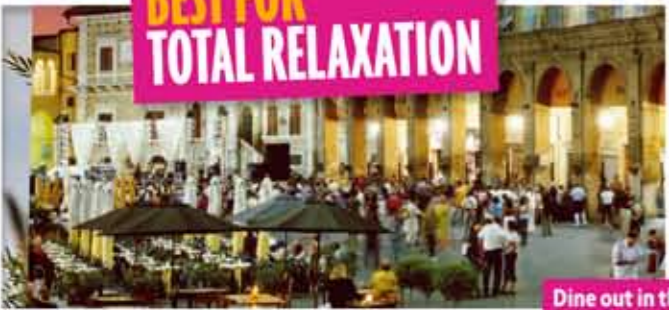


Bella Italia!

This summer Italy has something for everyone – and at the right price!

BEST FOR TOTAL RELAXATION



Dine out in the beautiful old town of Fermo

FRANCAVILLA D'ETE MARCHES

OUT AND ABOUT Between the Apennine mountains and the Adriatic Sea, Le Marche (the Marches) is a beautiful rural region in eastern Italy. Francavilla is a pretty village with shops, bars and a restaurant. Further afield are the medieval towns of Mogliano (main picture) and Fermo. Plus, the Sibillini mountains are a half-hour's drive away – as are the sandy beaches of the Adriatic coast.

STAY AT Casal dei Fichi is a farmhouse converted into self-catering apartments in a fabulous setting. Lazing and gazing at the views are the order of the day, from the shaded pergola terrace or the solar-heated, 14½m pool. Guests are invited to owners Bob and Ian's Monday pizza night, and self-catering is made simple with fruit, veg and herbs from the garden.

BOOK IT Apartments (each sleeps two) at Casal dei Fichi cost from £425 a week (+39 0734 959 018; www.casaldeifichi.com). Flights to Ancona from Stansted start at £42 (www.ryanair.com). A week's car hire costs from around £125 (www.carrentals.co.uk).



It doesn't look like it, but this is Italy

BEST FOR MOUNTAIN HIGHS

SELVA, SOUTH TYROL

OUT AND ABOUT Once Austrian and now part of Italy, South Tyrol in the north-east of the country has a cultural identity all of its own. In Val Gardena, locals speak Ladin, as well as Italian and German, Austrian dumplings (knödel) sit alongside spaghetti on the menu, and the beautiful Dolomite mountains, in their summer greenery, could pass for the set of *The Sound Of Music*. See for yourself by taking a chairlift up into the hills and walking the mountain trails around Selva and Santa Cristina. And take time out with a picnic of graukäse cheese and speck ham in a flower-filled mountain meadow.

STAY AT Hotel Rodella is a typical family-run three-star that is just over half a mile out of the centre of Selva, up the hill towards neighbouring Santa Cristina, and only 200m from the nearest mountain lift.

BOOK IT Inghams has seven nights, half-board, at Hotel Rodella, from £674pp, including flights from Gatwick and transfers (020 8780 6680; www.inghams.co.uk).



Chill out in the crystal water near Villasimius

BEST FOR BRILLIANT BEACHES

VILLASIMIUS, SARDINIA

OUT AND ABOUT South-eastern Sardinia's Costa Rei gives the better-known Costa Smeralda of the north a run for its money. Clear waters and sandy beaches are its hallmarks. Villasimius is actually slightly inland, and is popular in summer with plenty of shops, bars and restaurants to entertain. Take a boat trip from the Costa Rei back to Cagliari's Old Town, and keep the watery theme going with a spot of snorkelling or sailing.

STAY AT Casetta Francesca is a basic villa for two – an idyllic hideaway beside the sea with a tree-shaded terrace. You can swim or snorkel off the rocks or walk around the bay to a powdery beach. And vibrant Villasimius is just three miles away.

BOOK IT Sardinian Places has seven nights, room only, at Casetta Francesca from £549p, including return flights from Stansted to Cagliari and car hire (0845 330 2050; www.sardinianplaces.co.uk).

YOUR HOLIDAY

BEST FOR CITY SIGHTS

Wander around the incredible Piazza del Campo



SIENA, TUSCANY

OUT AND ABOUT With Florence as its regional rival, Siena is Tuscany's less obvious city – ideal for a long weekend or used as a base to explore the Brits' favourite Italian region for longer stays. Like Florence, it has loads of churches and other historic places – try the city museum in the gorgeously gothic Palazzo Pubblico. But it's the Piazza del Campo that steals the show – this huge square is the site of the twice-yearly Palio horse race (in July and August), and it's flanked by amazing medieval buildings on every side.

STAY AT The Hotel Garden is a restored 18th-century villa, handily placed for exploring Siena's sights. Its 122 rooms vary in decor – from the bright and colourful to more muted schemes. The spacious grounds house rose gardens, a large pool and tennis court, and the hotel's Limonaia restaurant has an idyllic sun terrace.

BOOK IT Cresta has four nights' B&B accommodation at the Hotel Garden from £367pp, including flights from Gatwick to Pisa (0844 879 8014; www.crestaholidays.co.uk).

BEST FOR FAB FOOD

PAESTUM, CAMPANIA

OUT AND ABOUT Campania is the home of buffalo mozzarella and pizza, so pack an appetite along with your bikini as the beaches are lovely, too. Paestum is famed for its amazing Greco-Roman ruins while Pompeii and Naples are about two hours away.

STAY AT Tenuta Seliano is a 200-acre working estate and boutique hotel. The traditionally furnished rooms are a generous size. Ideal for families. You can stay on a B&B

or half-board basis and, given the delicious local food and drink on offer, why would you not want to dine in?

BOOK IT Long Travel has seven nights' B&B at Tenuta Seliano from £504pp, including flights from London and car hire (01694 722 193; www.long-travel.co.uk).

Feast on homemade buffalo mozzarella after visiting the ancient city

