



HOTEL FACE-OFF: Tuscany

Castello di Casole vs. Villa Mangiacane



Timbers Resorts (2)

Though it dates back to the Middle Ages, this all-suite property has an infinity pool.



Villa Mangiacane (2)

This glorious estate just outside Florence boasts Machiavellian roots. (Really!)

"Game of Thrones" fans will love the medieval architecture of this Timbers Resort, complete with a cobblestone street. A former castle forms the foundation of the lush property on a hill. All 41 rooms are spacious suites with warm traditional décor (from \$550; CastelloDiCasole.com).

THE LOOK

Move forward in time to the Renaissance, when Michelangelo actually had a hand in building this villa for the Machiavelli family. Now 28 rooms and suites, the property is outfitted with pastel frescoes, antique furnishings and two huge terraces with Duomo views (from \$300; Mangiacane.com).

Flawless service in an intimate country setting is the appeal here. Steep yourself in Italian culture with classes in language, art and cooking. Food options range from fine dining to a pizzeria with a gelato bar. Italian filmmaker Luchino Visconti and Austrian actor Helmut Berger (inset), of "Godfather III," are associated with the area.



THE LURE

It's as if you're staying at a private estate. A head housekeeper greets arriving guests to determine specific desires. Family photos — historic, though the villa is currently owned by entrepreneur Glynn Cohen — line the walls, intermingled with shots of visitors. Notable guests include Tom Hanks (inset), Orlando Bloom and author Dan Brown.



Strong cyclists will love the area's challenging terrain, full of steep inclines. The hotel itself sits on a whopping 4,200 acres, studded with renovated farmhouses that are available for full or fractional ownership.

THE AREA

Set in Chianti wine country, the villa is surrounded by vineyards. The olive oil and some of the wine served at meals is grown right on the property. Tastings and balloon tours can be arranged.

Take a yoga or Pilates class on the outdoor garden terrace — surrounded by classic Tuscan vineyards and cypress trees — then head in for a massage at the spa. Once the wine cellar, the indulgent oasis has vaulted ceilings and thick stone walls.

MUST DO

Though it has a bucolic vibe, the estate is just 20 minutes from Florence. Staffers will arrange a seamless day trip to that magnificent city, full of museums, piazzas, cathedrals, restaurants and shopping. Day trips can also be set up to Venice, Portofino, Pisa or Lucca.

The biking program could be developed to include maps and more comprehensive information about different trails.

NEEDS WORK

Duplex rooms could use a second bathroom so that guests don't have to traipse down to the living room level in the middle of the night.

An infinity pool with gold tiles that reflect the sun sits on the edge of a hill and is the property's focal point. New Yorkers hungry for nature can visit Castello's game reserve and spot pheasants, deer, rabbits and boar.

THE POOL

The villa's landscaped pool is a perfect retreat for conversation, reading and (of course) swimming, while lush English gardens are ideal for a stroll. More than 200 African sculptures are dotted across the property.



— Beth Landman (The author was a guest of both hotels.)