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FARMS & VINEYARDS • VOLKSWAGEN JETTA • HERMITAGE SKI RESORT



Elegant dining at Conti di San Bonifacio

For those of us who want to eat and drink our way around the world

Luxury Tastes



Conti di San Bonifacio



Conti di San Bonifacio's Vineyard

The modern trend of agritourism is decidedly old-school—getting back to the basics, the land, the food, the culture. The hottest destinations are authentic working farms and vineyards. But we're not talking about milking cows here. These chic outposts offer guests the chance to try their hand in the kitchen, with ingredients plucked from the farm moments before, all while sipping first-class wines. No need to sacrifice creature comforts; these getaways offer unsurpassed luxury and service. —Kim Marie Evans

1 TUSCANY, ITALY

Here's a working farm and wine estate that is so indulgent, there is almost no reason to leave the grounds to enjoy the best in Tuscan food and wine. This luxe rustic retreat **CONTI DI SAN BONIFACIO** owned by Count Manfredo and his wife, Countess Sarah, is about sixty miles from the Pisa airport.

However, they welcome guest arrivals by helicopter from Rome.

Rent the entire seven-room resort and live out your *Under the Tuscan Sun* fantasies. Enjoy local wines at an al fresco table dressed in crisp white linens by candlelight, or the staff can arrange a trip to nearby Montalcino, which is famed for its Brunello wines.

Foodies can learn to make traditional Tuscan food at a cookery class on property or just enjoy the sublime dishes served up by Chef Elisa Barsotti. She creates classic Italian dishes—osso buco, wild boar alla cacciatora and tortelli Maremmani (a Tuscan dish with ricotta and spinach)—using organic ingredients.

Those looking for culture can tap the hotel guide for personal tours of cities including Florence, Pisa and Siena. Sun worshippers can decamp to Castiglione della Pescaia beach around half an hour from the villa. The hotel can also help organize boat trips, sailing lessons and diving. Rooms range from \$370 to \$650 per night and include breakfast.

2 PROVENCE, FRANCE

With rolling hills of lavender and stands of sunflowers—that inspired Van Gogh—Provence is home to arguably some of the best vineyards in the world. We suggest the wine villages of the Cotes du Rhone, Chateaufort-du-Pape, Gigondas,

Beaumes de Venise, Nimes and the Pont-du-Gard. All are easily accessed from Avignon, which is just a train ride from Paris.

Book the **DOMAINE DE LA FORGE**, a private 250-acre island estate just ten minutes from Avignon. The stunning seven-bedroom villa set on the Rhone River was owned by the Knights of the Order of Malta during the French revolution in 1789. When you book through Hosted Villas, you get a private host and chef. *Rates start at \$26,800 per week.*

For those who prefer Dordogne, book **CHATEAU VALANDRAUD** with views overlooking the rolling vineyards. This working vineyard near St. Emilion is actually home to a master winemaker. Half of the villa is for guests, the other half houses the owner's wine-fermenting tanks, cellar and, of course, the many secrets that go into making a premier Dordogne cru. *Booked through Hosted Villas with a private host on hand, the six-bedroom villa starts at \$18,850 per week.*

3 ST. KITTS, BRITISH WEST INDIES

On Kittitian Hill in sunny St. Kitts **BELLE MONT FARM** is more than a resort. It's a

food movement. Founder and visionary Val Kempadoo is trying something revolutionary for the Caribbean. Almost every acre of the property is edible, even the golf course (which is mowed by goats). The cart path is planted with tropical fruit trees and passerby are invited to enjoy those with the "pick me" signs.

During the day guests are encouraged to forage in the farm that is terraced with a view of the ocean below. French Chef Christophe Letard then turns the eggplant, tomatoes, basil or whatever else you fancy into an inventive meal that evening. Every ingredient is local (you won't find foie gras on the menu). Even the wine list is a fresh take on organic. The Master of Wine Isabelle Legeron is curating a collection of natural wines.

Though the property officially opened in December, it is still under construction. The main restaurant and nine holes of the golf course are open. Guesthouses are built in the style of Caribbean farmhouses and feature al fresco bathrooms. *Guesthouses start at \$2,500 per night, villas at \$8,200. Food, beverages, spa and golf included.*



We do love our German cars around here. Bossy automobiles, heavy with muscularity and grandiloquence, are a constant presence on our local streets. But as the big brands have become very sophisticated, prices have gone skyward and some of the frisky performance has gone missing.

Fortunately, Volkswagen steps into the breach with a renovation of its lines. The result is a new generation of refined cars offered for a competitive price. The sports hatchback GTI line gets most of the attention, but I took out the discreet looking Jetta for a test ride. I instantly noticed the ride possessed by German cars — taut yet supple, polished and civilized. The turbocharged four-cylinder announces itself with great heartiness. Gone is the wheezing, asthmatic five-cylinder; an engine that sings has replaced it. The car is thrifty, too, delivering numbers close to the EPA estimates. Long-distance drivers should spend \$2,000 more for the diesel, which gets 46 mpg highway. There's a perception that this car is for young women

heading off to college, says Derryck Arnold of Danbury Volkswagen. "But this model sells equally well to men and to parents who want to downsize." The dynamics of Jetta are that it's ready to play around. There are many competitors in the basic-sedan category, but it's hard to think of one that's such a delight to drive. Sometimes the important thing in a car is its fun factor. *Danbury Volkswagen, danburyvolkswagen.com; and Prestige VW of Stamford, prestigevwct.com*

—Chris Hodenfield

VOLKSWAGEN JETTA 1.8T SE

Price (as tested): \$26,160

Drivetrain: 170-hp 1.8 liter, turbocharged 4, front-wheel drive

EPA Mileage Ratings: 25 mpg city/ 37 highway



Chateau Valandraud in Dordogne



Al fresco bathroom at Belle Mont Farm

Chef Christophe Letard of Belle Mont Farm

Belle Mont Farm villa