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Property overseas: Unsung Italy

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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

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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."



Bellussima: a stone house in large grounds, with mountain views, just 40 minutes from both the Adriatic and Abruzzo airport will set you back just £30,000 (£103,000) through Lokation Italy

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 Chianti-shire, 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 Sessano, 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."

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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 Cataiano 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.teatrodel silenzio.com).

• **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 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 Bagnaia, 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.

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