

UNSUNG ITALY

Our love affair with Tuscany is still very much alive — but it comes at a price. **Anna Tyzack** finds out where the real Italian beauties are hiding for buyers on a budget

Bellissima: a stone house in large grounds, with mountain views, just 40 minutes from both the Adriatic and Abruzzo airport will set you back just €130,000 (£103,000) through Lokation Italy. See page 2 for a map of Italy, with a key to some of its other best-kept property secrets

It is a cultured crowd (or at least they would like to think so) who make for Tuscany in summer. The region's undulating olive groves, Renaissance towns and stone *borghi* satisfy their romantic definition of "summer holiday". "People are passionate about Italy," says Rupert Fawcett of estate agency Knight Frank. "They go there for the art, history and music."

But those who dream of owning an Italian farmhouse in Tuscany will find the prices far from romantic. In sought-after parts of the region (so-called Chiantishire, for example) and even in neighbouring Umbria, an average four-bedroom, stone farmhouse can cost about £1.2 million.

The British outpost, however, comprises a relatively small area of Italy. If you venture an hour north into Lunigiana or south into Emilia-Romagna, equivalent properties can cost up to half as much — and there is still plenty for classics scholars to sink their teeth into. "It's more of a buyer's

market," says Mr Fawcett, "so long as you are sensible and check all the facts."

For those prepared to explore, there are many lovely, old houses within easy reach of unspoilt coast and countryside all over Italy. Hardened Tuscanophiles will take some convincing that the countryside in Basilicata, in the far south, could be mistaken for Tuscany, but the €600,000 (£475,860) price tag for a bespoke stone farmhouse, surrounded by olive groves, might get them thinking. Here are 10 of the most enticing areas.

1. Majella, Abruzzo

Getting there: Abruzzo International Airport, Pescara

La cucina: Maccheroni alla Chitarra, black truffles

I vini: Trebbiano

Abruzzo has slipped through the net of most British second-home owners.

"Abruzzo has everything, yet still only

Italians seem to be aware of it," says Lorna Richardson of Properties Around Italy. It is fronted on one side by the

Adriatic coastline, with Europe's only blue flag beaches (seven in total). Further inland are some of Italy's best-preserved medieval and Renaissance hill-towns such as Castel del Monte and Santo Stefano di Sessanio, as well as the Roccaraso ski area and national parks.

"I spent more than six years searching all over Italy to find my ideal property. I now live in Abruzzo. I rest my case," says Ms Richardson. "I can ski in winter, a 15-minute drive from my house, I can be on the beach in the summer, a 30-minute drive, and I live in the national park, with views to die for. Nowhere is like Abruzzo."

She recommends Sulmona, on the edge of the national park, as a good place to start looking for property. Prices in Abruzzo are 40-70 per cent lower than Tuscany, according to Chesterton International (www.chesterton-international.com).

For sale: A two-bedroom villa on the edge of Sulmona, with views of mountains, trees and

sheep €250,000 (Properties Around Italy: 00 39 329 0864 210 704; www.propertiesarounditaly.com). A stone house in large private grounds (pictured above), with fabulous mountain views, wooden beams, stone fireplaces and original floors. It is a short drive from a good local town, and 40 minutes from the airport and the beach. €130,000 (Lokation Italy: 0845 688 9299; www.lokation.it).

2. Le Colline Pisane, Tuscany

Getting there: Pisa airport

La cucina: Peposo della Fornacina (beef cooked in a cotta pot with herbs and black pepper)

I vini: Chianti Colline Pisane

The hilly countryside south-east of Pisa is less "discovered" than other parts of Tuscany, but is still a viable option for culture vultures, as it is less than an hour away from Castiglioncello, Forte dei Marmi, Florence and Lucca.

"Despite its beauty, this location is relatively undiscovered," says Luca Catalano of developer Realitalia. "It has a low rate of international buyers and unspoilt hills, where agriculture is still a

solid, local business, and with property prices that are a fraction of those in other, better-known areas in Tuscany."

Realitalia is working on several projects in Chianni and Lajatico, birthplace of Andrea Bocelli, who has recently helped create the Teatro del Silenzio, a landscape theatre on the hills around Lajatico itself (www.teatrodelsilenzio.com).

Lazio, as the area has been chosen for Rome's third international airport. Regular flights from the UK will boost the local economy and open up the surrounding countryside. The airport will serve both Rome and northern Lazio, bridging the gap between Rome and southern Umbria and Tuscany.

Northern Lazio is dotted with medieval villages, such as Bagnara, Montefiascone and Vitorchiano, and features two picturesque lakes, Vico and Bolsena. Further east towards Umbria, around the medieval town of Casperia, 45 minutes from Rome, there are stone properties and villas for sale at a fraction of what they would cost across the Umbrian border.

For sale: Newbuild, Tuscan-style stone houses with large gardens in Lajatico with exceptional views, remote management and online rental system €550,000-€650,000 (0870 890 9936; www.realitalia.co.uk).

3. Casperia, northern Lazio

Getting there: Rome Fiumicino and Rome Ciampino airports

La cucina: Saltimbocca alla Romana (sliced veal with ham in a Marsala sauce)

I vini: Cerveteri vineyards, and Est Est Est from Montefiascone

All eyes are on Viterbo in northern

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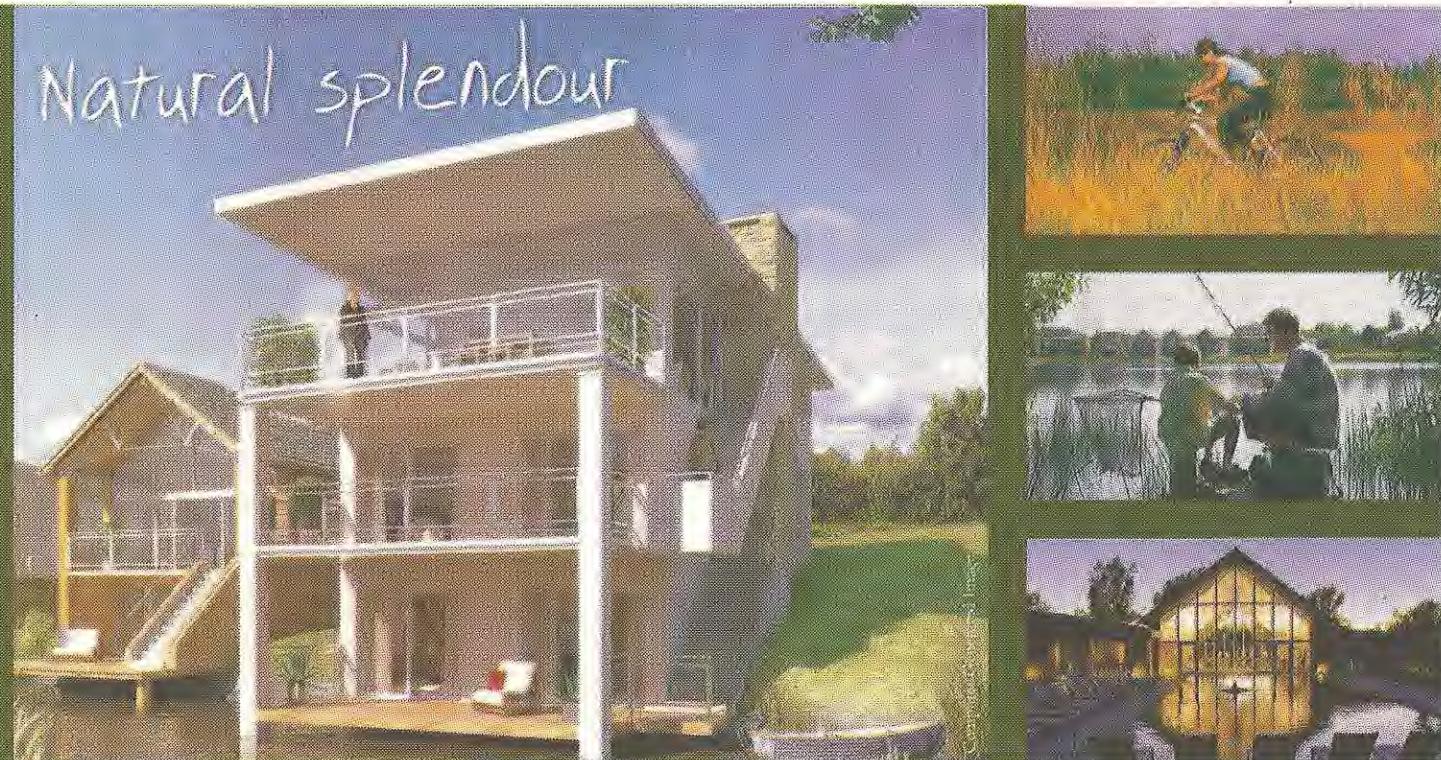
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www.propertyinrome.com. A two-bedroom stone house in a small hamlet near Montefiascone, with dining room, living room, and balcony is for sale at €183,000 (Italian Heartland: 00 39 0761 435914; www.italian-heartland.co.uk).

4. Corinaldo, Le Marche

Getting there: Ancona, Rimini, Bologna airports
La cucina: *Vincisgrassi* (baked lasagne without tomatoes)
I vini: Verdicchio wine

The Italians have claimed the coast of the Le Marche (pronounced Markay) region, and left the rolling inland countryside free for British buyers.

"Le Marche is perfect for people who are gutted they can't afford to buy in Tuscany," says Dominic Hepplethwaite of Live In Italy. Expect to pay about €200,000 for a stone house with rural views, surrounded by private land, requiring renovation.

Dermott Sales, of Le Marche Townhouses, recommends Monterubbiano, Corinaldo and Ostra Vetere – medieval and Renaissance towns within easy reach of beautiful walking country and the Adriatic coast. "The best properties for sale in Le Marche tend to be between 5km and 25km inland from the Adriatic coast, as they have the best of both worlds, with the sea less than 25 minutes to the east and the mountains and skiing only 30 to 45 minutes to the west," he says.

✿ **For sale:** Casta Saturni (pictured), a large house near Ostra Vetere, €260,000 and Casa Ruscello, a stone-built house in five acres near Corinaldo, €290,000 both with Le Marche Townhouses (0788 577 3433; www.marchetownhouses.com).

5. Garfagnana Valley, Tuscany

Getting there: Pisa airport
La cucina: *Zuppa di farro* (Tuscan bean and barley soup)

I vini: Sangiovese wines and vin santo
 Garfagnana, north of Lucca, does not rival Florence or Siena in terms of culture, but the countryside is brimming with nature and you are offered a lot more property for your money (€400,000 to €600,000 for a property with land, compared with €1.2 million to €1.3 million in the most popular parts of Tuscany).

"You have a Tuscany address, but it is more isolated," says Dominic Hepplethwaite. This did not deter Carducci, Pascali, Shelley and Byron from visiting, and the annual jazz festival at Barga, near Castel Nuovo di Garfagnana, is attracting a larger crowd each year. Try not to let the fact that it is one of Italy's rainiest regions put you off. Garfagnana's proximity to the mountains, forests and coast will compensate for the unpredictable weather.

✿ **For sale:** A rustic, three-bedroom stone house in good condition, with countryside views, €255,000 (Prestige Property Group: 01935 817 188; www.prestigeproperty.co.uk). A stone mill, with two houses, swimming pool, large garden and 25 acres of woodland and pasture, €695,000 (Knight Frank: 020 7629 8171).

A beautiful cottage requiring renovation, overlooking a lake near Castel Nuovo di Garfagnana €80,000 (Key Italy: www.keyitaly.com).



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6. Oltrepo Pavese, Lombardy

Getting there: Milan airports
La cucina: *Salame di Varzi* and black truffles
I vini: Oltrepo Pavese (DOC)

The region of Oltrepo Pavese is called "Little Tuscany" by those who know it, due to its undulating hills, vineyards and medieval hamlets. Until now, it has attracted mainly Milanese buyers (including Giorgio Armani) in search of a second home less than an hour from Milan. But British buyers are beginning to explore the area, finding properties priced about 50 per cent less than the equivalent in Tuscany. Towns such as Stradella, Broni and Casteggio are within easy reach of the Ligurian coast and Milan. Larger shops can be found in the university city of Pavia. Wine-tasting (wine has been made in Oltrepo for 3,000 years), walking, and riding will appeal to British holidaymakers, but spoken Italian is essential. "No one in Oltrepo Pavese that I have contacted from the property industry has ever attempted to speak English," says Paul Hudson of the Property Finders.

✿ **For sale:** A noble country house to the south of the town of Broni (pictured), surrounded by its own land with three storeys of accommodation to renovate, €600,000. (Property Finders: 020 7518 0335; www.thepropertyfinders.com).

7. Lunigiana, northern Tuscany

Getting there: Pisa, Parma and Genoa airports

La cucina: Testaroli with pesto sauce

I vini: Vermentino Colli di Luni DOC
 Squeezed between Liguria, Tuscany, and Emilia-Romagna, Lunigiana is a region of Roman ruins, medieval castles and baroque palaces. You might have heard of Cinque Terre, on the nearby Ligurian coast – five fishing villages, built on stone spurs, with coloured properties popular with wealthy Italians. But you may not have ventured further into the Lunigiana hills, where there are vineyards and hidden villages.

"You don't need to go far – 20 minutes inland makes a big difference," says Dominic Hepplethwaite, "and there are lots of nice-looking stone buildings in landscape which is similar to Tuscany."

He recommends Val di Vara, in the east of the region, 30 minutes from the coast and an hour from Pisa, Lucca and Portofino. Historic villages here include Montereggi and Bagnone (www.terredilunigiana.com).

✿ **For sale:** A semi-detached, two-bedroom, stone house with views of the Apuan Alps, recently restored, €130,000 (Casa da Mare: 00 39 0187 691179; www.casadamare.it). Further west into Liguria, between Genoa and Nice, Real Italia is selling restored houses in the 13th-century hilltop village of Colletta di Castelbianco (pictured), 20 minutes from the sea. From €137,000 to €416,000 (www.realitalia.co.uk).

8. Piacenza, Emilia-Romagna

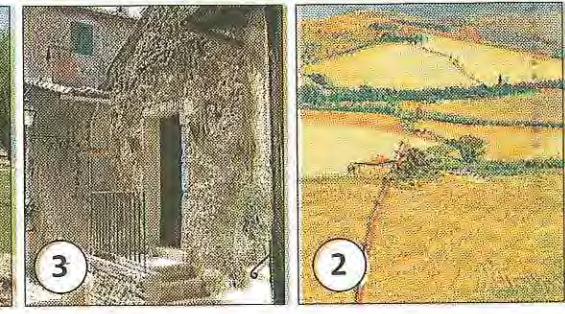
La cucina: Parma ham, balsamic vinegar, parmesan.

I vini: Lambrusco.
Getting there: Bologna, Milan (Bergamo), Milan airports
 The plains of Emilia-Romagna are dotted

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with grand towns such as Bologna, Parma and Modena, but if you venture into the mountainous north-west, there are good-value stone farmhouses and villas.

Admittedly, it can be isolated, but if you are a nature-lover, it is a more affordable option than Tuscany or Umbria. Rupert Fawcett, of Knight Frank, recommends Val Tidone and Val Trebbia, two valleys popular with the Milanese and Genovese. "The surrounding Piacentini hills offer a similar landscape to Tuscany, but are better priced," he says.

✿ **For sale:** A beautiful mill dating from the 1500s set in the ski area on the Tuscan Emilia-Romagna border on the outskirts of Pierpelago. Large garden, river, three bedrooms, separate lodge. €420,000 (Key Italy: www.keyitaly.com).

9. Otranto, Puglia

Getting there: airports at Brindisi and Bari
La cucina: *Taiddha* (mussels, potatoes, pecorino)

I vini: Salento Puglia
 Southern Italy has more Mediterranean and Greek influences than the north, and this is reflected in the architecture and cuisine. Lecce, on the coast, is widely regarded as "Florence of the south", but unlike its northern twin, it is created from *pietra leccese*, the local stone. Here, there are designer shops, restaurants and a half-buried Roman amphitheatre. There are stunning beaches between Lecce and the town of Otranto – popular with Italy's jetset, with regular ferries to Greece.

"Puglia is beach-orientated," says Rupert Fawcett of Knight Frank. House prices in

the region have risen by 8 per cent in two years; buyers can choose between *masserie* (traditional courtyard farmhouses) and *trulli* (conical-shaped, white-washed houses, designed to be cool in summer and warm in winter) that cost as little as €30,000.

✿ **For sale:** €175,000. A three-cone, refurbished *trullo* near Alberobello (similar to the one pictured), with sleeping space for three people. Casa Travella: 01322 660988; www.casatravella.com. Knight Frank (0207 629 8171) is selling bespoke stone *masserie* in five acres of olive groves and landscaped gardens, with pools, from €600,000. The houses are situated 45 minutes from Brindisi airport and 10 minutes from the beach.

10. Matera, Basilicata

Getting there: airports at Brindisi and Bari
La cucina: *calzone di verdura* (folded pizza with chard, peppers and raisins)

I vini: Aglianico del Vulture
 The lesser-known Basilicata forms a triangle between Campania, Puglia and Calabria, and, according to Rupert Fawcett, the landscape could be mistaken for Tuscany. "It is geographically closer to Greece than Milan," says Mr Fawcett. "And this is reflected in the food and culture."

There are good beaches and countryside, with stone villages and vineyards.

✿ **For sale:** Knight Frank is using the same developer as Puglia (see above) to create bespoke stone farmhouses (pictured) overlooking a lake, near Matera, an hour from Bari airport, from €600,000 (Knight Frank, as above).