

Reader's digest

Why tranquil Tuscany beats White Lotus' Sicily

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In search of an Italian escape away from the tourist traps, our writer discovers the medieval villages and modern attractions of Tuscany

After watching *White Lotus*, all I wanted to do was visit Sicily. After all, who doesn't want to sip wine on a yacht like Jennifer Coolidge?

However, when friends and family complained about tourists flocking to the location after the series, which led to hotels and resorts being overbooked to the point that no sunbeds were available on any beach, I decided to turn to Tuscany instead to get a similar experience. And that's one of the best decisions I ever made.

**Staying inside a stone-walled
medieval *borgo* (village)**



Visitors can stay in a restored medieval village

Unlike many Italian resorts in the countryside, Toscana Castelfalfi is a 50 minute drive from Florence and Pisa airport. Castelfalfi has totally changed the game for visitors wanting to live among Tuscan locals, but also want to enjoy the facilities of a five star hotel.

The 2,700 acre estate is adjacent to the restored medieval castle, which houses a studio of art sculptures, displaying marble pieces from internationally famous artists.

Complete with vineyards, olive groves, a borgo (village) dating back to Etruscan times (where residents live all year round), and a golf course, Castelfalfi hotel gives guests a chance to live among locals in the houses or the villas that are rented in the same area.

"The 2,700 acre estate is adjacent to the restored medieval castle, which houses a studio"

After going through a sustainable revamp from the ruins a decade ago—when German travel giant TUI bought the estate and began transforming it into a high-end resort—the result is a rare "rags to riches" example of how a business can work in harmony with the village and locals.

Last year, Indonesian entrepreneur Sri Prakash Lohia bought the estate and started a new wave of refurbishments, including revamped guest rooms and a stylish new lobby.

Now the completion has resulted in one of the dreamiest locations I have ever seen, I realise while sipping my prosecco.

Pizza making and archery

The day starts with pizza making in a dedicated area near the mini farm, perfect for people wanting to learn how to make their own dough.

We head to the adventure park in the afternoon, after consuming my personally-made pizza, to dabble into archery, climbing, and zip lining.

After a long day of fun activities, I wasn't worried about dinner. The resort has eight restaurants, which use products from the estate's supply, so there's no reason for me to leave the grounds.

We opt for Il Rosmarino—a relaxed trattoria with an outstanding selection of wood-fired pizza, pasta and seafood, and a lively outdoor courtyard that stays open until late night.

Beekeeping and golf



Castelfalfi courses the biggest golf course in Tuscany

The next day, bee keeping is on our agenda. The estate is home to a colony of bees, which the beekeepers look after and let guests taste the delicious honey.

Then we depart for a day of golf. Castelfali has the largest golf course in Tuscany, with 27 holes.

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It's marvelous how there seems to be something for every guest—and the best part is that you don't have to stay at the hotel to enjoy its facilities.

However, there's nothing like waking up in one of the 120 rooms in the estate to enjoy yoga, meditation, HIIT, or barre classes, all free for hotel guests, followed by a day at the spa.

Sunset by the pool

Choosing between a massage or a facial was one of the toughest decisions I have ever made, because their spa is so well equipped.

I also needed time to try out the hydrotherapy pool, Finnish sauna, bio sauna and the Turkish baths before going to their two outdoor pools overlooking the Tuscan countryside. I didn't want to miss the sunset here.

For a fancy evening, there's nothing like the tasting menu created by executive chef Francesco Ferretti, with local wine pairing, at the Michelin-starred gourmet restaurant La Rocca in the medieval castle.