

**FREE** CHICKEN OR STEAK BAKE  
TODAY OR TOMORROW AT GREGGS - SEE PAGE 66



**£10 OFF AT ARGOS**  
WHEN YOU SPEND £30 ON CHILDRENSWEAR - PAGE 66

# SUNDAY EXPRESS



REMEMBERING TODAY THE VICTIMS OF 9/11

SEPTEMBER 11, 2011

[www.sundayexpress.co.uk](http://www.sundayexpress.co.uk)

# Luxury at fraction of the price

**ANNIE DAVIES** finds a rich Italian mix of the rustic and rare at the historic Castello di Casole estate in Tuscany

**I**TALIAN FILM DIRECTOR Luchino Visconti of *Death In Venice* fame once owned the 300-year-old Castello di Casole estate, where wild boar and deer roam the woods and where vineyards and olive groves stretch as far as the eye can see. Now run by Colorado-based Timbers Resorts, it has been given a new lease of life and those with a love of the Tuscan dolce vita can buy a fractional share of a luxurious bolt-hole previously confined to the rich.

A 20-minute drive from Siena and 45 minutes from Florence brings you to the 4,200-acre property in the heart of rural Tuscany, where dotted among the Castello's oak-forested hills are 28 honey-coloured villas, or casali.

With thick sandstone walls and terracotta roofs, these luxury farmhouses have been restored or recreated using traditional designs and materials.

Not everything is traditional however: beds are vast, showers pummellingly-powerful and infinity pools jut out from terraces. Air-conditioning, widescreen televisions and high-speed internet access come as standard but the character of each villa has been carefully preserved. Quirky, recycled rustic furniture conceals contemporary top-of-the-line kitchen equipment. Reclaimed tiles add interest to steps and rich colours create warmth.

Next April the estate's restored 12th-century castle will be reborn as a five-star, 41-suite, boutique hotel with a spa, pool, restaurants and bars. The first wedding has already been booked at its deconsecrated chapel.



**CHARACTER:** The living room of one of the properties; and part owners Henry and Rebecca

Owners are guaranteed a warm welcome with fridges fully stocked and family photos put up before you arrive. Shopping and cleaning are taken care of too.

If you don't fancy cooking your own pizza in the wood-burning oven, staff can do it for you, leaving you to enjoy the stunning views and a glass of vino.

In some properties you can even sip chianti in the bath while watching the sun set. The estate also produces wine and olive oil from its 88 acres of vineyards and 13 acres of olive groves.

London-based lawyer Henry Thompson, who is on the board of Castello di Casole's investors, bought into the Tuscan dream three years ago

when he and his wife Rebecca purchased a share in a villa.

"We wanted somewhere within a two-hour flight of London that was comfortable and luxurious but informal," he says. "We fell in love with it; it's a wonderful spot, a tonic to the soul."

Not surprisingly, shared ownership of the properties is not cheap and prices have gone up since the Castello di Casole was launched in 2006. Whole ownership of a villa cost between £3million and £3.6million then; now, it's between £3.3million and £5.5million.

There is the fractional option however. Unlike timeshare, where buyers purchase the right to use a property, fractional means owning a share



of the deeds. Fractional ownership of estate villas starts at £390,000 for a 12th share, entitling owners to a minimum four weeks annual use of the property. Fractional prices start at £250,000 for an eighth share of a two-bedroom studio, rising to £656,000 for a sixth share of a three-bedroom penthouse with private terrace, all offering four weeks annual usage.

Owners can swap their weeks for a stay at other Timbers resorts, including Doonbeg in Ireland, Esperanza in Mexico and Steamboat, Colorado.

● **MORE INFORMATION:**  
[castellodicasole.com/39](http://castellodicasole.com/39) 0577 967511