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DEPARTURES DISPATCH

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A Tuscan Itinerary: Val d'Orcia

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Courtesy of La Bandita

Located in central Italy, Val d'Orcia is the Brooklyn of Tuscany, thanks to an abundance of artisanal everything. It is home to small-batch pastamakers, dairy farmers and upstart wineries that have created a bold new class of Brunello. Tiny workshops sell hand-tooled leather goods, textiles and ceramics. The scent of local Pecorino wafts from the many specialty food shops. And two stylish hotels have put a

decidedly luxe stamp on things.

STAY

Val d'Orcia's neo-Tuscan verve is most evident in two rustic-chic La Bandita properties situated in and around the Renaissance town of Pienza. **La Bandita Townhouse** (rooms, from \$265; 111 Corso Rossellino; 39-0578/749-005; labanditatownhouse.com), a former convent, sits smack in the middle of one of the most charming towns in Tuscany. The 12 guest rooms are minimalist yet warm, a fusion of crisp Italian linens, honey-colored stone, wood floors and whimsical accents like a handwoven straw bag to be used for shopping. **La Bandita** (rooms, from \$265; Podere La Bandita; 39-333/404-6704; la-bandita.com) is an idyllic villa surrounded by verdant, Cypress-and-sheep-speckled grounds with airy lounging areas, shaded terraces for alfresco dining and an infinity pool. The restaurants offer a set menu of fresh, local fare served at oversized tables. The communal setup lends itself to making fast friends with, well, everyone.

EAT

Try the farm-to-table experience at **Monteverdi** (39-05/7826-8146; monteverdituscany.com/dining), where celebrated chef Paolo Coluccio whips up dishes like lavender risotto. At organic farm **Podere Il Casale** (64 Podere Il Casale; podereilcasale.it), one crosses peacocks and the random donkey before sitting down to a hearty meal and a drop-dead-gorgeous view of the Val d'Orcia valley. Exquisite cheeses, olive oil, pasta and honey are available for purchase.

DRINK

Arrange a tasting at smaller, cutting-edge Montalcino/Brunello producers, such as **Sesti** (sestiwine.com), **Cupano** (cupano.it) and **Fonterenza** (fonterenza.com).

SHOP

Tucked into Via Dogali, an ancient cobblestone street in Pienza, **Officine 904** (16 Pienza Via Dogali; officine904.it), led by a husband-and-wife designing duo, quietly produces some of the most fabulous (and versatile) bags in Italy. The hyper-modern wares can also be purchased online.