

FINANCIAL TIMES**"The Best Autumn Escapes to Italy" by Maria Shollenbarger**

12 Sept 2021

Last week, Italy lifted its compulsory five-day quarantine on all arrivals from the UK; if you're fully vaccinated and have a negative Covid test in hand, you're good to go. But where to start?

Consider a southerly point – Salina, one of the largest of Sicily's Aeolians. And my favourite, boasting as it does gorgeous water and some spectacular hikes in its interior. Malfa's where you rent a house; Pollara's the village to do sunset aperitivo in; Rinella is where the direct-from-Palermo ferry docks. (Also: capers, growing wild everywhere, and Malvasia vines, made into gorgeous whites.) Though all of Sicily is currently designated a "yellow" zone – meaning masks are required indoors and out, and certain museums and cultural sites need to be booked online in advance – restaurants and bars are still open at night, and everything else is more or less business as usual.



Capofaro's sleek cottages and kitchen garden offer a "viticultural deep-dive"



The pool at Capofaro on Salina

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Where to stay? [Capofaro](#) is a perennial, for its sleek, elegant cottages, huge kitchen garden, killer pool and the viticultural deep-dive it offers (it’s owned by the Tasca d’Almerita family, whose Malvasia, produced right on these acres, was one of two wines served to Barack Obama on his final state visit). [Hotel Signum](#) is the grooviest, with its traditional Restoration Hardware rooms, the perfection of its terrace bar, and the estimable talents of Martina Caruso, the owner’s 31-year-old Michelin-starred daughter in the kitchen. Then there’s the [Principe di Salina](#). It’s simple; its 12 rooms are spare and white, its sitting room a cute hybrid of California and Sicily. It might not be the most luxe thing you’ve ever seen but it’s a nice round-out to what the other two offer; and its situation – right at the top of the slope down which Malfa tumbles prettily toward the sea – can’t really be beat. [capofaro.it](#), from €310. [hotelsignum.it](#), from €250. [principedisalina.it](#), from €220



The “haute contemporary farmhouse” vibe at Casa di Langa



The vines and gardens feature prominently in Casa di Langa’s food and wine offerings

To another stellar island: Ischia. If you trawl social media for travel satisfaction, you’ll likely know a bit about it by now – Capri’s bigger, much shaggier sister in the Gulf of Naples, with the weirdly wonky thermal baths Angela Merkel loves and the beaches that inspired Elena Ferrante in her [Neapolitan Quartet](#). In truth, it has long harboured pockets of real, albeit not largely known, elegance. The arrival of Marie-Louise Sciò here in 2019, to take over the Mezzatorre Hotel, helped propel the island into the spotlight. Now a small group of hoteliers, restaurateurs and local businesses (the Mezzatorre among them), has established a consortium to “re-launch” the island – highlighting its secret addresses, top tables, unsung wineries, switched-on guides and quite fascinating history. [Ischia is More](#) is a social media endeavour with offline presence and promotions around the Campania region; there are plans for a website and signature events further afield. For now, its creators are flooding its feeds with images and intel about what’s on offer island-wide, from private tastings to hikes in its hilly and still-wild interior to where, of course, to get the best hand-made sandals (for my money that would be [Mario d’Ischia](#) in Lacco Ameno, but get there and decide for yourself). [@ischiaismore](#)

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The "grooviest" place to stay on Salina: Hotel Signum

And then, it seems, it's all happening in Piedmont, where, with the arrival of late September a seriously moreish eating-drinking season is about to get started (the town of Bra here is where the Slow Food movement began). Three hotels worth a look have come on the scene here since late spring. [Casa di Langa](#) sits on the doorstep of some 100 acres of typical rolling landscape between the Barolo and Alta Langa regions, and is itself quilted with working vineyards. The vibe is haute contemporary farmhouse, with 39 rooms dressed modestly but fairly faultlessly in neutral shades, organic cottons and linens and waxed wood floors and furniture. We like how prominently the vines and gardens feature in the food and wine offerings, served in a slick restaurant that wouldn't be out of place in Milan's Zona Tortona. [casadilanga.com](#), from £382

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The Mezzatorre Hotel is situated in a 16th-century watchtower overlooking the Bay of Naples © Ted Gushue



Parasols and cushions dot the piazzettas around the hotel © Ted Gushue

A very different proposition can be found to the east in the Gavi hills, at Locanda La Raia. This biodynamic farm-hotel-contemporary art foundation does things the purist way: along with vines, rye and einkorn grains are crop-rotated across its close to 450 acres, and livestock are biodynamically raised as well. The foundation, an art-in-landscape project whose scientific board includes the architect Flavio Albanese and James Bradburne, the Anglo-Canadian director of the [Pinacoteca di Brera](#), hosts artists and photographers but also organises symposia and panels, drawing the interested from Milan and Genoa alike (it's roughly an hour's drive from each). The locanda itself used to be a postal office; the restoration of its 12 rooms and indoor-outdoor spaces sees 17th- and 19th-century antiques playing with low-key contemporary furniture, and coolly sculpted gardens surround it. [la-raia.it](#), from about €230

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Nordelaia's 12 rooms and apartments are "almost totally different" to one another

And finally, right in the middle of Monferrato is [Nordelaia](#), which opened in late July. Design is front and centre here; the 12 rooms and apartments built around an 800-year-old farmhouse are each almost totally different to one other, and boast a host of high-style signifiers from blue-chip 20th-century and antique furniture and lighting to velvet-canopied beds (but no TVs). There is a casual ground-level bistro for breakfasts and easy, *formaggi-salumi* lunches, and a more elevated food and wine experience in the first-floor restaurant, overseen by Andrea Ribaldone, a generations-back local with multiple restaurants, a couple of stars, and an Eataly advisory under his toque. Lest you not be relaxed enough just reading about all that, there's a 450sq m spa and hammam in the house's subterranean vaults, with views over the hills from various lounges, saunas, fitness studios and indoor pools. [nordelaia.com](#), from €280