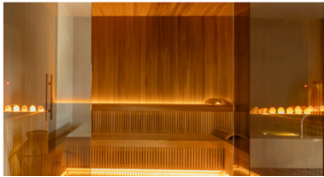


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First In: Borgo dei Conti Resort, Italy

By Lee Marshall



Why book Borgo dei Conti Resort?

Because Umbria is the new Tuscany and yet the region known as the *cuore verde d'Italia* ('green heart of Italy') is still under-supplied with persuasive upscale resorts. Borgo dei Conti Resort can finally take its place among Italy's great country hotels now that a top-to-toe redesign by Milanese firm Spagnulo and Partners has made its pleasant but modest previous incarnation a distant memory. Unveiled in July 2024, the reboot draws inspiration from the deep, intense colour palette of two Renaissance painters with an Umbrian connection, Perugino and Raphael. Original details, including frescoed wall friezes, are complemented by fabrics and fittings that draw on Umbria's still vibrant artisanal manufacturing traditions, among them smoky terracotta bathroom tiles and bedheads made from textiles woven on handlooms in Perugia. In the summer heat, the capacious outdoor infinity pool comes into its own, but the resort's forest walking trails, two restaurants, and a spa that seems to go on forever make it a perfect long weekend destination even at the cooler extremes of its April to November seasonal opening.

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Set the scene

On a modest Umbrian backroad halfway between Perugia and Città della Pieve – a road so countrified it even has a speed limit for bicycles – a great bastion of a fortified gate suddenly rears up above crenellated walls. This is the entrance to Borgo dei Conti Resort. It's also a portal to a world apart, one that leads you up a winding road through a dark ilex forest to the sunny heights above, where a group of estate buildings built around the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries have been repurposed as a laid-back resort. The overriding spirit is one of discreet, chic repose in a setting that, however, is very much rooted in the territory. Everything, from the artisanal textiles, to the honey and ricotta served at breakfast, is authentically Umbrian.

The backstory

There was a fortress on this hill back as far as the Middle Ages, but it was artist-aristocrat Lemmo Rossi Scotti, Count of Montepetriolo, who gave us the fabric of Borgo dei Conti Resort as we see it today. Between the last two decades of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th, this competent but conservative painter who specialised in battle scenes transformed the property into a grand Gothic Revival castle-villa surrounded by a park in the English style. Sold by his heirs after the last war, the crumbling estate was rescued from neglect in 2002 by the Babini family. The Hospitality Experience collection, their creation, also includes The Place in [Florence](#) and the Londra Palace hotel in [Venice](#). At first, they bided their time, pitching Borgo as a pleasant family-oriented 52-room resort. But at the end of the 2022 season, they closed the resort for a year and a half to work on a reboot and upgrade so radical it counts as a new arrival. There are now just 21 rooms in the main villa, with 19 more due to open at the start of the 2025 season in an adjacent building called La Colonica, which formerly housed the estate workers.

The rooms

It's not always easy to reconcile historic details with contemporary design, but Spagnulo and Partners have met the challenge with panache. Oak parquet floors just made for barefoot walking converse with the ancient ceiling beams above, stencilled clay bas reliefs of stylised flowers and branches above bed heads put a modern spin on the botanical fantasies of Medieval painters and wood carvers, and a brass bathtub adds a touch of Steampunk glamour. The architects went so far as to repaint a series of lights by design firm Panzeri in a Corten-like finish to make them look more authentically Umbrian. The result is a series of spacious rooms, all different, all with roomy double-sink bathrooms, that invite one to play at lords and ladies while wearing Prada. The effect is taken to eleven in two *piano nobile* suites, Conte and Contessa, that are full of original detail from the era of the Rossi Scotti counts such as frescoed friezes and ornate heraldic fireplaces.

Food and drink

Borgo dei Conti Resort hits the sweet spot between not enough choice and way too much in its two restaurants, fine-dining Cedri and more winsomely casual Osteria del Borgo, plus its cute horseshoe of a bar, where the best seats are the ones with ringside views of the cocktail-shaking action. Open for both lunch and dinner, the Osteria is a covered alfresco terrace above the pool with great countryside views, while Cedri – where breakfast and dinner are served – has inside tables in an airy, high-windowed space where the estate's lemon trees once lived in winter. Chef Emanuele Mazzella oversees both outlets. His roots on the island of Ischia mean that Umbria's meaty, carb-heavy traditions are tempered by southern lightness and brio. If you had to pick one dish as the standard bearer for his north-south fusion approach, it would probably be the aubergine parmigiana risotto, which tastes like Naples and Milan making love on a plate.

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The service

Personable GM Antonello Buono – who is just that by name and by nature – looked locally when building his team. Umbria is a part of Italy that hasn't (yet) been spoiled by overtourism, and there's a certain healthy innocence in the regional character that comes out in the staff's genuine desire to help. Full marks for the service at the Osteria del Borgo, where a waiter's gentle insistence that the amberjack was the daily special to go for was right on the money. Kudos, too, to the chic, retro uniforms – proof that the design concept didn't stop at the furniture.

The area

Perugia, with its art, shopping and summer Umbria Jazz festival, is less than half an hour away by car. Solomeo – the immaculately restored village HQ of Umbria cashmere king Brunello Cucinelli, worth a visit for more than just the outlet boutique – is ten minutes down the road. Lake Trasimeno is within easy reach, as is Assisi. Umbria's delightfully compact international airport, with its regular London Stansted flight, is a half-hour drive. But it's all the undiscovered places in the immediate vicinity of this Nestore Valley property that are the real draw – hilltop villages, great-value country trattorias, quiet roads just made for appetite-building bike rides. Sure, the distant twin cooling towers of the Pietrafitta electricity generating plant, which can be glimpsed from a few of the hotel's terraces, bring the tone down a little. But in this rural idyll, they, too, look somehow bucolic.

Who comes here?

The resort's upscale refit has seen the clientele shift towards couples, though families are still in evidence. It's very much one of those places where you come with grand sightseeing plans and end up spending days on end by the pool.

For families

The modular nature of many of Borgo's rooms and suites means that whole family "apartments" can be created, consisting both of connecting rooms and suites and non-connecting units that share a single entrance and exit door. Staff can offer stressed parents some downtime by organising activities lasting up to two hours for children older than three. Pets are welcome; dog owners are advised to book one of five terrace suites, which give the animals a chance to stretch their legs without wandering off. Pets are also allowed on the grassy lawn of the lower poolside terrace.

Eco effort

Though not yet 100 per cent plastic free, Borgo dei Conti Resort is moving in that direction. Bathroom amenities come in aluminium tubes and towels are not changed every day unless requested. No systemic chemical products or fertilisers are used in the resort's gardens, vegetable patch and olive groves, and the produce made here – including olive oil and honey – is 100 per cent organic.

Accessibility

All common areas, including the pool and spa, are accessible. Fully accessible rooms will arrive in April 2025 when the 19 new rooms in the La Colonica building are unveiled: two of these, a 62-metre junior suite and an 88-metre suite, have been specially designed with Disabled guests in mind.

Is it worth it?

Accommodation prices have risen everywhere in Italy in the last few years. With its entry-level executive rooms averaging out at about €700 a night in low season, Borgo dei Conti Resort still compares well with its closest Umbrian competitor, Castello di Reschio.