

The Times Online (UMV
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December 2021

(IMAGE 1 OF 4)

ITALY

The Italian hotels staying open for the off-season

For the first time Italy's top places to stay in Sicily, Portofino
and Puglia are welcoming guests for crowd-free holidays in
the cooler months



The pandemic has all but put an end to the concept of an “off-season”, and that’s good news for travellers. Well, it was until Omicron came along. Yet our desire to escape has probably never been greater, despite the Covid-related hurdles, and Italian hoteliers are ready for us.

Take the luxury hotel group Belmond. For the first time, the team behind some of the world’s most fabulous escapes has extended the season in some of its most celebrated Italian outposts: Grand Hotel Timeo in Sicily and the glamorous Splendido Mare in Portofino. And it’s not just the Belmond crew that has caught on to the trend. The doors of Rosewood’s Castiglione del Bosco in Tuscany and Puglia’s Paragon 700 also remain open for winter. After a tricky summer season, you can’t blame them.

Christmas on the Italian coast might seem an unlikely idea for UK travellers, but Portofino pulls off the festivities with aplomb: rocky fortresses clad in glitter, squares alive with tinsel in every shade of green, blowout parties and temperatures that still manage to hit the low 20s. Even in the winter months, the water continues to sparkle and there’s still a luxury yacht or two berthed in front of the colourful fishermen’s houses on the harbourfront. In a display of off-season chic, the fashion set’s Gucci and Prada frocks blend with the Hollywood throwback glamour of this high-end Ligurian village. Don’t forget to pack a hat and at least three pairs of sunglasses.

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Down south in Puglia, party season goes on all year round. Normally busy with tourists photographing the vintage Italian chimneys, Ostuni off-season is just you and the Pugliesi. Here you can stay at Paragon 700, which dates from the 17th century and, after its recent grand refurbishment, has 11 dazzling rooms and suites.

Interiors are eclectic with bejewelled frescoes, giant bedheads and vast pendant lights. With the added benefits of a walled garden, spa, outdoor pool with tropical shrubs and intimate gourmet restaurant, it's the perfect romantic winter getaway.

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Enjoy extracurricular adventures in Ostuni's great restaurants: Porta Nova charms with a seafood menu devoted to *crudo di mare* (seafood platter) and some dreamy sea views, while for those in search of southern Italian classics Osteria Ricanatti has all the headliners, with belting Salento wines to match.

Forget Blighty this winter: embrace inverno Italian-style.

B&B doubles at Splendido Mare from £375; B&B doubles at Grand Hotel Timeo from £345 (belmond.com). B&B doubles at Rosewood Castiglion del Bosco from £594 (rosewoodhotels.com). B&B doubles at Paragon 700 from £298 (paragon700.com)

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