
ttg LUXURY



FANTASY ISLANDS

The Maldives still leads the way in the Indian Ocean, but the traditional powerhouse is facing stiff competition from the likes of Mauritius, the Seychelles and Sri Lanka

Plus: effective email marketing; Richard Branson's luxury view; LGBT+ special report; how to sell safaris; slow travel; 10 ways to see Australia; Italy tips; and Middle East trends

Charm school

Is there anywhere quite like Italy? Already packed with many gems, the country offers up a host of reasons to take another look this autumn and into next year. Not to mention *The White Lotus* effect...

AUTHOR: AOIFE O'RIORDAIN

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ith the riches of cultural heavy hitters like Rome, Venice, and Florence, scenic showstoppers like the Amalfi Coast and Tuscany and the beaches of Puglia, Sardinia and Sicily, Italy is many things to many people.

With tourist numbers on the up, the country is proving to be very much back on travellers' bucket lists. "Italy is performing really strongly for us this year with a 25 per cent increase in bookings that are almost back to pre-Covid levels," reports Sophie Jones, Italy product manager for Elegant Resorts.

A slew of new hotel openings is also ensuring fresh interest in some of the country's classic

Photography: Romain Réglade

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destinations such as Rome, Capri and The Lakes – more of which later. “Set-jetting” is now also a thing, apparently, with big TV dramas such as *Succession* putting Italy on the map for a whole new audience. Sicily has been the breakout star of season two of hit comedy-drama *The White Lotus*, with Elegant Resorts reporting bookings to the island have doubled since 2022. Sicily was given another boost as one of the locations for the recently released film *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*, filmed at several Sicilian cities and landmarks such as Syracuse, Cefalu and Segesta.

The pace of development shows little sign of slowing down, with luxury brands queuing up to plant more flags in Italian soil. Next year sees the launch of Accor’s feverishly anticipated Orient Express La Dolce Vita train, while LMVH has confirmed it will begin operating the legendary Hotel Romazzino on Sardinia’s Costa Smeralda in 2024. That will be followed by the reopening of the neighbouring Hotel Pitriizza under the luxurious Cheval Blanc banner in 2026, while Mandarin Oriental has also signed a deal to open a hotel there.

Traditionally popular with German, Swiss and Austrian visitors, the breathtaking peaks and high-mountain pastures of the country’s north are also garnering more attention out of ski season and come into their own in autumn, with walking, hiking and biking popular options, while standout destination spas include Forestis and the Adler Spa Ritten.

With overtourism becoming a topic of discussion at many Italian tourist hotspots, agents would do well to suggest some of the country’s lesser-visited regions and cities. Second-tier cities to explore for an urban break could include Bologna, Turin and Trieste; lesser-known wine regions could be Friuli Venezia Giulia; and more under the radar regions include Abruzzo and Le Marche, which can often prove equally, if not more, rewarding than the traffic-choked roads of the Amalfi Coast and crowded alleyways of San Marco.

Venice vibes

Some of La Serenissima’s grand dames are getting face lifts; the Bauer Il Palazzo is

currently being renovated and will reopen as a Rosewood property, while the storied Hotel Danieli (hoteldanieli.com) will join the Four Seasons stable next year.

The St Regis Venice (marriott.com) recently reopened following a two-year restyle that gave it a more contemporary, art-centric ambience. Inspired by one of the building’s former residents, Claude Monet, the new look includes the specially commissioned Murano glass *White Chandelier* by Chinese artist, Ai Weiwei. In summer, Nolinski Venezia (nolinskivenezia.com) opened its doors in the city’s former stock exchange building in an enviable perch between La Fenice and Piazza San Marco. The second property from French group Evok Hotels, it marries Venetian grandeur, Art Nouveau and mid-century modern styles, throughout its public spaces, 43 guestrooms and 13 suites.

Tuscan treats

Needing little introduction, Tuscany is a perennial favourite for first timers and frequent visitors. Little surprise that it is also the setting for La Pensione di Vignamaggio (vignamaggio.com), one of the initial phases of the transformation of the historic Vignamaggio Estate in Panzano in Chianti that shares the same creators as the bar-setting The Newt in Somerset and Babylonstoren in South Africa’s Cape winelands. Its newly opened suites and trio of villas will be followed by a hotel in its Renaissance-era palazzo in 2025.

Two years ago, the Lohia family acquired the Toscana Resort Castelfalfi (castelfalfi.com), a sprawling 1,100-acre estate, which has meant €100 million of enhancements with restyles of its 146 rooms and villas, the new Olivia Restaurant, an adventure park and kid’s club and an upgrade of its 27-hole golf course (that is now the biggest in Tuscany) while two new villas and a new spa open this September.

Les Domaines de Fontenille Group (lesdomainesdefontenille.com) has also just opened its first Italian outpost, Pieve Aldina, an intimate, character-laden palazzo amid fragrant gardens, olive groves and vines in the heart of the Chiantigiana outside Radda in Chianti.

Sizzling Sicily

Many are calling it *The White Lotus* effect, but the glamorous goings-on in the second series of this wry social satire have certainly turbocharged interest in Sicily. Most visitors want to check in to the real-life location for *The White Lotus* Hotel & Spa, the San Domenico Palace, Taormina a Four Seasons Hotel (fourseasons.com), with its dreamy views out over Taormina and the Ionian Sea. “The show has had an incredible impact on awareness for our hotel and for Sicily as a destination,” says general manager Lorenzo Maravaglia. “We are thrilled to see the interest the show has generated. We registered a spike in web traffic from the US, UK and Australia as soon as the show started to air, with traffic saying consistently high.”

But there can be no doubt many other properties dotted around the island have benefited from this five-star frenzy too, such as Belmond’s neighbouring Grand Hotel Timeo (belmondhotel.com), with its sweeping views of the town’s Greco-Roman amphitheatre and Mount Etna and Rocco Forte’s two properties (roccofortehotels.com), Verdura Resort and Villa Igeia, the latter set in a restored heritage-listed Art Nouveau building on the edge of Palermo, whose bar also made a brief cameo in the series.

Lakeside love

Elegant Resorts reports increased interest in the Italian lakes, possibly also down to that area’s starring role in hit series *Succession*, but also down to its iconic hotels such as new arrival Passalacqua (passalacqua.it) overlooking Lake Como, which has become an instant classic alongside glamorous waterside stalwarts such as Grand Hotel Tremezzo (grandhoteltremezzo.com) and Villa d’Este (villadeste.com). On the shores of Lake Garda a new arrival this autumn is Cape of Senses (capeofsenses.com), an adults-only spa resort and member of Small Luxury Hotels set on a terrace over Torri del Benaco. A trip to the lakes can easily be included with a visit to the country’s





fashion capital Milan, whose burgeoning hotel scene includes Lungarno Collection's new Portrait Milano (lungarnocollection.com) housed in a 16th-century former seminary as well as the opening of the new W Milan this autumn, while 2024 will see Rocco Forte's latest property, The Carlton Milan, arrive in the city.

Capri and the Amalfi coast

Capri and the Amalfi coast epitomise the very notion of "La Dolce Vita" and few can resist the siren call of its craggy, indented coastline edged by tourmaline waters and ice-cream-coloured houses tumbling down to the water. Although tourism numbers are at high levels in the peak summer months, shoulder seasons like May, September and October present themselves as the ideal times to visit this stretch of the Italian coastline, when hotel rates are also lower.

On Capri, Oetker Masterpiece Collection's Hotel La Palma (oetkercollection.com) was the must-book opening of the summer season, which did not disappoint, evoking the glamorous 1960s heyday of this iconic Italian resort, albeit with a luxurious, contemporary update as well as a beach club. Back on the mainland, the views are to die for at the newly opened Anantara Convento di Amalfi Grand Hotel (anantara.com) that perches on the cliffside above Amalfi. A former 13th-century Capuchin convent, this has been reimagined with 52 guestrooms and suites and a pizza restaurant overseen by master Neapolitan pizzaiolo Gino Sorbillo (*turn to p87 to see our Tried & Tested review*).

Eternally yours

Following a pre-pandemic slump, Rome has seen a flurry of high-end openings already this year and autumn is the ideal time to visit when the summer heat has mellowed. Top of the list is Six Senses Rome (sixsenses.com), a self-styled city-centre resort housed in the opulent Palazzo Salviati Cesi Mellini, which opened in March. Following not long after was the Rome Edition (editionhotels.com) in April and the Bulgari Roma (bulgarihotels.com) opened in June. Intercontinental also returned to the Italian capital with the reopening of the Ambasciatori Palace (ihg.com) on the historic Via Veneto.

As well as these big-name openings, smaller, more boutique properties have also been flourishing, such as the Palazzo Velabro (designhotels.com) near the Roman Forum and the family-owned Palazzo Ripetta (palazzoripetta.com) while Naples' Romeo Hotel will debut its Roman sibling, Romeo Roma (theromeocollection.com) in October, which was one of the last projects by much-lauded architect Zaha Hadid. ■

Pictured

1. Capri's Hotel La Palma reopened this summer
2. San Domenico Palace, Taormina features in *The White Lotus*
3. Anantara Convento di Amalfi Grand Hotel
4. Six Senses Rome is housed in an opulent former palazzo
5. Chianti is the setting for La Pensione di Vignamaggio
6. The St Regis Venice has reopened after a two-year restyle
7. Rome Edition is the brand's first Italian property
8. Les Domaines de Fontenille Group's Pieve Aldina in Chianti

