



The Italian Job

Call off the search. **Daisy Finer** finds la dolce vita for you and your family

1 CASA PAGGETTI, NR GREVE

Whatever they tell you, wine and children are a good mix. The perfect one, in fact, when you're spending a week at Casa Paggetti. Because you don't really want to leave it, especially when you eventually find it (take detailed directions). Tucked away at the end of a tiny hamlet, with the kind of views that only Italy can offer (cypress trees, undulating hills, Pantone 'Greenery' everywhere), you can happily hide yourself away in this soulful old farmhouse with a big, hearty kitchen (the couple across the way can come and whip up fresher-than-fresh pasta, Tuscan specialties and wood-fired pizza on request lickety split, washed down with Chianti Classico) with plenty of spots to laze in the sun or hide away in the shade with a good book, and a lovely vegetable patch. Children spend all day happily in the pool, going for strolls, playing with the locals who chit-chat outside all day, and watching, jaws dropped, as dusk falls and with it swoops in a colony of 'pipistrelli' (bats). But of course it would be silly not to hit the road on occasion. Greve is the nearest town, and although touristy, it's beautiful and offers good shopping (Macelleria Falorni sells fantastic meats) and fine gelato. Don't eat there though, there's a wealth of goodness to find elsewhere. For something fun and original, head to Dario Cecchini's famous butcher's shop in Panzano and his restaurant Solociccia, where everyone whoops it up at a communal table laden with mouthwatering food (avoid weekends though). Of course, Florence is a nip down the autostrada as is Siena in the other direction.

BOOK IT: Tuscany Now & More offers one week from £3,039 based on six sharing. 020 7684 8884; tuscanynowandmore.com



2 ROME CAVALIERI, ROME

The only way to do Rome with children. Though that's not to say that this isn't an equally glam option for couples. The view of the Eternal City set out before you and ever bathed in sunshine is utterly exquisite, but it's also the feeling of playing your part in the theatre that is one of the great hotels of the world which excites. For this is a grande dame, an old school big hitter with all the pedigree and professionalism that you seek in this most classic of destinations. The pool is a scene. Women twisting sophisticated turbans on their heads, wearing sequined bikinis, drinking strawberry daiquiris, chatting, swimming, reading Pushkin, tanning their impossibly brown bodies. The men strut. The children order the most delicious and expensive ice creams. There's an underground spa with La Prairie facials and a kids' club with gladiator antics. The buffet breakfast spreads through two rooms. And you can dip into the treats of the city on the free shuttle bus, knowing that, at the end of the day, you can retire to cloud-like beds and bathrooms crammed with goodies by Salvatore Ferragamo. Big but still classy.

BOOK IT: Doubles from €295 (room only). romecavalieri.com



OLD
SCHOOL
ROME



ROOM
WITH AN
UMBRIAN
VIEW



3 VILLA TORRE, TENUTA DI MURLO

If you've ever felt the need to be monarch of all you survey, you could do worse than climb to the top of the medieval defence tower at Villa Torre on Umbria's remarkable, Tenuta di Murlo estate and take in the 360-degree view of the valley of Monte Tezio. It's breathtaking. Villa Torre is just one of five villas which have been created by renovating some of the 90-plus farm buildings on the vast estate, which has been in the ownership of the same family for more than 400 years. Set far apart from one another and accessed by individual gravel tracks, the superbly appointed properties can accommodate between six and ten people with one, Villa Subtilla, offering space for up to 18 through three apartments and a cottage. Despite feeling deliciously far from the madding crowd and offering on-site spa, restaurant and fitness facilities, as well as breathtaking (in all senses) hikes within its 6,000 hectares, the Murlo estate is also superbly located for visits to some of Umbria's most beautiful and historic towns, including Perugia, Assisi, Sienna, Arezzo, Gubbio and Cortona – with the neighbouring regions of Lazio and Tuscany also being within easy reach. Horse riding, fly-fishing, quad bike trips and wine tasting sessions can be arranged. Or you could, of course, simply lounge around the pool in the heaven-scented gardens of your chosen villa with a good book and a picnic prepared by the estate's first-class chefs. One thing's for sure – you won't get bored with the view.

BOOK IT: Cottages from €1,200 per week. murlo.com



4 AL JAFAR, PACECO

Sicily offers a raw seaside beauty that is utterly beguiling – the light is glorious, the beaches laidback, sandy havens and the Western towns of Marsala and Trapani well worth exploring. OK, it doesn't offer itself up like Tuscany does – you have to dig a little to see the beauty, but that's part of the charm. This house is ideal for those with an old-fashioned sensibility – it feels rather aristocratic in both its simplicity and grandeur. The walled swimming pool area is where you will spend most of your time, dipping into the refreshing pool and feasting under the awning on barbecues. There are three bedrooms, one a twin, along with a fourth bedroom in a tower with an electric window which opens to the skies (so it's small but rather intriguing, perhaps for the late comer or uninvited guest). The best bit? Breakfast is magically delivered by the caretakers on a daily basis, who also do all the washing up from the night before and will make and tidy your bedrooms. They make fantastic pancakes for children too. Now that's a holiday.

BOOK IT: From €4,050 per week (sleeps eight). 020 7377 8518; thethinkingtraveller.com

5 L'ANDANA, CASTIGLIONE DELLA PESCAIA

Up a stunning drive, flanked by 182 cypress trees, this former Medici shooting lodge instantly lifts your spirits. The wrap-around Tuscan landscape, deep in the heart of the Maremma, is soft and soothing; all ochre colours and instant stillness. This gorgeous family hotel, complete with its own vineyard, golf course and kids' club, cleverly retains an intimate feel. It's child friendly in a low-key way. With only 33 rooms, it has a delightful air of understated comfort. Guests are well-dressed and discreetly wealthy (hence the über expensive boutique – you'll covet everything.) The main restaurant, situated under the shade of the spreading pines, is heavenly. The biggest treat is no piped music. There is a dinky shuttle that takes you to the nearby pretty coastal town of Castiglione della Pescaia, where the hotel books you into the best beach club beloved by locals. The antithesis of touristy, the beach is packed with fiery Italian families. Cabanas and loungers reserved, feast on exquisite spaghetti vongole and fresh fish cooked with verve. At night, treat yourself to the hotel's gourmet restaurant, La Trattoria Enrico Bartolini, where the beetroot risotto with gorgonzola is worth the trip alone.

BOOK IT: Doubles from €440 B&B. andana.it ■

