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SLEEPER || SIENA, ITALY

Living a fairy tale under the Tuscan sun

CASTEL MONASTERO

Colonna del Grillo, Castelnuovo Berardenga, Italy;
39-0577-51000;
www.castelmonastero.com;
suites from \$482

BY CELESTE MOURE

Perched on a hilltop 22 kilometres east of Siena and bordered by olive groves and vineyards, Castel Monastero is perfectly situated to deliver the kind of Tuscan getaway you may have dreamed of. Upon arrival, a Louis Vuitton model look-alike escorts you past the iron gate to this once-upon-a-time medieval village to the reception where you are quickly and efficiently checked in, Prosecco in hand.

Centred on a lovely piazza is a collection of 17th-century buildings that accommodate 70 guestrooms. There are also two restaurants with menus overseen by multiple-Michelin star chef Gordon Ramsay and head chef Alessandro Deffanti. The décor throughout is rustic chic: stone floors, Rubell fabrics and antique furniture and light fixtures provided by local artisans. The Tuscan experience is central to a stay at this hotel and fulfilled with vineyard tours, horseback riding on nearby trails, a fresco dining and lazing by the pool with the aroma of lavender in the air.

DESIGN

Built around 800 as a monastery and later converted into a castle when one of the most important families in Italy (the Chigi) moved in, Castel Monastero has been reimagined into a bucolic getaway fit for a prince and his princess. The look is rustic-meets-minimalism with arched entryways, secret patios and stone pathways that lead to the picturesque piazza.

2a. Both inside and out, furnishings feature lots of iron, wood and leather and a soft palette of earthy creams and browns.

AMENITIES

Like any fairy-tale village, Castel Monastero offers a little bit of everything: a pastoral church that holds Sunday mass (it can also be booked for weddings) and bottles of Chianti made with grapes that grow a stone's throw from guests' bedroom windows. Villagers, or guests, are detoxified and rebalanced inside the 10,000-square-foot spa during treatments such as Kobido, a Japanese face massage that improves lymphatic circulation. After basking under the Tuscan sun or working

ing out in the gym without walls (exercise equipment is located under a breezy canopy), guests plunge into one of three swimming pools on different cascading levels. And those looking to take some skills back home can sign up for a cooking class focusing on traditional Tuscan dishes. Meeting-room space with the latest audio-visual technology can accommodate up to 150 people.

ROOMS

Each room is unique – some feature a staircase to a loft-level bedroom, others have terraces, fireplaces or frescoed walls. Featuring exposed wooden beams, painted timber panelling and doors and separate living areas with plush



Each room in the 17th-century hotel is unique; many overlook the central piazza, where breakfast is served al fresco.

leather sofas, flat-screen TVs and antique writing desks, the atmosphere is simple yet comfortable. The spacious bathrooms, with rain showers and separate tubs, are stocked with Molton Brown products. One caveat: The numerous light switches on almost every wall and on the headboard can turn bedtime into a 20-minute, button-pushing affair. Expect complimentary Wi-Fi access and twice-daily room cleaning.

SERVICE

The entire staff is genuinely warm and accommodating in that inimitable Italian way. The concierge excitedly tells us about the must-visit vineyards in the area as if his uncles and cousins were the ones crushing the grapes, and waiters, chambermaids and bellboys readily deliver sweet *Buon giorno* and *Buona sera*.

FOOD

Breakfast takes place outside in the sunny piazza where the complimentary spread includes everything from prosciutto and local cheeses to fresh-made yogurt, croissants and scrumptious coffee cakes. Another highlight is dinner at Contrada Restaurant under a blanket of stars. Don't miss the pappardelle with Cinta Senese pork and Chianina beef ragout topped with Tuscan pecorino flakes. The more laidback La Cantina, situated in the cavernous cellar, features both intimate and communal tables as well as a self-service buffet of antipasti. Currently the cellar stocks 380 labels of local vintages; the goal is 600 by next year.

VERDICT

Sure to become the place to stay for jet-setting couples looking to do it all (or nothing at all) in this corner of Tuscany.

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