

Florence fringe

You don't need to trek down endless gravel tracks to get a taste of Chianti's finest rooms. Helen Farrell discovers fabulous winery accommodation within a stone's throw of Florence

ALL TOO OFTEN overlooked in favour of their august Chianti Classico neighbour, the Chianti Colli Fiorentini and Chianti Rufina regions boast centuries-old estates making authentic and approachable wines, close to the Tuscan capital. The Florence fringe offers dreamy

views and country-chic accommodation while never losing sight of the city's cultural happenings and myriad attractions. Take in the family farms and multinational flagship wineries, ancient castles and noble villas, while staying conveniently close to suburbia.

Helen Farrell is editor-in-chief of The Florentine, an English news magazine in Florence, Italy

Fattoria Lavacchio

For some of the most bucolic vineyard views near Florence, Fattoria Lavacchio's recently restored working windmill marks your destination. At the organic estate's shop, Bottega del Mulino, you can purchase wines and exquisite extra virgin olive oil, artisan cheeses and freshly baked bread; or book a table at the adjacent Mulino a Vento restaurant whose panoramic terrace, spit-roasted meats and mature by-the-glass wines will sate your appetite. Four farmhouses provide a peaceful retreat and a range of options for couples, families and groups.

A blissful place to holiday year-round, the area comes to life in June at Lavacchio's annual Rock the Wine event, with concerts under the estate's emblematic cedar tree, and in September when the picturesque town of Pontassieve draws in crowds for the yearly



Cookstock food festival, featuring cooking shows on the scenic Medici bridge. Eat locally at restaurants flaunting stellar wine lists: La Tana di Ugo and Toscani da Sempre. www.fattorialavacchio.com >

Above: the vineyards at Fattoria Lavacchio



Peace by the pool at Fattoria Lavacchio



The terraced gardens at Villa Medicea di Lilliano, just a 15-minute drive from Florence

Villa Medicea di Lilliano

Just 25 minutes from Florence, set among olive groves and vineyards, stands this thousand-year-old wine estate, which served in the 11th century as a watchtower, later as a Medici residence, and once hosted a banquet for the King of Denmark. Three years ago, the Malenchini family opened its home of two centuries to holidaymakers seeking a quintessential Tuscan experience – it's also a popular wedding venue.

The six individual villas exhibit contemporary Tuscan design with traditional mainstays: terracotta-tiled floors, beamed ceilings, Chianti-coloured cushions and wall art displaying Florentine scenes: think Ponte Santa Trinita and Medici cornucopia. Take a tour of the villa, from the unforgettable terrace with distant views of Brunelleschi's dome to the sumptuous frescoed private rooms still belonging to the family, before strolling around the historic cellars and sipping a glass of the estate's fruit-forward Chianti Colli Fiorentini or Malenchini's most recent addition, a harmonious Canaiolo.

Watch this space, as the Villa Medicea di Lilliano brand is slated to open the family-owned Palazzo Peruzzi suites in Florence's Santa Croce neighbourhood in 2019.

www.medicivilla.com



La Corte villa



Olive oil storage cellar

Poggio Casciano

Poggio Casciano is Ruffino's flagship visitor centre: an ochre-arched Renaissance villa where personable brand ambassadors explain how cousins Ilario and Leopoldo Ruffino started the small winery that became a household name. Survey the medals that established Ruffino's global reputation and inspect the 1890 parchment issued by the Duke of Aosta appointing the winery as an official royal supplier.

Tasting tours begin with the two-hour Vineyard in the Glass visit, starting in the vines, mostly planted to Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, before venturing underground for a special barrel tasting in the centuries-old cellar. Wine connoisseurs will be attracted to the Back to the Future vertical tasting across four decades of Riserva Ducale Oro, the producer's landmark Chianti Classico.

Poggio Casciano recently added truffle hunting into the mix, giving visitors the chance to join a *tartufo* and his dog for a morning spent sniffing out the precious tuber, followed by a decadent truffle lunch paired



with Ruffino wines. An eight-room boutique hotel boasting an infinity pool and an all-American barbecue area opened on the estate in summer 2018.

www.ruffino.com

Above: Ruffino's Poggio Casciano visitor centre

Piccionaia apartment at Torre a Cona



Torre a Cona

Torre a Cona

Southeast of Florence, hidden in plain sight near the village of San Donato in Collina, Torre a Cona is a well-kept secret among locals. A striking 18th-century villa that remains imprinted on your mind, the estate's proprietors are the Rossi di Montelera, the family behind drinks giant Martini & Rossi.

Six refined rustic apartments look out over the sinuous scenery, and larger groups can take up residence in the silent surroundings of Villa Lecceta and Casa Villa, a stone's throw from the newly installed, stylish pool.

A tour and tasting is a must, from the beautifully restored barn, now the estate's wine shop, to the old cellars and evocative *vinsantaia*, the birthplace of the luscious Sangiovese-based Fonti e Lecceta, Occhio di Pernice Vin Santo. Equally interesting is Torre a Cona's Casamaggio Colorino, which places Sangiovese's blending partner into the inky spotlight, while the single-vineyard Badia a Corte, Chianti Colli Fiorentini Riserva is a silky tribute to the local area.

www.torreacona.com

Photographs: John Werich

Castello del Trebbio

A Florentine banking family built the impressive Castello del Trebbio in the 12th century. It has since expanded and there is now farmhouse accommodation – five tranquil apartments and two villas for groups – a restaurant, and a winery making a range of wines including quaffable Chianti Rùfina, an aromatic white blend and a Chardonnay-Trebbiano sparkler that's riddled on-site.

The cellar door stocks homegrown saffron and spelt in addition to a range of wines produced by the estate's current owner. The estate has adopted many ethical and environmental practices to preserve this beautiful spot for future generations.

www.castellodeltrebbio.com



Castello del Trebbio



Manicured vineyards and olive groves surround Frescobaldi's Castello Nipozzano



Castello Nipozzano

Castello Nipozzano

Frescobaldi's majestic Castello Nipozzano boasts four country-chic rooms in a muted colour scheme that leaves the final say to the wide-ranging views over Chianti Rùfina. Opt for the Frantoio room with a centuries-old grinding stone as the centrepiece, or the four-poster Pendolino suite in earthy shades.

A stay at Nipozzano wouldn't be complete without a tour of the castle's thousand-year-old subterranean cellars for an intimate wine tasting. Follow in the footsteps of Donatello and stock up on a few cases at the castle's wine shop or the nearby Frescobaldi-owned Il Quartino enoteca.

Nestled in a mesmerising hilltop location, surrounded by a vast expanse of vines, the sunsets never fail to soothe the soul, and there's live music through the summer. Sip a glass of opulent Vecchie Vite from the castle's oldest vines or select any of Frescobaldi's wines, paired with dishes using locally sourced produce – you can even buy a box of the castle's own eggs and Laudemio olive oil.

www.nipozzano.com