



Castello di casole, Tuscany: hotel review

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We review Castello di Casole in Tuscany, Italy and enjoy traditional Italian cooking, pizza making lessons and views of rolling Tuscan hills

This may be a children's [pizza-making](#) class but Alessandro takes his mission seriously. I am standing with my five-year old son next to the singeing heat of a 200 year-old pizza oven in Castello di Casole's Pazzia restaurant and we watch as the Neapolitan chef produces a box of smooth dough balls he made the day before and has left to prove for 18 hours.

Roughly half way between [Florence](#) and Siena, and surrounded by 4,200 acres of quintessential rolling, forested hills and golden fields, Castello di Casole is a magnificent Italian country estate. At its centre is an imposing, ochre-coloured castle flanked by gardens of lavender, gravel-edged lawns, roses and olive trees. The castle, parts of which date from the 10th century, was once home to the noble Bargagli family and, in the 1960s, to Italian film director Luchino Visconti.

Opened as a hotel in 2012, following a seven-year restoration, Castello di Casole is pitched at travellers in search of an unblemished version of la dolce vita, one with all the luxurious perks you could imagine. It's run by the US-based Timbers Resorts and has 41 rooms and suites within the castle and the hamlet that surrounds it, and another 28 villas and farmhouses (rentable by the week) scattered throughout the estate. Décor is tastefully restrained, with sage and burnt umber paintwork, beamed ceilings, antique furniture sourced from local markets, traditional cotto floors and Carrara marble bathrooms.

As with any self-respecting Tuscan estate, this one comes with its own vineyard and olive groves but the real showstopper is the hotel's infinity pool with its mesmerising views over the undulating landscape. As dusk falls, most guests gravitate to the terrace above the pool, aperitivo in hand, to watch the spectacular sight of the sun sinking behind the hills.



If this all sounds a little theme park perfect, don't be put off. There's a seam of Italian authenticity running through the hotel, not least where food is concerned. This being Italy, pizza is just part of the gourmet story at Castello di Casole. As well as the Pazzia Restaurant, which serves traditional Italian dishes and homemade gelato as well as Alessandro's expert pizzas, there is a more formal restaurant, Tosca, overseen by chef Daniele Sera. Despite the stiff linen and impeccable service here, it still feels relaxed. A standout of the four-course tasting menu was the delicate spinach and ricotta gnudi with tomato confit and light-as-air mozzarella foam.



More active gastronomic experiences are on offer, too. Guests can go truffle hunting, mushroom foraging, wine and olive oil tasting and [pasta-making](#) (yoga classes, pilates and numerous children's activities are also on offer while a sleek spa is housed in what was once the castle's wine cellar).

Back at the pizza lesson and the trickiest part turns out to be scooping the pizza onto the paddle in one confident movement for cooking; mine slumps into a sad pile but is expertly rescued by Alessandro. After our pizzas emerge blistering and molten, we sit at the bar, tucking into the fruits of our labours. They're so delicious that, two hours later, we find ourselves back at one of the restaurant's alfresco tables ordering another.



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