

OUR PICK OF EUROPEAN VILLAS

Best for luxury CRETE, GREECE

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THE VILLA Looking over olive groves to the coast, Youphoria Villas are a collection of six designer hideaways near the north-western harbour town of Kissamos on Greece's largest island. We love open-plan Plethora (sleeping five). Its two bedrooms have extravagant en suite bathrooms and a sea-view balcony.

THE LOCATION This is Crete's most unspoiled corner, with secluded peninsulas and traditional villages to explore. Take a boat from Kissamos to gorgeous Balos beach, where a turquoise lagoon edged by white sand is warm enough for swimming from May.

THE FOOD A night at Gramboussa Taverna in Kalyviani is film-set Greece – you'll be surrounded by vivacious, laughing families and eat delicious dishes like stuffed courgette blossom and rabbit wrapped in lemon leaves.

THE COST Plethora costs from £234 per night; youphoriavillascrete.com. See easyjet.com for flights and car hire, and visitgreece.gr for more information.



A private infinity pool and lavish sun loungers greet you at Plethora

Best for couples KALKAN, TURKEY

THE VILLA Outstanding couple-sized villas are hard to find, which makes Islamlar – a one-bedroom retreat that perches above Kalkan Bay – a real find. The wow factor comes from romantic Turquoise Coast views that unfurl below a generously sized terrace and pool. But the contemporary

interior is fab too, with white-as-a-cloud decor that adds to the sense of lofty tranquillity.

THE LOCATION Islamlar village is a traditional place – you'll love sipping sweet dark tea at the old teahouse and buying your loaves at a bakery that grinds its own flour. Shepherds tend their flocks by vertiginous walking trails, and the Lycian Way is on hand for a serious hike in refreshing mountain air.

THE FOOD Trout is the local speciality – sample it at easy-going Mahmut's in the village. Or drive down to Kalkan, where a zillion rooftop restaurants offer everything from mezze to Mexican.

THE COST From £811pp for seven nights in April, the start of the season, including flights and car hire; simpsonstravel.com. Find out more at gototurkey.co.uk.



This hidden retreat is perfect for romance



Best on a budget CORSIKA, FRANCE

THE VILLA Authentic Bergerie Murtetu (sleeping six) is one of the best villas on the west's rocky shoreline. Scented by wild myrtle, this stone building oozes the rustic-chic charm that's essential to an authentic Corsican experience. Its airy rooms are painted in rich ochre and terracotta, and the outdoor space, with a dining terrace and pool that look out to the Valinco Gulf, is equally gorgeous.

THE LOCATION Quaint Olmeto village gives intriguing glimpses into the isle's past, plus stunning views of the buzzing Propriano resort below. Discover deserted coves on a coastal walk between Campomoro and Tizzano.

THE FOOD Book La Crique in Olmeto for polished Med cuisine. Want to try gutsy Corsican dishes such as veal with olives and chestnut cake? Head to Ferme Auberge San Ghjuvani, outside Propriano.

THE COST The holiday season begins in May, when seven nights costs from £499pp (saving £230pp), based on six sharing, including flights, car hire and a hamper with Corsican Places (corsica.co.uk). Visit corsica.net for more.

Bergerie Murtetu's typical Corsican style

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Best for a family MALLORCA, SPAIN

THE VILLA The low-key, north-eastern resorts around Pollença have kept their Mallorcan souls intact. For a classic family holiday on a budget, check out Finca Tomas (sleeping six/seven). It has the perfect combo of character and modern comfort – there's a massive master bedroom with en suite for you, a PlayStation 2 for them and a pool that's great for al fresco lunches.

THE LOCATION Cala Sant Vicenç's

two coves are a few minutes' drive – you can snorkel here in summer.

THE FOOD You'll love Cala Sant Vicenç's little restaurants, like Pizzeria Poli for Mallorcan squid. Pollença's old town Sunday market turns shopping into a cultural experience.

THE COST From £452 for the property for seven nights with Mallorca Farmhouses (mallorca.co.uk), which can arrange flights and car hire. Visit illesbalears.es. w&h

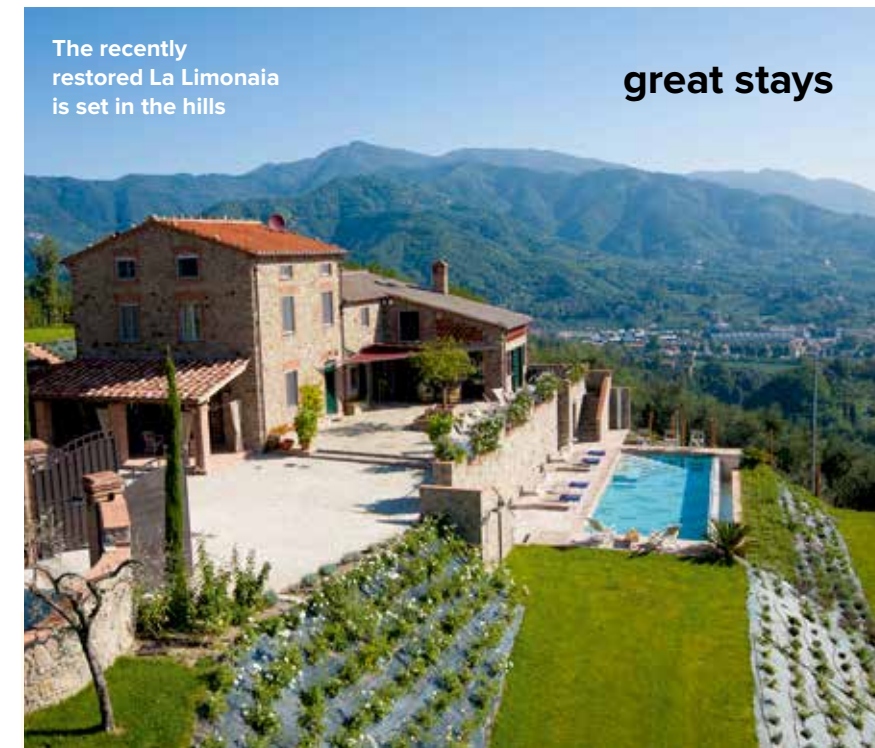
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Finca Tomas is surrounded by olive groves

The recently restored La Limonaia is set in the hills

great stays



Best for groups TUSCANY, ITALY

THE VILLA The most affordable properties in this perennially popular region full of rolling, cypress-topped hills are in the north-west. There you'll find La Limonaia, a period feature-packed house (sleeping ten) with spectacular hillside views. Newly renovated, it works brilliantly for several families holidaying together as there are three interconnected, ground-floor living areas with a kitchen each and bedrooms that are all en suite. Chat and clink glasses of Chianti by the pool and on the sun-splashed dining terraces.

THE LOCATION The Renaissance town of Lucca has all the cobbled passages and sweeping piazzas you could wish for. Sightseeing in Pisa is half an hour's drive away.

THE FOOD Taste Lucchese cooking (think aromatic truffle risotto and soups thickened with sweet wheat) at Antico Caffè delle Mura, which has a lovely setting on Lucca's ancient wall.

THE COST From £2,395 for the whole property for seven nights in late May, when its season begins, vintagettravel.co.uk. Find out more at intoscana.it/en.