



Delicious chicken salad recipes

Perfect for a light summer lunch

Weekend

Travel
Starts on
page 25

20 best rural retreats in Tuscany

Italy's farm stays are perfect for an early autumn escape. Annabelle Thorpe picks the most stylish hideaways

1 Fattoria Lavacchio near Florence

A sprawling wine estate in the Florentine hills, Lavacchio is a great bet for vinophiles, with 52 acres (21 ha) of vines producing some tasty vintages. The estate offers 13 B&B rooms and five apartments, and guests can choose from horse riding through

the vines, cooking or ceramic classes, truffle hunting or a photographic tour. The Windmill restaurant, specialising in organic produce, is the perfect spot for long, wine-fuelled lunches.

Details A week costs from £641.50pp, including flights, car hire and a one-bed apartment (020 8568 4499, sunvil.co.uk)

2 Lupaia Torrita di Siena

Rustic luxe doesn't come more, well, luxurious than this. Lupaia is owned by one of Italy's fashion families ... and it shows in the flamboyant, sumptuous furnishings, lashings of colour, soft drapes and elegant carved wooden furniture in the ten bedrooms. Outside, the pool has wonderful views over the hills of the Val di Chiana, matched by those from the pretty restaurant terrace, which serves four-course suppers of Tuscan dishes. **Details** B&B doubles are from £130 (0039 0577 668 028, lupaia.com)



3 Quercia Rossa Maremma

If you want to get off the beaten track, Maremma is the place to go, and Quercia Rossa makes a great base for exploring. The outside of this house might not have the charm of a typical Tuscan farmhouse, but inside all is rustic elegance. The owners, Alessandro and Paolo, have chosen a sleek mix of antique and classic pieces. With six rooms, it gives you a real sense of escape. **Details** B&B doubles are from £57 (i-escape.com) ▶

4 Fattoria Barbialla Nuova San Miniato

If you fancy urban style at your rustic escape, Barbialla Nuova will do nicely — it is a clutch of seven apartments and one villa, all gorgeous stone farmhouses and decked out with sleek Italian minimalism. The apartments are split across two farmhouses, each with a pool, while the villa (sleeping 8-10) has its own plunge pool. There's no restaurant but the farm shop sells wonderful local produce and Guido is always on hand to recommend the best places to eat.

Details A one-bed apartment costs from £56 per night (l-escape.com)

5 Agriturismo Settesoldi San Miniato

Small but perfectly formed, Settesoldi has just three rooms and plenty of rustic charm. That's in no small part due to its enthusiastic owners, Sergio and Cecilia, who are on hand for everything from whipping up traditional Tuscan dishes to organising wine tastings at their friends' vineyards. Within easy reach of Pisa and Florence, Settesoldi is also a stone's throw from the picturesque hilltop town of Bucciano, the centre of Italy's white truffle region.

Details B&B doubles are from £56 (0039 0470 491 0480, settesoldi.it)

6 Villa di Campolungo Agriturismo Fiesole

Tucked away in the rolling Fiesole hills above Florence, Campolungo dates from the 15th century and oozes historic

charm through its thick, saffron-coloured walls. Owner Silvia has restored the seven bedrooms using local stone and Tuscan fabrics to complement the surviving beams, doors and terracotta, but runs it on 21st-century, sustainable principles. Try the estate's organic olive oil, and gorge on Silvia's homemade cakes at breakfast. The pretty town of Fiesole is a few minutes' stroll away.

Details B&B doubles are from £76 (0039 0550 515 250, sawdays.co.uk)

7 Podere la Cerreta Sassetta

Unusually for an agriturismo property, Cerreta is also home to a thermal spa (termedisassetta.it). Its 185 acres, with outdoor pools, make the most of the mineral-rich waters, biodynamic treatments and holistic massage therapies. The ten rooms are in four simply converted stone-built farm buildings, along with a cosy restaurant that serves the organic produce grown in the fields around the houses — la Cerreta is 95 per cent self-sufficient. Beyond the farm, the wooded hills of the Maremma offer tranquil, shady walks.

Details B&B doubles are from £91 (0039 0565 794 352, lacerreta.it)



8 Fattoria San Martino Montepulciano

Switch off the iPad, power down the phone and relax in this limewashed, organic, vegetarian hideaway that offers all the tranquility of a retreat, but with wonderful local food, wine and a beautifully ramshackle garden. The four sizeable suites all come with polished wood floors, sumptuous, white-linen bedsheets and a marked lack of technology to break San Martino's lovely rural spell.

Details B&B doubles are from £111 (0039 0578 717 463, www.fattoriasanmartino.com)

9 Podere le Mezzelune Bibbona

The four bedrooms in the main house and the two self-catering cottages at Mezzelune channel a different vibe when compared with most other agriturismo: clean lines, sleek wooden furniture, and an almost Scandi-chic feel. Outside, it's about traditional Tuscan pleasures: tasting a bottle or two along the "wine road" of the Etruscan coast, cookery classes and oil tastings at Mezzelune, and strolls through the house's six acres of maquis shrubland and olive groves.

Details B&B doubles are from £111 (0039 0586 670 266, www.mezzelune.com)

10 Agriturismo Tenuta Chiudendone San Miniato

One of the first places to call itself a "boutique farm", Chiudendone consists of a 19th-century farmhouse and standing barn, perched on a hill, just outside the pretty town of San Miniato. The buildings have been carefully renovated and converted into two chic apartments, each sleeping four, with clean white walls and contemporary furniture. The owner, Francesco, is on hand to pour wine, talk you through the kitchen garden — which guests are free to use — and recommend local eateries. **Details** From £114 per night in a two-bed self-catering apartment (0039 3479 451 662, tenutachiudendone.com)

11 Agriturismo Il Vignolino near Florence

This farm stay is ideal if you want to mix the art and culture of Florence with a peaceful place to which to return at the end of a busy day's sightseeing. Il Vignolino lies just 15 minutes from the city, and is a more of a rural B&B than agriturismo, with ten simply furnished bedrooms, hearty breakfasts and cold suppers available. Ideal for children, it has a large lawned garden and pool, playground and bike rental.

Details B&B doubles are from £51 (0039 3354 284 55, vignolinobedandbreakfast.com)

12 Agriturismo Bellavista Seggiano

The views across the Val d'Orcia from this family-owned 16th-century

farmhouse are spectacular, particularly when lazing by the sizeable outdoor pool. Pleasures are simple here: a spot of mushroom foraging or chestnut-picking, or a long lunch at one of the nearby picturesque towns, such as Pienza or Montalcino. The four apartments are simple rather than luxurious, with self-catering facilities, but breakfast, made with produce from the farm, is not to be missed.

Details One-bed apartments are from £32 (0039 0564 973 062, www.agriturismo-bellavista.it)

13 Casanova di Pescille San Gimignano

Just over a mile from the iconic towers of San Gimignano, di Pescille is a great choice for wildlife lovers because it is located in a reserve that's home to wild boar, partridge, hare and pheasant. The 19th-century stone farmhouse has eight cosy rooms, with exposed brickwork and classically tiled floors, while there is one self-contained apartment, sleeping two. Food is a big part of a stay at di Pescille, with half and full board available at the Zafferano restaurant, along with cooking classes and tasting sessions.

Details B&B doubles are from £63 (0039 0577 941 902, casanovadipecille.com)

14 Podere Conti Filattiera

The perfect choice for a real sense of escape, Podere Conti is surrounded by lush wooded landscapes at the foot of the Apennines. The 13 eclectically furnished rooms mix original beams and floors with fabric and furniture.

locations ranging from Iran to Morocco. The terrace restaurant and hammock-dotted pool area — together with walks straight from the front door — make it pretty hard to leave.

Details Doubles are from £69 (0039 3482 681 830, podereconti.com)

15 Podere Salicotto, Buonconvento

Days start slowly at Salicotto; breakfasts of warm ricotta, home-made bread and organic jams are served until 10.30am, with owners Silvia and Paolo on hand to help plan walks, cycle trips (there are bikes to hire) or visits to nearby Siena. The six cottage-style bedrooms all have gorgeous views, while outside there is a huge pool and the chance to join yoga classes and cooking lessons, or book a massage.

Details B&B doubles are from €119 a night in September (0039 0577 809 087, www.poderesalicotto.com)

16 Villa Poggio di Gaville Chianti

Di Gaville is a gorgeous 18th-century farmhouse in the heart of Chianti, and it stands out because its owner and host, Jamal Amin, creates a wonderfully convivial atmosphere and also serves up spectacularly good food. There are ten warm, saffron-coloured rooms dotted

travels, and a traditional wood-beamed lounge lined with books. Outside there's a pool and a network of walking trails.

Details B&B doubles are from £62 (0039 055 961955, villapoggiodigaville.com)

17 Agriturismo Vernianello Chianti

Vernianello has been in Fabio and Ilenia's family for generations, and in spite of its reinvention as an agriturismo, with four spacious apartments, it still feels like a family home. Each apartment has a well-equipped kitchen, but it can be tempting just to eat at the farmhouse restaurant, which serves dishes including wild boar and Florentine beef steak. Cooking lessons are available. **Details** Room-only apartments (without towels) cost from £45 a night (00 39 0577 989 006, vernianello.it)

18 Le Fonti a San Giorgio Montespertoli

Choose from one of the seven apartments at San Giorgio, or add a touch of drama by staying in the former San Giorgio chapel, perched on top of the hill. All rooms are warmly furnished, with wooden floors, butter-hued walls

serves up a daily changing menu, with many of the ingredients coming straight from the farm.

Details A week's self catering in a one-bed apartment costs from £487pp including flights and car hire (020 8568 4499, sunvil.co.uk)

19 Agriturismo Poggiacolle San Gimignano

Less than an hour from Siena and Florence and just a mile from San Gimignano, Poggiacolle makes an ideal base for first-timers to Tuscany. The estate offers nine B&B rooms in the main farmhouse, and five apartments, all with terracotta tiled floors and beamed ceilings. Poggiacolle is a working farm and guests are welcome to join in with the harvest.

Details B&B doubles are from £59 (0039 0577 941 537, poggiacolle.com)

20 Locanda Casanuova Figline Valdarno

Tucked away in the eastern part of Chianti, Casanuova is about stepping off the whirligig for a few days; there are no TVs or telephones in the simple, cream-walled rooms, but there are home-baked cakes for afternoon tea, and the evening meal is chalked up on a board each morning. Instead of a swimming pool, there is a natural pond fringed with reeds, and a shallow paddling pond for children. On warm evenings, the pondside provides a perfect spot for alfresco barbecues.

Details Doubles are from £110 half-board (0039 0550 500 037)

