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Five of the top Italian farm stays



Fattoria La Vialla, Arezzo, Tuscany

With the highest organic credentials, the Vialla farm and wine estate has been built up over 30 years by three generations of the Lo Franco family, who are passionate about natural food production. Piece by piece they have bought up neglected adjoining farms, revitalising them to produce wine, olive oil, sheep's cheese, pasta and vegetables for sale in the estate shop and by mail

order, and converting the farm buildings into self-catering accommodation with rustic furnishings and mod cons. The 30 stone properties, scattered around the estate, sleep 2-10, and prices start at €378 a week. Guests can join in the grape and olive harvests and visit the flour mill, dairy, bakery and kitchens where pasta sauces are made. One evening each week everyone staying is invited to dinner, a feast that is served on long tables out in the open air.

Details: 00 39 0575 430020, lavialla.it.

Monteverde, La Spezia, Liguria

The pretty pink-washed farmhouse with terraced gardens (above) looks over the vineyards that produce the estate's Colli di Luni DOC wine. Set in seven hectares (which also produce fruit, vegetables, eggs and jams for self-catering guests), it is 6km from the rugged Cinque Terre coast. Go in late autumn and you can

join in the olive harvest. There are nine apartments converted from two old farmsteads. Rates are from €250 for a three-night stay for two people. Details: 00 39 0187 674727, www.agriturismomonteverde.it.

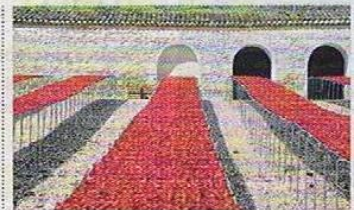
Baglio Fontanasalsa, Trapani, Sicily

This family farmhouse, surrounded by olive groves, has been restored to create nine en suite rooms named after different varieties of olives. Some of the rooms look on to the central baglio (courtyard), where breakfast is served, and others lead out on to an orange grove. There is a

tasting room to sample the farm's wines and award-winning olive oils, both of which are offered in the restaurant. It is perfectly positioned for visits to Trapani and archaeological sites and is 2km from the beach; you can take a hydrofoil to the Egadi Islands. The cost is from £84 a night for B&B in a double room (from £128 HB) with Real Holidays (020-7359 3938, realtholidays.co.uk).

L'Orto, Matera, Basilicata

In the little-visited deep south in the "arch" of the boot of Italy, L'Orto (which means kitchen garden) grows artichokes, aubergines, tomatoes and



peppers (above). Work up an appetite for dinner in the restaurant (or cook your own from farm produce) by cycling or walking to picturesque villages and archaeological sites. A week's self-catering is from £986 for two sharing a one-bedroom apartment including car hire, one dinner and two days' cycle hire with route notes (Inntravel (01653 617000, inntravel.co.uk).

in three converted farmhouses. Wild boar and deer roam the forest that supplies white truffles to the River Café in West London. Go in autumn and you join a truffle hunt. There are pasta-making demonstrations and bread-making lessons offered too. Foraging for fruit and herbs is encouraged, and other organic food can be bought from the farm shop. Florence, Siena and Pisa are all about 60km away for day trips — if you can drag yourself away from the estate. Rates start at £70 a night for a self-catering apartment sleeping two, booked through i-escape.com.

Fattoria Barbialla Nuova, San Miniato, Tuscany

It is a ten-minute drive on bumpy tracks from the start of the estate to the self-catering apartments

Caroline Hendrie

