

Condé Nast Traveller

NOVEMBER 2019

The Readers' Choice Awards 2019

CONCIERGE



THE BIGGEST AWARDS EVER, MORE THAN 600,000 VOTES

Over 1150 winners

HOTELS
CITIES

COUNTRIES
TRAINS

ISLANDS
CRUISES

AIRLINES
SPAS

THE ROUND-UP: ITALY

BIG-HITTING NEW ARRIVALS AROUND THE COUNTRY, EDITED BY STEPHANIE RAFANELLI

THE SECRET SCENE

BELMOND VILLA MARGHERITA, RAVELLO

A more rarefied position than Belmond Hotel Caruso's hardly seems possible, sitting in orange-scented gardens at the tippy-top of Ravello, one of the Amalfi coast's most famous and hard-to-reach towns. But now the refined Belmond Villa Margherita retreats even further from the crowds. The broderie-anglaise-white house is set down a cobbled road beyond its parent hotel on its own plot of olive trees and climbing roses. Margherita has the scarcest commodity in this corner of the world – privacy – along with the bespoke offerings of the hotel: the infinity pool; truffle and mortadella pizzas; a concierge to book Rivas to Positano. It was last spring when Caruso's pokey gym and hair salon – with the property's most squandered view – were transformed into an opulent residence. Artwork by Matisse hangs beneath hand-painted, trompe l'oeil ceilings of tree branches and trellised lemons. Upstairs, two bedrooms have a pastoral air of early-20th-century English abroad (the villa can be rented whole or split into two suites). There's a pint-sized kitchen for that first espresso or, indeed, high tea in the garden. A return to Amalfi coast solitude and the Ravello of DH Lawrence and Vita Sackville-West. JO RODGERS Villa from about £11,000 per night. belmond.com

WHERE TO STAY



THE LOW-KEY ISLAND HANGOUT

MEZZATORRE, ISCHIA

In its mid-century heyday, Ischia shone as brightly as neighbouring Capri. Ischia had beaches, healing springs and bays of supernatural green-blue in which Pablo Neruda learnt to swim, and pastel fishing villages where WH Auden raved about the light with Truman Capote.

Film director Luchino Visconti bought a home here, Hollywood followed. Yet flashier Capri stole the show. Nobody chose to name a style of trouser after Ischia, and memories of her halcyon days slowly faded, restoring it to Neapolitan families and the low-key. 'Capri has glitz and glam, but it's so obvious,' says Il Pellicano's Marie-Louise Scio, who chose the lesser-known island for the group's third property by taking over the historic Mezzatorre – the most talked-about opening of the summer. The sea-urchin-coloured hotel is a former 16th century watchtower and pirate's lookout on the island's wild north-west headlands. Ceilings are high and vaulted, verandahs crenellated, walls six feet thick in places. Its solid quietude envelops. Some rooms are set in forest – exuberant birdsong in the Mediterranean pines – above which rises Visconti's abandoned early-20th-century villa. In the basement of the hotel, a deep-green tiled thermal spa bubbles with pools of mineral water; treatments use indigenous nutrient-rich mud. But the centre-piece is a glorious outdoor saltwater pool where guests doze on daybeds, bright with blue-and-white stripes. In poolside La Baia, waiters pour Ischian wine with plates of *carpaccio di mare*. The chef at formal La

Torre restaurant is an island boy who cooks unfussy food, using top-quality produce from the volcanic soils. Capri dazzles. Ischia dazzles but remains authentic. LAURA FOWLER *Doubles from about £330.*

mezzatorre.com

PHOTOGRAPHS: SIMONE ACEFALO (@SIMACEPHOTO); LUCY LAUCHT

THE CAPITAL CONNECTION

HOTEL DE LA VILLE, ROME

It's been almost 20 years since Rocco Forte opened Hotel de Russie near Piazza del Popolo. With its neoclassical meets Art Deco grandeur, a collaboration between Olga Polizzi and local architect Tommaso Ziffer, it forever raised the bar for design addresses in Rome. This June, younger sister Hotel de la Ville was born atop the Spanish Steps, further elevating the family's ruling position in the city – all part of their heralded Italian expansion this year. Previously home to an old-school hotel, the 18th-century palazzo first underwent two-and-a-half years of renovations, reducing the number of rooms to a more manageable 89. This time the Russie's design duo chose the European Grand Tour as their reference. In spaces that are otherwise classic Polizzi, a Roman marble sculpture here or a print of Villa Borghese's pines there hint at a bygone age of travel. Larger rooms have enormous terraces but nothing can rival the heady 360-degree views of honey-hued cupolas from the rooftop. And the two-floor spa, using the Sicilian botanicals pioneered at the group's Verdura retreat, compensates for the absence of a pool. Meanwhile, herbal cocktails are served against a backdrop of tapestries in the bar, to be followed by a suitably elegant supper of fresh-off-the-boat bread-crusted sea bass at the outdoor restaurant. But it's the understated things that make this a property for its home city. Unlike its lofty contemporaries, such as the Hassler next door, it democratically embraces street life through a dining room and bar which can be accessed directly from via Sistina. An espresso here costs one euro. De la Ville's recalling of a centuries-old jet set is drawing in a new crowd, while blurring the lines between hotel and city life. SARA MANUELLI
Doubles from about £430. roccofortehotels.com



THE DESIGN DISRUPTOR

IL PALAZZO EXPERIMENTAL, VENICE

Young at heart. That's a refreshing tone to set in a city whose hotels too often stagger unimaginatively under the weight of heavy velvet brocade and solemn antique furniture. Brought to northern Italy by the French friends who rebooted the Parisian cocktail scene when they opened the Experimental Cocktail Club in 2006, Venice's newest boutique address dares to be different. It helps that the group's sixth hotel lies far from the tourist scrum at the eastern end of Le Zattere, the long promenade that draws a sunny, café-crawl line along the neighbourhood of Dorsoduro. This 16th-century palazzo was, for many years, the headquarters of the Adriatica Shipping Company – its colourful Thirties mosaic sign still adorns the façade. Inside, the design by thirty-something Experimental collaborator Dorothée Meilichzon feels like a fun 21st-century spin on Art Deco. She brings a surprise touch of fairground to the candy-striped doors of the guest rooms and pays homage to the Fifties Olivetti showroom by the great Carlo Scarpa in the funky terrazzo flooring in the public spaces. In the restaurant, the spry team of chefs riff on the Adriatic connection in market-fresh food and wine pairings. Appealing to the locals is a big part of the Experimental remit. Serious cocktails such as the almond-spiked house Negroni and reworked *cicheti* snacks promise to bring a buzzing aperitivo scene to the lovely garden terrace. Meanwhile the snug street-facing bar that houses the Experimental Cocktail Club is a fine cold-weather nook. Injected with a wake-up shot of verve and a hop from Giudecca's fizzing art scene, this part of the Dorsoduro is the new young heart of Venice. LEE MARSHALL
Doubles from about £200. experimentalgroup.com



WHERE TO STAY

EXCLUSIVE
FIRST
REVIEW

THE GREEN CHAMPION

LEFAY, THE DOLOMITES

When the Leali family opened their first eco-spa on Lake Garda in 2008, based on principles of Chinese medicine channelled through Western science and Italian nature, they were national pioneers. Made in local olive wood and powered primarily by a biomass furnace, it became the first Italian hotel to offset its remaining carbon emissions, and earned a decade of green and wellness awards. It was also headily romantic: treatments bore such whimsical names as The Moon In The Lake and the pool gave the effect of levitating over Garda. Now their new ski-spa in a fir-lined valley near Madonna di Campiglio translates both that vision and sensation for the Dolomites. Bio-architect Hugo Demetz's main structure of black aluminium, larch and glass maximises natural heat, light and the mountain surroundings: the conifer carpet feels strokable from the fourth-floor bar. Fires crackle like boots on autumn leaves. Everywhere oak, chestnut and silver birch branches suspend a connected natural state from slopes to indoor spa: the Roman-bath-sized complex spans 24 treatment cabins, panoramic zoning-out rooms and pools. Four indoor areas correspond to the energy flows treated in Garda's garden. A salt cave, orange and rosemary aromatherapy saunas, and Turkish baths cleanse body, mind and spirit like mountain air. In 88 bedrooms with heavy curtains, hanging textile panels of reindeers coax post-spa sleepers like children into fairyland; while the back-lit onyx bar throws the light of campfire on aperitivo drinkers. Lake-caught Alpine char and Trentino spumante ensure the local commitment is down to the last plate. An Italian role model in sustainability, wellness and romance. **STEPHANIE RAFANELLI** *Doubles from about £290. dolomiti.lefayresorts.com*



THE REVAMPED CASTLE

COMO CASTELLO DEL NERO, CHIANTI

Polenta, chestnut, liver and grape; not just the rich, wintery comforts of this region's palate, but the traditional palette of its interiors. Both, declares interior designer Paola Navone 'are troppo pesante' – just too heavy? In late 2018 COMO's Christina Ong bought Castello Del Nero, a 12th-century-castle-turned-hotel and 740-acre estate in the heart of wine country, after spending her birthday here. She then tasked her Milanese design partner for Miami Beach, Phuket and Bali to reimagine the historical property – the group's debut in mainland Europe – in just 74 days. Navone faced not only an overdose of offal shades, ruched brocades, four-poster beds and chandeliers, but frescoes protected by the Italian Fine Arts Commission and, most onerous of all, nine centuries of the Florentine Del Nero and Torrigiani clans' history. Navone's response was 'less a design, than a lightening'. She took the castle back to its vaulted bones, demanding only a strict two-tone of *pietra-serena* grey and cloud, mirroring the heavenly ceiling of the private chapel (terracotta floors were – sacrilegiously – whitewashed). What was left functioned as a blank stage for Navone's witty creations. For Michelin-starred La Torre, the former stables, she designed two sets of chairs, one in dappled-grey faux pony skin. The other, in a semi-circular Thirties shape, makes a horseshoe when seen from above. A contemporary design castle with Italy's first COMO Shambhala retreat. SR

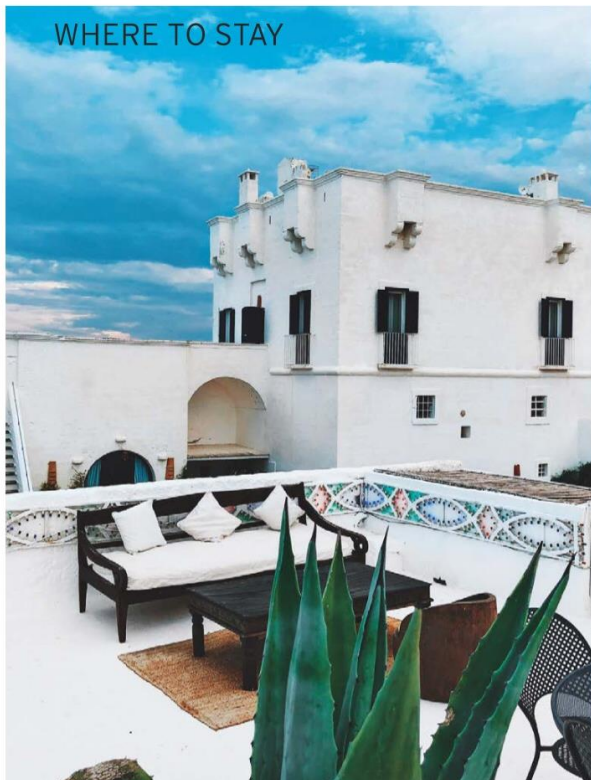
Doubles from about £505. comohotels.com

PHOTOGRAPHS: MATTIA AQUILA, CATHERINE MEAD



November 2019 Condé Nast Traveller 49

WHERE TO STAY



THE ROOTED RURAL REFRESH

MASSERIA TORRE MAIZZA, PUGLIA

Some hotels burst onto the scene all ready for their close-up. Others, like this one, bide their time. Opened in 2006 as the intimate cousin to more family-oriented Torre Cocco, Maizza was already charming. It just needed that little style lift, a small service tweak, to make it world-class. And now it is: Rocco Forte took over the place in 2018, relaunching it the following May as his fourth Italian property. It takes a keen eye to spot the line between old and new. Much of the bull-white masseria dates back to the 16th century. Ten recently added garden rooms merge seamlessly with the whitewashed vernacular, just as the San Pellegrino-bottle green of a nine-hole golf course blends pleasantly into a grove of gnarled olives. All is discretion here. A walled garden filled with bougainvillea camouflages a lick of pool and a pergola for lazy orange-infused lunches. Inside, designer Olga Polizzi nails Puglian country manor in a way few rivals, even Borgo Egnazia, manage, using regional artisanal textiles and ceramics; Puglian plates form a planetary installation on the wall behind the reception desk. The mustard-hued cushions on the banquettes of Carosello restaurant are a touch of genius in what would otherwise be a black-and-white-floored urban ambience. Local boy Luigi Barletta's menu is equally less-is-more: 'spaghetti, tomato and basil' is a tribute to the simple goodness of southern Italian ingredients. The ultimate romantic refuge in impeccable good taste, right down to the newly elevated beach club. LM
Doubles from about £300. roccofortehotels.com. Elegant Resorts offers seven nights in a superior room from £2,115 per person, including breakfast, flights and transfers. +44 1244 897294; elegantresorts.co.uk

THE GRAND ARRIVAL

MANDARIN ORIENTAL, LAKE COMO

The greatest compliment one can pay this hotel is that it feels as if it's always been here. In an alternate universe, this suave waterfront nest north of Blevio might have taken in its first guests towards the end of the 19th century, as the European sister of the Oriental in Bangkok. But in those years, the original villa on the lake's forested eastern shore was still a private residence. It was the home of opera singer Giuditta Pasta, claimed by Italians as their own Maria Callas, and only became a hotel in 2010, with heavy interiors and a restaurant that valued fancy trills over good clear notes. Meanwhile, buoyed by the standing ovation given to its first Italian property, the Mandarin Oriental, Milan in 2015, the Hong Kong-based group was planning an encore. At the end of the 2018 season, it took over this 75-room lakeside estate – with its courteous tree-lined avenues, landscaped gardens and a floating swimming pool – as its first European resort. Rooms were lightened by Milan-based designer Eric Egan, known equally for bringing historical verve to new-builds and contemporary flair to historically sensitive jobs like this one. The Mandarin Room, the reception and afternoon tea lounge are the only obvious signature Oriental group touches. Other appointments have been equally impressive. General manager Samuel Porreca was poached from JK Place Roma and he brought with him head barman Luca De Filippis. With this fashion-capital-worthy opening, the Como scene finally throws off its musty image. LM
Doubles from about £695. mandarinoriental.com



PHOTOGRAPH: GIACOMO SONZINI