



Golden daze
The sun casts shadows over the old chapel, still attached to the L'Andana estate, and the spa courtyard (opposite).



TUSCAN TREASURE

Alain Ducasse's outpost of understated luxury, L'Andana, offers guests an experience that is as rooted in the terrior as the tenacious vines in this quiet corner of Italy.

Words **Josephine McKenna** Photography **Julian Kingma**



In a quiet corner of Tuscany, the wind is whistling

through the vineyards as the early sun casts golden shadows across the hills. The pigeons are beginning to stir as you cycle past wildflowers, zigzagging through the vines and catching a glimpse of the Mediterranean in the distance. This is the Maremma, a westerly region that stretches from the coastal province of Grosseto to the medieval hilltop town of Siena, and is just a two-hour drive from either Rome or Pisa.

Renowned Monegasque chef and restaurateur Alain Ducasse fell in love with this largely undiscovered part of south-western Tuscany and chose it for L'Andana, his first hotel in Italy. "It is a slightly remote region – not at the top of travellers' lists," he says. "In the distance, one can see the sea. The colours and scents are unique. Who can resist such beauty?"

In L'Andana, Ducasse and Italian entrepreneur Vittorio Moretti have created a beauty of their own – a stunning hotel, spa and restaurant from a former 16th-century estate that was once a summer palace for Leopold II, Grand Duke of Tuscany. The hotel and its surrounding estate is situated close to the town of Castiglione della Pescaia and faces the island of Elba, where Napoleon Bonaparte was once exiled.

"It's a bit secret – apart from the crowd," says Ducasse. "This also means it's a very authentic region, with a well-preserved landscape and people who are true and sincere. I hate the sort of artificial luxury where you feel nowhere, in a standardised place. Here you feel you are in Tuscany, and precisely in Maremma."

Ducasse is, of course, renowned for his interpretation of French cuisine and his three-star Michelin restaurants in Paris, Monte Carlo and New York, which have spawned a generation of chefs. He has three country inns in the south of France but is passionate about Italy, L'Andana being his latest attempt to create a luxurious residence that combines elegant design and fine dining in a stunning natural landscape.

As soon as you enter the long driveway lined with tall cypress and parasol pines, you have a sense of entering another realm. The gentle hills are covered in olive orchards and neat rows of vines and there's an overwhelming tranquillity to the landscape.

Beyond the stately façade of the villa, the emphasis is on service and serenity. The aim has been to create the ambience of a country inn, so the reception area is full of elegant antiques and comfortable chunky sofas, where you can relax around a cosy open fire in the winter or gaze through vast windows at the rolling hills during the lazy summer months.

"It's about relaxing with style," says Ducasse. "It's a very special physical and mental experience – feeling at ease, relaxed, yet also open to the environment."

Designed by Italian architects Ettore Mocchetti and Stefano Dorata, the hotel's interiors successfully merge the soft, earthy tones of Tuscany with a hint of Provence. There are 33 rooms in the villa and 14 new rooms in the adjoining guesthouse, each with plush, richly coloured furnishings, silk curtains, stone fireplaces and stunning views. Some bathrooms are especially expansive and striking, boasting elegant bathtubs by the window or large mosaic-tiled showers.

This being a Ducasse property, food is an integral part of the experience, and the hotel's Trattoria Toscana gives guests an opportunity to explore Tuscan cuisine and fine wines. The restaurant's understated pastel tones and luxe finishes make it popular for weddings and banquets, which often spill out into a large outdoor garden catering for up to 300 people. But even more of a hit is what's coming out of the kitchen.

Chef Christophe Martin worked with Ducasse for many years and plays a vital role in delivering his mentor's culinary vision. "His role is crucial and he plays it very well," says Ducasse. "Christophe spent many years at Le Louis XV in Monaco, which is literally my incubator for young talent. This is where they learn the style of cooking I want to do, especially the Mediterranean one – a cuisine based on exceptional products. This is exactly what Christophe does – expressing a cuisine boldly rooted in a terroir."

Martin visits his favourite growers at the local market every day to select the best of the season's vegetables and daily catch, while a nearby slaughterhouse >



Country life
The long, tree-lined driveway leading to L'Andana estate. Guests can indulge in Tuscan fare created by chef Christophe Martin (opposite, top left) or take sanctuary in the spa (opposite, top right and bottom).



Solid ground
The estate's restaurant, Trattoria Toscana, serves dishes such as asparagus gnocchi (opposite, left). The traditional stone building in which it is housed complements the stately façade of the villa (opposite, centre) and the understated luxury of its interiors (opposite, right).

THE FINE PRINT

Getting there

By air The nearest airports are at Pisa (145km), Florence (175km) and Rome (164km).

Malaysian Airlines flies daily from Sydney to Kuala Lumpur, connecting three times a week to Rome. Economy-class fares start at \$1648, plus taxes. 132 627, malaysiaairlines.com

By train From Rome's Fiumicino Airport, take a train to Roma Termini station, then to Grosseto, 23km from L'Andana.

By car To rent a car in Italy, find the best price by comparing major brands such as Hertz, Avis, Budget, Alamo, Sixt, Europcar and Thrifty via booking service Vroom Vroom Vroom. 1300 722 920, vroomvroomvroom.co.uk

Stay

L'Andana Hotel rates start at \$879 for a superior room and range up to \$3167 for a prestige suite, including buffet breakfast for two. Discounts are available for advance non-refundable bookings fully paid at the time of reservation. *Tenuta La Badiola, Località Badiola, 58043 Castiglione della Pescaia, Grosseto, Italy, +39 0564 944 800, lhw.com*

provides milk-fed calves and lambs. Martin also has a small garden where he grows his own fresh herbs, and he supervises the production of everything from home-made brioche to gelato.

Whether it's sautéed gnocchi with asparagus, herb-crusted veal, a rabbit casserole or oven-baked monkfish, the menu is a simple but authentic interpretation of local Tuscan cuisine, albeit with the odd surprise thrown in – the desserts, for example, might include classics such as tiramisù but also English trifle.

As you'd expect in a restaurant set in one of the world's most famous wine regions, the cellar extends to some 250 labels – 90 per cent of them from Tuscany. It also includes the reds, whites and rosés produced by the Moretti family, under the label Tenuta La Badiola, on the estate's 30 hectares of vineyards.

Set away from the restaurant, the spa, surrounded by gardens and outdoor swimming pools, is one of L'Andana's finest assets. It's a sanctuary, lined with cactus and volcanic rock, in which to relax and recharge. Inside, there's a softly lit indoor pool and walls set with niches in which tiny aromatic candles flicker, soft music adding to the mood. Before a treatment, your first stop might be the sauna, the hydro-massage pool or the scented steam room reminiscent of an ancient circular Roman bath.

L'Andana's signature treatments are designed to be a "sensory journey" that cleanses and harmonises the body. A two-hour personalised session might include a facial, a foot massage and a holistic massage, complemented by hot volcanic stones that help shift layers of stress and muscular tension. Guests can choose the

lighting and the oils they prefer, and a massage that relaxes or energises, while enjoying a cleansing herbal tea and a treat from the kitchen.

"The spa is an important part of our total offer," says Ducasse. "We tried to come up with something different... to bring the nature and gastronomy from Tuscany to the spa. You can have a spa gently perfumed with local herbs – like thyme or marjoram – and at the same time savour light biscuits prepared with similar ingredients."

L'Andana is built on what was once marshland, drained during the tenure of Italy's fascist regime in the middle of the last century. Some of the remaining marshes have been incorporated into a magnificent national park that's a refuge for wildlife including wild boars and porcupines. In summer, guests can go hiking in Maremma National Park, or they can take part in other outdoor activities such as horse riding or mountain-bike riding. Boating enthusiasts might like to sail to the nearby islands of Elba and Giglio from Punta Ala or Marina di Scarlino, a mere 20 minutes away from the estate, while golfers might prefer to stay on dry land and spend some time at L'Andana's driving range. And, for something a little more laid-back, there are also cooking classes, wine tours and a romantic picnic on Punta Ala beach to be enjoyed.

It's when you're strolling along the sand, or stargazing from the hotel terrace, or pedalling past the vineyards on your way back to the hotel, that it strikes you once again: that stillness to the landscape, and the unforgettable style and comfort that have been created in this sleepy slice of Italy.*

Revel in a real sense of place. Here, you feel like you're in Tuscany, in Maremma to be precise.