



THE ULTRATRAVEL TOP 10

# SUITE SPOTS INDULGE IN ITALY

How do you decide where to stay in a country like Italy, which is crammed with good hotels, apartments and B&Bs? It's not just a question of location, cost and star ratings, which aren't such a reliable indicator of quality here, in any case. The deciding factor should be authenticity. Italy is fortunate in that it still has a high proportion of hotels run by families or by small boutique groups that have strong personal ties with the country. Hip interiors and state-of-the-art technology are all very well, but what really counts in Italy, which is made up of 20 fiercely individual regions, is a hotel that is faithful to its origins and isn't trying too hard to run with the pack. Here are 10 of the best places where you won't feel you're staying in a bland international chain, or one dreamed up by a design agency in Manhattan, but somewhere with character, heritage and style that reflects the history and culture of the landscape outside your window. With no scrimping on comfort, of course. Kate Quill reports

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## 1 LE GROTTA DELLA CIVITA, MATERA, BASILICATA

Matera, in the southern province of Basilicata, is one of Italy's most beautiful and underrated cities. Its labyrinthine medieval streets and *sassi*, ancient cave dwellings that overlook a deep ravine, have made it a popular film location, as it doubles up as a very convincing ancient Jerusalem. (The imaginative website shows footage from Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Gospel According to St Matthew*, which was filmed in the town.) This 18-room hotel opened two years ago in partnership with the local authorities to preserve the character of the caves. Rather than being set in one building, the rooms are spread across several – it's called *albergo diffuso* (literally, "diffused hotel"). The look is one of spare, religious minimalism, with simple wooden furniture, beds covered in plain linen, white candles dotted in the corners, and vast basins and baths fashioned from old animal troughs. There are no televisions, telephones or other gadgets. The luxury of staying in these beautiful stone spaces is the simplicity and silence they offer, and their humbling sense of history – a far more therapeutic experience than staying in a spa resort that costs four times as much.

**Doubles at Le Grotte della Civita**  
([www.legrottedellacivita.com](http://www.legrottedellacivita.com),  
00 39 835 332 744) cost from €110 (Dh501)  
per night, excluding breakfast

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