

ITALIAN ELEGANCE

Treat yourself to a Tuscan adventure and visit one of these charming and unique destinations

BORGO DI VAGLI

Clockwise from main image: Borgo di Vagli is nestled in the Niccone Valley; celebrations in nearby Cortona; a bedroom in one of the villas.



Each of the 21 stone houses were carefully designed and the stunning interiors, which feature some of the original doors restored and mounted on the walls, really make you feel like you are in the heart of rural Italy. The decor and main features of the rooms, including coal fireplaces, give the sense of going back in time, while the comfy furniture and up to date amenities like Wi-Fi and international television channels make sure that Borgo di Vagli is very much up to date for today's generation. With a sense of understated beauty, it's impossible to not feel right at home here! What truly separates Borgo di Vagli from other destinations is the sense of community in the hamlet. Owners come from all across the globe but share the common enjoyment that comes with owning such a perfect little getaway. Returning to Borgo di Vagli over the years, the owners all get to know each other and friendships become formed, with everyone feeling truly part of something special.



What to do:

Within the hamlet itself there is a swimming pool, perfect for summer afternoons where guests can relax in the Tuscan sun, and there are plenty of places nearby for long walks to discover the area. There is also the option of exploring the greater area in the province of Arezzo, and the nearby town of Cortona is a must visit. An architectural marvel, Cortona is set on the hillside at an elevation of 600 meters, with steep narrow streets and incredible views of the valley. The Etruscan Academy Museum is a long trip into the history of the area and is well worth the visit for those keen to learn more about Arezzo, and Cortona itself.

Where to eat:

All of the homes at Borgo di Vagli come with a full kitchen, meaning guests can cook their own meals if they wish, but with several towns nearby, each with a large array of restaurants, getting out to explore the area and sample what Tuscany have to offer is an attractive option.

For dinner, traditional local fare is served at the on-site restaurant, with a set menu that changes each night of the week – pizza night, with pizzas cooked in a traditional oven, is one to watch out for. Dining at the restaurant is also a great way to immerse yourself in the village community, with many guests sitting together and large tables. Sometimes this is where you can find Fulvio Di Rosa himself, and what better entertainment for dinner. than learning about how Borgo di Vagli came to be from the man who restored it to its former glory.

www.clubborgodivagli.com

Imaging owning your own little slice of Tuscan life. That is the reality for the 90 partial owners for whom Borgo di Vagli is a home away from home each year. Fractional ownership allows a predetermined number of buyers to own a luxury property for a set number of weeks per year, allowing owners to sample the luxury of Tuscany without having to worry about the maintenance when they are not at the property. Nestled in the wooded hills near the stunning Italian town of Cortona, the history of Borgo di Vagli goes back 700 years. Over time, as was common for many Italian villages in the mid 20th century, Borgo di Vagli fell into disrepair; but eventually Fulvio Di Rosa came to the rescue. An Italian architect-restorer, Di Rosa was no stranger to returning hamlets back to their best, and the renovation of Borgo di Vagli began in 2000.

BORGO PIGNANO



Clockwise from above: the 18th Century villa; a living room in a suite (with Murano glass chandelier); a colourful master bedroom; one of the outdoor terraces; honey making on the estate; Villa Pignano dining room; a grand bathroom

Set in an historic country estate roughly an hour's drive from the city of Florence, Borgo Pignano features an 18th-century villa as part of a 750-acre organic estate, which reflects the core value of the property. 500 metres above sea level, the Etruscan hamlet offers stunning views of the nearby hilltop town of Volterra, and the Tuscan countryside as a whole.

Within the main villa there are 14 rooms and suites, all which stay true to their origins. Some still feature the original frescoes, but all come showcase original artworks, Italian linens and chandeliers. The main villa includes a stunning library, billiard room and lounge, giving guests a variety of places to unwind and relax in a traditional Italian setting.

Beyond that, Borgo Pignano also features a large country farmhouse for up to 20 guests, as well as cottages and maisonettes for those who prefer a more secluded getaway.

What to do:

Borgo Pignano has a whole host of activities on offer, including a new spa and wellness centre that opened in April of this year. Perfect for relaxing, all of the treatments on offer have been crafted using organic ingredients grown on site, with a trained herbalist creating the oils used and infusing them with flowers, herbs, plants and honeys found on the estate.

We took up the offer of an authentic Tuscan cooking classic, cooking fresh pasta dishes under the watchful eye of one of Pignano's chefs. While we didn't make a tortellini quite fit for the



restaurants, the freshness of the ingredients used and the fun aspect of being able to make pasta from scratch made for an entertaining and fulfilling afternoon.

Guests can also explore the estate with farm tours, learn to paint in the peaceful Tuscan countryside and take horse riding lessons and treks around the local farm. Private picnics can be arranged for an end point of treks around the estate, allowing guests to enjoy a delicious meal alfresco, with the added advantage of the picnic being prepared for you, awaiting your arrival.

Pignano also features an infinity pool with stunning views of the countryside, with the cooling pool, carved from an ancient limestone quarry, perfect for the heat of summer. While this large pool is perfect for adults, a smaller pool is scheduled to open during 2017.

Where to eat:

Dining at Borgo Pignano is an experience that must be sampled, with Villa Pignano the focal point when it comes to dinner. 0km cuisine, often referred to as farm-to-fork, means that the ingredients come from the local area, with the vegetable garden, mill and organic farm meaning guests are treated to the freshest ingredients, picked at their best, ensuring a delicious meal true

to the area itself. We enjoyed the fish tasting menu, giving us a sample of all the ingredients on offer. The sea urchin pasta tasted so fresh you would think you were standing right next to the Mediterranean as you ate it.

In the summer, Pignano offers a Trattoria Al Fresco where guests can enjoy authentic Tuscan delicacies from the garden. With grilled meats, as well as a classic wood fired oven for stone-baked pizzas, the menu is the perfect complement for an evening on the terrace in Tuscany.

Breakfast is served in Villa Pignano, and while guests can find all the usual fare you expect to find at breakfast, it is capped by local honey and homemade jams, meaning that the 0km cuisine philosophy holds true for breakfast too, resulting in the perfect start to the day!

www.borgopignano.com/en/



CONTI DI SAN BONIFACIO



Located in the heart of the Maremma wine-growing region, Conti di San Bonifacio is a stylish boutique retreat, ideal for those looking for something a bit different.

Owned by the Count and Countess, the resort comprises just seven deluxe rooms and suites, meaning a stay here is an exclusive experience. Not only that, the restored farmhouse is perched atop a hill and overlooks the vineyards and farmland of the beautiful valley.

The style of Conti di San Bonifacio is that of a chic, modern-day hunting lodge – where cowhide rugs and taxidermy sit side by side with design classics. The muted palette of soft greys, whites and tactile textures give a stylish homely vibe, which enhances the exclusive feel and nature of a stay here. Each of the rooms, including the public spaces, have been individually decorated and furnished under the direction of the Countess, Sarah Edgington di San Bonifacio.

Part of the charm of the rooms is the view and, staying in a Conti di San Bonifacio Suite that includes a terrace, we were treated to a stunning panorama, the Tuscan sunset and a peaceful and starry night sky we gazed at are a photographer's dream.

What to do:

The most important thing for guests to do at Conti di San Bonifacio is relax, and the hilltop pool that overlooks the Tuscan hillside is perfect for this, with guests able to lounge poolside in the summer, before taking a dip to cool off.

The resort offers a range of experiences, including a

cooking class where guests can learn how to make pasta from scratch, a gelato workshop, Italian lessons, and the complete olive oil experience. This involves a tour of the olive grove, where guests will learn about the history of olive oil in Italy and how the resort stays true to its organic roots; a trip to the olive oil mill, where the olives are turned into olive oil; and a tasting experience upon returning to the resort.

Guests can also enjoy hillside yoga, where they can unwind in tranquility under the Tuscan sun, with views like no other.

Where to eat:

There is one restaurant at the resort, but Maremmana – named after a breed of cattle in Tuscany – offers the very best in local cuisine. With the majority of ingredients found locally by the chef, and olive oil that is pressed on site and grown within walking distance of the restaurant, guests are treated to a deliciously fresh menu that will please any palate.

For lunch we were treated to a Caprese salad



Left: the tranquil pool; guests can enjoy the views whilst sampling the local food and drinks; the rooms are stylishly rustic, and reflect the hunting lodge style.



and a burger, with a bun so fresh out of the oven that it was still warm. The mozzarella, basil and tomato of the salad was complemented perfectly with Conti di San Bonifacio's own olive oil and the burger was cooked to perfection.

For dinner we opted for the tortellini with local meat, served with a rich tomato sauce, and a Fiorentina steak. Like lunch, this was all fantastically fresh, with the pasta made in the kitchen there and then, and the tomato sauce tasting like the tomatoes had been picked from the garden that very day. The steak was grilled beautifully and presented in stunning slices as it arrived at the table.

Dessert was a cheese board, served with local garnishes and chutneys that made for an incredible combination. The restaurant is always updating the menu, however, and the recently added gelato with homemade biscuit crumble and seasonal fruits – from the garden, of course – is almost impossible to resist.

www.contidisanbonifacio.com

Above: the views of the surrounding vineyards can be enjoyed from the terrace and rooms. Right: Maremmana restaurant.