

**INTERNATIONAL**

These Tuscan golf villas are just the Italian job  
Golf is on the upswing in Italy, and new homes offer the best of both worlds, says *Max Davidson*



Don't be putt off: The Argentario golf course among the rolling Tuscan hills

Trying to buy a golf villa in Italy used to be a fool's errand. The country had never embraced the game in the way that Spain and Portugal did. Courses were thin on the ground, and as for Italian golfers, the less said the better.

How quickly things have changed: last year's Open Championship was won by Francesco Molinari from Turin, who went on to form a successful partnership with Britain's Tommy Fleetwood in the Ryder Cup.

In 2022, unimaginable a generation ago, the Ryder Cup will be contested in Italy, and fans from both sides of the Atlantic will converge on the Marco Simone course near Rome; expect rents in the area to go through the roof.

Buying a golf villa in Italy kills two desirable birds with one stone, and makes for a pretty shrewd investment. The Italian climate in winter might be a tad cooler than the Algarve or the Costa del Sol, making year-round golf less attractive, but for Italy-loving golfers that need be no deterrent.

Tuscany, in particular, seems to be gearing up for this new niche market. This is not Surrey, with a golf course around every corner (there are fewer than 20 courses in the whole region). But if you are looking for a desirable Tuscan property within a chip and a putt of the 19th hole, there are some tantalising options.



[A lounge at the adjoining resort](#)

For €1.8million (£1.58million), you can get a classic five-bedroom villa near the Montecatini golf course in the pretty spa town of Monsummano Terme through Sotheby's International Real Estate. At the Castelfalfi golf club, which is 50 minutes inland from Pisa airport, stylish new villas are being built right next to the fairway.

Perhaps the most impressive new development is the Argentario Golf Resort and Spa in southern Tuscany. It is equidistant from Rome and Pisa, about two hours from each by car, and within a short drive of the ancient settlement of Porto Ercole, now a fishing village and popular holiday resort on the Tyrrhenian Sea.

The resort is a little removed from the parts of Tuscany with which generations of British holiday-makers have fallen in love, but it's none the worse for that. Just looking out across the course, with the sea in the distance, olive groves on all sides and a little - hillside monastery, is to experience a deep sense of tranquillity.

Although the championship course will test any golfer, it does not feel overmanicured, like many resort courses. Eco-friendliness rules, and the course is maintained according to sustainable environmental principles, with chemical fertilisers banned.



An elegant bedroom and smart living room in one of the villas

At Argentario, the food is superb: there is no nonsense about finishing off a round of golf with a pint of bitter and a cheese sandwich. The wines of the Maremma region that it sits in are not as well known as the wines of northern Tuscany, but they have the cachet of a well-kept secret with time on its side. At nearby Le Mortelle, the legendary Antinori family have invested in a new organic vineyard which has all the hallmarks of a rising star.

But perhaps what really distinguishes Argentario from bog-standard golf resorts is the stylishness of the architecture. The uber-modern clubhouse, a witty take on a dragonfly with its cantilevered glass roof, oozes polish and sophistication, while the new residential properties on the hills overlooking the course could be top-of-range villas in Malibu.

Five of them are about to come on the market, priced between €1.75 million and €2.86 million, all finished to the highest standard, with coolly elegant decor and furnishings and to-die-for sun terraces.



## The course

The villas have great buy-to-let potential too, with rents topping €3,000 a week in high season. A further dozen or so villas are planned. “Would-be European investors have come mainly from Italy, the UK, France, Switzerland and Scandinavia,” says Augusto Orsini, the owner of the resort.

Tuscany continues to be the biggest property draw in Italy: agent Knight Frank reported that 62 per cent of inquiries from foreign buyers are for the region. Property prices in the cities of Florence and Lucca have now stabilised, growing at around 1 per cent a year after falling 40 per cent in the last decade. Italy has also recently become a magnet for high net worth individuals thanks to its liberalised tax programme. There is a flat tax on all global income of €100,000, and eligible family members must pay a flat tax of €25,000; 150 people applied for residency through the scheme last year.

This has also led to a boost in the market for Italian properties over €10 million. “Buyers pay little attention to the political and economic landscape, focusing instead on the unrivalled lifestyle on offer,” says Amy Redfern-Woods of Knight Frank. “For Italy, banking and governmental crises are nothing new.”

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