

Castelfalfi: An Idyllic Retreat in the Heart of Tuscany

Nature takes center stage at this sprawling estate.

By Irenie Forshaw



Castelfalfi sits within a stone-walled medieval borgo (village) dating back to Etruscan times / ©Toscana Resort Castelfalfi

We arrive at Castelfalfi after dark, driving through the shadowy country roads with little sense of what lies more than a few feet ahead. So it isn't until the next morning, drawing back the drapes, that we have a moment to take in our surroundings. Below us, the Tuscan hills look like islands emerging from a sea of mist. Lush green olive groves and cypress tree-lined meadows stretch as far as the eye can see.

It is so silent – so completely still – that it's hard to believe we are less than an hour's drive from the bright lights of Florence and Pisa. Castelfalfi sits within a stone-walled medieval borgo (village) dating back to Etruscan times that first appeared on a map in 754 AD. Comprising an ancient castle, 2,700 acres of

woodland and vineyards, and a collection of villas, the sprawling estate counts the noble Medici family among its owners.

Since then, Castelfalfi has changed hands countless times, eventually falling into disrepair after WW2 as many of the villagers left their homes to look for work in the city. This changed, however, when German travel giant TUI bought the estate over a decade ago and began transforming it into a high-end resort. Last year, Indonesian entrepreneur Sri Prakash Lohia took over the property and started a fresh wave of refurbishments, including revamped guest rooms and a stylish new lobby.



Lush green olive groves and cypress tree-lined meadows stretch as far as the eye can see /
©Toscana Resort Castelfalfi

But it is the surrounding landscape that takes center stage at Castelfalfi. Whether you're touring the vineyards and olive groves or visiting the beehives to taste fresh honey with the resident beekeeper, you never forget where you are.

These aren't token efforts, either. The estate is home to a fully working olive oil mill, winery and vegetable garden run by a network of passionate staff who clearly love what they do. If you're keen to immerse yourself in the Tuscan countryside – without forgoing a touch of luxury – this is your place.

Stay



The room had some lovely touches like the king-size bed topped with a striking wall mural of the Tuscan countryside / ©Toscana Resort Castelfalfi

Castelfalfi is home to 151 elegant rooms and suites. If you're looking for something traditional (think wooden beamed ceilings and rustic furnishings) opt to stay in one of the 'tabaccaia' rooms in the historic tobacco warehouse opposite reception.

The best place to take in the stunning views, though, is from the main building. We stayed in one of the newly renovated suites boasting sweeping vistas of the rolling hills. The room had some lovely touches like the extra-comfy king size bed topped with a striking wall mural of the Tuscan countryside and the marble-clad bathroom complete with a generous monsoon shower and tub.

Slightly further afield within the estate, there's a collection of farmhouses that can be rented for family vacations and larger gatherings. Set among the wheat fields and cypress trees with their own gardens and pools, you'll have access to all the hotel amenities as well as the option to have shopping delivered to your door or a private chef brought in to prepare gourmet meals. If you want to be closer to the main hotel, you can also opt to rent a cozy apartment in the borgo.

Dine



Breakfast is served on the sunny terrace at La Via del Sale in the main building / ©Toscana Resort Castelfalfi

When it comes to dining at Castelfalfi you won't be disappointed; this is Italy after all. On our first evening, we headed to Il Rosmarino – a laid-back trattoria with an excellent selection of wood fired pizza, pasta and seafood, and a buzzy outdoor courtyard that stays open late into the night.

Breakfast is served at La Via del Sale in the main building. The sunny terrace is one of the best spots for dining al fresco and taking in the panoramic views. As for the food, there's everything you could possibly think of – and more – including an egg station with a chef ready to cook your eggs exactly how you want them and a vast selection of fresh juices, pastries and freshly baked treats.

For a memorable fine dining experience, be sure to book a table at La Rocca, housed in the medieval castle in the heart of the village. Here, talented young chef Michele Rinaldi crafts authentic Tuscan dishes that let the region's vibrant local ingredients shine.



For a memorable fine dining experience, book a table at La Roca, housed in the medieval castle / ©Toscana Resort Castelfalfi

We opted for the four-course tasting menu which came with impeccable wine pairings (many of the bottles come straight from the winery). Standout dishes include the pillowy beetroot glazed polenta gnocchi dotted with a light-as-air potato foam and cardoncello mushrooms, and the traditional rose cake served with a delicate rose ice cream and red wine zabaglione.

It's also worth dropping by for a bite to eat at the Country Clubhouse, overlooking the golf course. The menu changes weekly with a focus on organic, seasonal produce much of which comes from the on-site vegetable garden. If you're struggling to pick a dish, the maître d' is on-hand to make expert recommendations (the Tuscan wild boar ragu was delicious).

Relax



The resort boasts a 27-hole green set across two courses / ©Toscana Resort Castelfalfi

Golf lovers will be pleased to hear Castelfalfi boasts a 27-hole green set across two courses (the Mountain Course is among the hardest in Italy while the Lake Course caters to all levels).

If you're looking for something a bit more relaxing, the spa is the perfect place to unwind. The outdoor pool is a wonderful setting to watch the sunset with a glass of wine. As for facilities, inside you'll find everything you need including a hydrotherapy pool, Finnish sauna, bio sauna and Turkish baths. It's worth booking a treatment during your stay; we recommend the Inner Calm Massage to alleviate any lingering tension and leave you feeling completely rested and refreshed.

Protect



Castelfalfi has taken impressive steps to minimize its impact on the environment / ©Toscana Resort Castelfalfi

Perhaps unsurprisingly given its beautiful surroundings, Castelfalfi has taken impressive steps to minimize its impact on the environment. As well as ensuring the production of its fine wines and olive oils is entirely organic, the resort has eliminated the use of all pesticides, chemical treatments and single-use plastics.

The on-site biomass boiler (powered by burning leftover olive stones and woodchips) provides 100% of the heating and cooling throughout the estate and eco-friendly irrigation techniques are used to collect rainwater. Not stopping there, Castelfalfi is currently in the process of building a new solar panel plant to provide carbon-free electricity.

Explore



The highlight of our trip was the unforgettable bee experience / ©Toscana Resort Castelfalfi

There is so much to do at Castelfalfi that deciding where to begin can be tricky. In the last year, the resort has introduced an array of activities (which change with the seasons) to give you a unique chance to see behind the scenes and immerse yourself in the Tuscan countryside.

The highlight of our trip was the unforgettable bee experience. We donned protective suits and were driven into the hills to see the bees in their hives and learn about their fascinating lives with resident beekeeper, Mateo. Afterward, we were taken back to the estate to taste Castelfalfi's organic wildflower honey straight from the hive.

It's also well worth taking a tour of the vineyards and olive groves (if you're visiting from September-November you can also take part in the grape picking harvest and olive pressing at the on-site mill). Naturally, the best bit is the tasting; we sampled an incredible selection of extra virgin olive oils and fine wines with Francesca and Cosimo back at the [winery](#).



If you're visiting in September you can take part in the grape picking harvest / ©Toscana Resort Castelfalfi

It would be easy never to step foot outside the estate during your stay but if you do have time to venture further afield there are lots of pretty towns to visit nearby. We stopped at the ancient hilltop hamlet of Certaldo – the birthplace of Giovanni Boccaccio – and took the funicular to the highest point in the village to explore the historic center.

Of course, a trip to Tuscany would not be complete without visiting Florence to marvel at Brunelleschi's iconic terracotta-tiled dome and spend an afternoon or two wandering through the Tuscan capital's famed art galleries.

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