



Tuscan Treasures
Clockwise from above: Hotel Il Borgo's pool, in Montalcino; the outside courtyard of Relais & Château Il Falconiere hotel, outside Arezzo; the garden at Villa Bordonni; Lucca's famed Piazza dell'Anfiteatro.

Why Tuscany?

A host of hotel and spa openings is breathing new life into the region—a reminder of why we keep going back.

There's a type of traveler who, on the subject of Tuscany, offers up the party line: "It may be beautiful, but it's *too discovered*," which happens to be the best way to elicit discerning smiles from those who truly know the area—the chic Romans and Milanese who've been spending weekends here since they were knee-high to a Sangiovese vine; the repeat renters who call it home for some of the year. Tuscany's 9,000 square miles of rolling hills and lush vineyards, pine tree-lined beaches and palazzo-encircled squares contain the best of what draws people here again and again—and to consider it "discovered" would be to sell the region short.

Against the canvas of the timeless Tuscan landscape, a vibrant style and culture have emerged, some of it brought to you by transplants who couldn't leave. You can admire a view of Monte Amiata from the minimalist terrace at the B&B **La Bandita** (*Podere La Bandita, Pienza*; 39-333/404-6704; la-bandita.com; doubles from \$450),

opened last May by John Voigtmann, an erstwhile Manhattan music executive. Or in Montalcino, relax by the pool at Castello Banfi's **Il Borgo** (*Poggio alle Mura, Montalcino*; 39-0577/877-700; castellobanfi.com; doubles from \$639), a 14-room hotel in a 19th-century building restored to gorgeous effect by American Cristina Mariani-May, a co-CEO of the family winery. A handful of Tuscany's thermal baths—among them **Terme di Saturnia** (*58014 Saturnia, Grosseto*; 39-0564/600-111; termedisaturnia.it) in the Maremma and **Adler Thermae** (*San Quirico d'Orcia*; 39-0577/889-001; adler-thermae.it) at Bagno Vignoni—have shed their dowdy images and emerged with sleek rooms and amenities. And then there's Florence, moving apace with the rest of the region: the **Four Seasons Hotel Firenze** (*99 Borgo Pinti*; 39-055/26261; fourseasons.com; doubles from \$760), which opens in July, could exist only here—housed in a palace designed by the Renaissance architect Sangallo, and painstakingly restored under the aegis of the Ministry of Fine Arts and Culture.

How to tackle Tuscany's multitude of attractions? Don't try to do it all at once; it does, after all, contain 10 distinct provinces. And do leave time for a detour along one of the *strade bianche*, the "white roads" that often lead to delightful vistas. Tuscany is simultaneously luxurious and worlds-away rustic, resolutely provincial and firmly forward-thinking. Expect to be surprised. And who knows? You may even make a discovery or two. —MARIA SHOLLENBARGER

