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Italian Escapes Where You Can Be One With Nature

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By Luisa Taliento

New places of encounter, contemplation and peace, where you can enjoy experiences without conflict, because the stars here aren't people but plants. The concept behind the success of horticultural travel couldn't be simpler, and in Great Britain it inspires one person out of three to take a trip. This is a type of tourism boasting important numbers. In Italy as well, the "Great Italian Gardens" network attracted over 8 million visitors last year alone (grandigiardini.it).

But the trend is about more than just ratings. In many gardens, you can stop overnight and wake up amid century-old trees, bushes in bloom and paths where you can stroll through the greenery without running into a soul. One example is Cernobbio and the noble park of Villa d'Este, which since 1873 is a luxury hotel dreamed about and known around the world, up to the standards of a classic Italian brand. But there's more outside Lake Como and its theatrical greenery: from Marche to Liguria, here's where to go ... beyond the garden.

HUFFPOST TRAVEL

30 NOVEMBRE 2015



Venissa, on the Mazzorbo Island, Venice, photo ©courtesy by the hotel.

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MAZZORBO: GREEN LAGOON

Since the day of the Venetian Republic, the island-garden of Mazzorbo has been the Venetians' buen retiro. You can recognize it from a distance because of its fourteenth-century bell tower rising over the greenery of the walled vineyard. Even today, hospitality is for a very limited number and its name is Venissa (tel. +39 041 5272281, venissa.it). Just a few suites, an inn, an award-winning restaurant and, all around, five acres of land safeguarding local biodiversity – and protected by medieval walls. You can explore the rose garden, the vegetable gardens, the fishpond and a special vineyard with vines rooted in the island's silty and clayey soil. But then you can go on to chat with the farmers and gardeners who arrive daily from Burano, and along the canals they grow black cabbage, castraura (the area's purple artichoke), farinello (lamb's quarters, a weedy plant that is now all the rage with gourmets), white turnips and rose hips.



WabiSabi Culture, San Ginesio (Macerata), photo ©courtesy by the hotel.

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SAN GINESIO: ZEN IN THE MARCHE

Cultivating a Zen garden means taking care of your soul. This is the philosophy of WabiSabiCulture, a ryokan – a Japanese-style inn – nestled in the Sibillini mountains (tel. +39 335 396025, wabisabiculture.org), close to San Ginesio in the province of Macerata, a village that is part of the circuit of “Italy’s Most Beautiful Towns.” The outcome of the bio-restoration of three stone farmhouses, it boasts classic sliding doors that reveal visions of the woods, amid peonies, lavender and wisteria. The owner, Serenella Giorgetti, gathers seasonal flowers to make the tsuki, lanterns that lend a touch of spirituality. You sleep on rice-straw tatamis, enjoy warm baths in wooden vats, the cuisine is all natural, and you can stroll down the gravel paths to the lake with koi carps. There’s plenty of time to learn the art of flower arranging, conscious breathing and meditation, with a view of maples.



Villa Della Pergola, Alassio (Savona), photo ©courtesy by the hotel.

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ALASSIO: BRITISH TOUCH

The English general Montagu Scott McMurdo, Sir Walter Hamilton Dalrymple, Daniel Hanbury: in turn the owners of this villa, they were above all gardening buffs, visionaries who transformed a simple farm on the hills overlooking Alassio into what the writer William Scott described in 1908 as one of the wonders of the Italian Riviera. This is a passion that also infected the current owners, who turned to Paolo Pejrone to take care of and expand the Anglo-American park of Villa della Pergola. The landscape artist examined faded photographs of the era and was able to restore its old-fashioned splendor, reintroducing the collections of wisteria, lily of the Nile, citrus trees, birds of paradise and succulents. The residences that compose the villa, transformed into a charming B&B, evoke Victorian homes with bow windows overlooking the greenery (tel. +39 0182 646130, villadellapergola.com).