

SUMMER | 2019

BOLD

INSPIRATION FOR TRAVELLERS

ESCAPE

UNWIND

RECHARGE

CANADIAN SUMMER!
TALES FROM THE NORTH

MEMBERS-ONLY IN TUSCANY

VILLA MONTEROTONDO



It was dark and drizzly, but that didn't dampen the mood. Maybe it was the Chianti we were drinking, or the tranquil Tuscan countryside—or maybe it was the pizza. We had just spent the past hour rolling dough, chopping veggies and shredding cheese, and now watched with anticipation as our creations sizzled in an outdoor forno, or wood-burning oven.

Despite a few mishaps—an uncooked pizza en route to the forno splattering onto the kitchen floor, perhaps because of the aforementioned Chianti—even a novice like myself managed to create a traditional Italian pizza, thanks to the help of our local in-residence chef.

A private chef is just one of the options at Villa MonteRotondo, part of Exclusive Resorts' collection of five villas dotting the 4,200-acre historic Casali di Casole estate in Tuscany, Italy, not far from Florence, Siena and San Gimignano.

As an elite private vacation club, Exclusive Resorts offers members access to a portfolio of more than 400 private multimillion-dollar residences in 75 destinations, from Tuscany to St. Barth's, Kyoto and Manhattan. And membership comes with perks.

Long before arriving at Villa MonteRotondo, I was contacted by Mary-Therese, my dedicated "vacation ambassador," to tailor my stay—from pantry must-haves (like pecorino, prosciutto and, of course, Chianti) to the option of a private chef, personal driver and

customized day trips. (A driver is recommended, since the labyrinth of twisty-turny country roads in Tuscany can get confusing.)

Driving through an archway of trees, you'll come upon Villa MonteRotondo—a restored Tuscan farmhouse from the 16th century with vaulted ceilings and exposed stonework reminiscent of a past era. Its design reflects the traditional style of the region, with Italian furnishings, hand-carved marble sinks, a traditional Tuscan fireplace and outdoor forno, plus a private infinity pool overlooking rolling hills.

The larger Casali di Casole estate is worth a wander, with 12 hectares of olive groves and 40 hectares of vineyards (producing private-label vintages of olive oil and wine), and access to a five-star boutique hotel and spa housed in a renovated castle near the entrance to the estate.

It would be easy to curl up with a book and a bowl of homemade conchiglioni with sausage ragout and dry mushrooms—and never leave. But this is Tuscany, after all, and there's too much to see to sit still. Exclusive Resorts' in-country reps can arrange private tours in nearby Florence, Siena and San Gimignano, but they'll also organize personalized excursions, from truffle hunting to lunch at a local taverna.

I like history and wine, so our in-country rep organized a private tour of Badia a Passignano, a fortified monastery in the heart of the Chianti Classico territory, where the main grape varietal is Sangiovese. Dating back to 395, the monastery is still inhabited by Vallombrosian monks specializing in—you guessed it—grape growing.



Old World wines focus on the terroir, which means terra or soil. "When you say terroir, you are not referring only to the soil, you're referring to climate conditions, weather conditions, grape variety, but also the winemaker, because all of this is influencing the style and quality of the wine," says our guide Ljubica Kostic Colia.

Fortunately, you can sample this "terroir" at the on-site Michelin-starred Osteria di Passignano, which serves up Tuscan cuisine and Antinori wines. The Antinori family owns the vineyards around the abbey; their wine is aged in the historic cellars beneath the monastery, including the hyper-local Badia a Passignano Chianti Classico Gran Selezione.

You won't find this wine back home in the liquor store or at the airport duty free shop. Like Exclusive Resorts itself, it's a rare, one-of-a-kind experience. Booking for members only. [exclusiveresorts.com/vacation-collection](https://www.exclusiveresorts.com/vacation-collection)

—VAWN HIMMELSBACH

