereta is a beautiful Relais et Châteaux hotel owned by the Moretti family, who are also at the head of Bellavista, one of Italy's best producers of sparkling wine (hotel staff will be happy to organise a visit to the Bellavista estate nearby). L'Albereta offers a world-class spa – Espace Vitalité Henri Chénot – and its restaurant is run by Gualtiero Marchesi, Italy's answer to France's Paul Bocuse. Some of Chénot's dishes, such as the black rice with goldleaf or the dripping of fish (an homage to artist Jackson Pollock) are simply unforgettable. The Moretti family also owns l'Andana in Tuscany, an equally beautiful venue with a restaurant run by Alain Ducasse.

Rooms from €60 per person.
www.relais.com/albereta

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