

travelista

Maria Shollenbarger on the rebirth of a 10th-century castle – and exploring wild Caucasus



The Umbrian castles now throwing open their doors

Up in the still-wild Val Niccone in Umbria, the Austrian-born architect Benedikt Bolza and his Florentine wife, Nencia Corsini, have spent the past two decades cultivating Castello di Reschio, a 3,700-acre estate across which Bolza has rehabilitated almost 30 once-derelict 17th- and 18th-century farmhouses, selling them to a select group of homeowners who in turn selectively let them as holiday villas (to Gwyneth Paltrow, among illustrious others). The rarefied Reschio experience is now diffusing for a wider audience: the estate's 10th-century castle, on which the Bolzas are putting the finishing touches of a comprehensive renovation, will open next June as a 36-room hotel. About 15km to the southeast, meanwhile, the owners of Tenuta di Murlo, an even vaster private estate, have just restored Castiglione Ugolino, their own small castle, which sleeps up to 12 people and has its own chapel; the estate is now working on more villas, as well as a small cultivated organic farm – fava beans, lambs, chickens and all – to serve the dual purposes of feeding and educating their guests. *Castello di Reschio*, reschio.com. *Tenuta di Murlo*, rooms from €120 a night, villas from €3,750 a week; *Castiglione Ugolino*, from €12,000 per week; murlo.com.



Next stop Armenia, the new darling of European travel

Riding a wave of enthusiasm for the cuisine of the Caucasus and demand for untrammelled European landscapes, Georgia has exploded in popularity. Now that it has achieved proper destination status (and the attendant crowds), eyes are turning to its still-pristine near neighbour Armenia – like Georgia, replete with historic monasteries, lush woodland and mountain hikes (and killer baklava). With a section of the Trans Caucasian Trail rehabilitated and reopened, it's more appealing than ever. Jonny Bealby, whose Wild Frontiers has been operating in the country for 15 years, has just launched a limited series of group or private tours, taking it all in. *Nine-day group tour*, £1,495 per person, including accommodation, excursions and tour leader; wildfrontierstravel.com.



Crete's little sister steps into the spotlight

About a kilometre off the northern coast of Crete, the islet of Spinalonga – tiny, ancient, uninhabited since the '50s and stunning in its severe beauty – has been added to Greece's already robust list of Unesco World Heritage sites. Among its champions for the recognition was Agapi Sbokou, the dynamic (and very chic) owner of Blue Palace, one of Crete's most elegant hotels. Sbokou has shown the same farsightedness with her own property: witness the recently launched Haven at Blue Palace, a hotel-within-a-hotel experience, combining stays in individually designed suites and villas (all unique from the ground up, and eminently private) with tailor-made menus, treatments, excursions and experiences that leverage only Cretan traditions, products and talent. From the porcelain to the charcuterie to, yes, the private guided sunrise excursions to Spinalonga, which the Blue Palace faces, it's a vibrant, modern reinterpretation of an island standard. *Haven at Blue Palace*, suites from €864; bluepalace.gr.



A new temple of textiles in Jaipur

Collectors have long known that Rajasthan's historic cities are rich sources for some of the finest hand-woven and -printed fabrics. As of last month, Jaipur has an important new address for them: Nila House, a beautiful restored 1940s monument and cultural centre, where exhibitions, live demonstrations, workshops and artists-in-residence programmes will illustrate the ways in which centuries-old traditions of Indian craft and artisanship are inherently sustainable. Along with its library and extensive archives, the first-person encounters are tailored to provide a nexus for learning and research—and, of course, retail satisfaction. *Entrance is free*; nilajaipur.com. [@mariashollenbarger](https://www.instagram.com/mariashollenbarger)