

Castelfalfi: the hidden heart of Tuscany

Nature, agriculture, wellbeing and hospitality harmoniously coexist in this restored hamlet



Walking past the stone-walled buildings of Castelfalfi's sequestered streets, it's easy to imagine how this haven was once a quaint borgo. Originally settled by ancient Etruscans and once owned by the astute Medici family, the historical castle and its surrounding properties passed through a variety of stewards before being left uninhabited as a result of World War II.

But the centuries-old estate is now experiencing its very own renaissance. Underpinned by the architectural beauty of a previous life and enriched by the verdant valleys fringing its walls, this mediaeval jewel in the heart of Tuscany invites discerning travellers to embrace a slower pace of life while immersing themselves in a world centred on agricultural and culinary excellence.



Undisturbed landscapes

From the moment you begin your ascent up the winding mountain road, the beauty of the 2,700-acre estate is evident. Lush olive groves, expansive vineyards and row upon row of Turkey oaks populate the green horizon, which appears to go on for miles.

Having flourished for years with little to no intervention, the fertile grounds are carefully maintained using farming principles that honour the traditions of days gone by while adopting more sustainable processes. The finest quality organic ingredients such as olive oil, honey and wine are produced and distributed across the estate for the ultimate farm-to-table experience. And elsewhere rainwater collected in the artificial lakes is repurposed for eco-friendly irrigation of the crops.

There are plenty of opportunities to explore the lush surroundings, from taking leisurely strolls through the aromatic **vineyards** to enjoying breathtaking hot-air-

balloon rides over the region. If you want to keep it simple, we suggest hiring an e-bike for a few hours and venturing into the unspoiled nature at your own pace.



History reimaged

Perhaps the clearest sign of Castelfalfi's transformation comes in the change of its infrastructure. The hamlet's long-standing tobacco factory, for example, once the main work hub for local residents, is now one of two buildings forming the Toscana Resort Castelfalfi. The interiors of the main building at this five-star hotel have been recently redesigned, with contemporary furnishings inspired by the colours of Tuscany's landscape. And the restored castle towering over the grounds is now home to La Rocca, a gourmet restaurant that is one of eight found across the hamlet – all of which fall under the guidance of executive chef Francesco Ferretti.

Even the narrow streets of this ancient place, once desolate following the devastation of the war, are lined with art galleries and artisan shops set between restored farmhouses. Those looking to achieve a home-away-from-home experience can book one of the private villas spread across the estate to truly immerse themselves in the Tuscan way of living.



Activities for all

Offering an escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, this mountainous borgo promises a rejuvenating stay, whether you're looking to relax by the pool with a signature cocktail made using the estate's own gin, or are more interested in getting your adrenalin pumping with a Ferrari ride through the Tuscan hills.

More than 40 indoor and outdoor **experiences** await across Castelfalfi. Home to Tuscany's biggest golf course (which has a beginner-friendly Golf Academy and has been granted the GEO Certified eco-label as a result of its sustainable systems), the estate is the ideal destination for perfecting your backswing. Alternatively, you can get a glimpse of the culinary excellence that defines this region through cooking classes and farm tours combined with wine and oil tastings or test out your harvesting skills by joining in one of the hamlet's oldest agricultural traditions down in the olive groves. Those after a challenge should block out time to visit the **Castelfalfi Adventure Park**, a 10-course destination with zip-lines, Tibetan bridges and breathtaking trails suspended among the trees, all offered at varying levels of difficulty for youngsters and adults alike.

Families staying at the Toscana Resort Castelfalfi can also make the most of the on-site Falfy Kids Club and Game Club, where younger children and teens can while away

hours and leave you with time to check out the nearby towns of San Gimignano and Volterra or visit the unique Theatre of Silence, just a 30-minute drive away in Lajatico.

For most visitors, a week just isn't enough time to enjoy all that the estate has to offer, and the promise of new spa treatments, new grounds to be explored and new culinary creations will turn anyone into a repeat visitor.



Harmony at the centre

An old anecdote in the hamlet tells of how a visiting traveller wrote to the estate's owner in 1562 to thank him for "the hospitality bestowed upon him" during a stay in Castelfalfi. More than 400 years later this welcoming spirit is still ever-present for those who visit the storied village.

Previously overshadowed by neighbouring destinations such as Pisa and Florence, this quiet corner of Tuscany is experiencing a rebirth that places it high on the list of must-visit locations in this part of the world. Strategically positioned away – but not too far – from the classic tourist circuit, the estate prioritises harmony, not only with nature and the animals that call this land home but with the past and the present. Here, Tuscany's ancient history is celebrated and brought to life through flavours, interactions and experiences that leave you feeling better.