

COUNTRY LIFE[®]

TRAVEL

Time for a change



WINTER 2018/19

Top 10 Villas

Ezzahra, Marrakech, Morocco

THE vibrant city of Marrakech is pretty perfect all year round. Last time, I stayed slap-bang in the middle; this year, I branched out to the Palmeraie, a 10-minute journey from the centre.

I'm not sure I can ever go back to Medina life—Ezzahra is, quite simply, heaven and I'm convinced that serviced villas are the way forward. They offer all of the luxury of a five-star hotel (there are 20 staff, including a butler and masseuses on tap), without having to share any of it with other guests.

Three sumptuous villas make up the estate (sleeping 26 in total) and the decor will have you yearning to buy up the entire *souk* and ship it home. Cooking is a sophisticated blend of authentic Moroccan cuisine and lighter, European flavours, but, remember, this is your own place, so you can request what you



would like, when you want it. Watermelon daiquiris appeared by the pool after our inclusive massage treatments, as if by magic. Later on in the evening, we enjoyed an alfresco dinner, bathed in candlelight. The villa has a car to whisk you off on tours of

the Medina and there's also riding and visits to the Atlas Mountains. *HL*
From £18,270 for three nights, based on 14 people sharing, on an all-inclusive, fully serviced basis (00 212 6612 21714; www.ezzahra-morocco.com)

The perfect 10

Find your holiday home away from home with
COUNTRY LIFE's choice of the top 10 villas in the world

Gaelforce, Sydney, Australia

THERE really isn't another property quite like Gaelforce. Overlooking the shores of Pittwater, the original 1930s structure has been restored and extended by Francesco and Gael Boglione.

It's no wonder that the interiors—clean and white, offset by bright, modern art and the earthy timber structure—are so beautiful. A coral-inspired bed occupies one room and another comes with a freestanding tub and floor-to-ceiling windows.

Outside, you'll find a wood-decked jetty, a boathouse (Mr Boglione keeps his Riva inside) and a sunken pool, fringed by palms. *Contemporary Hotels* (00 61 2 9331 2881; www.contemporary.hotels.com.au) offers seven nights from AU\$17,500 (about £9,870) based on 14 people sharing





Villa Sola Cabiati, Lake Como, Italy

SET on the shores of glamorous Lake Como, this pristinely preserved Baroque villa is picturesque enough to house a Disney princess—or you and 11 of your nearest and dearest.

Once the summer abode of the noble Serbelloni family, Villa Sola Cabiati features sweeping, swirling frescoes of Virgil's *Aeneid* in pretty pastel hues plus antique furniture, including a bed once slept in by Napoleon.

Although you can't sleep in M. Bonaparte's canopied bedstead, there are six

suites available, which are equally opulent and recently redecorated. Claw-foot tubs and vintage vanities sit resplendent in the accompanying bathrooms.

The 16th-century lakefront landmark also comes with a host of modern amenities. There's a 24-hour butler service, dedicated housekeepers and a personal chef who can organise anything from a candlelit dinner to a poolside barbeque in the manicured, camellia-scented gardens. Despite the architecture and artefacts, it's all rather comfortable.

Should you want to escape, there's a private dock and water limousines courtesy of the nearby Grand Hotel Tremezzo; the nearby town of Bellagio is a short cruise away. Alternatively, ask the chef to pack you a picnic and head to Isola Comacina, Lake Como's only island. *Nicole Trilivas Elegant resorts* (01244 897441; www.elegantresorts.co.uk) offers three nights at Villa Sola Cabiati from £18,220, based on 12 people sharing on an all-inclusive basis. Flights and transfers can be arranged at an additional cost.

Pinkmead estate, near Cowes, Isle of Wight

IF it weren't for the fact that the place itself is so beautiful, I'd be tempted to say that getting to the Pinkmead estate was half the fun. Catch the Red Jet ferry to Cowes and, from there, a smaller boat, captained by Dave the boatman, to Pinkmead's private jetty. Only a delightful stroll separates you from the house, a 24-acre estate previously owned by Henry VIII and Oxford University. It's been in the O'Dell family for three generations.

The estate has only recently become available to hire, on an exclusive basis. There's a three-bedroom main house that's been beautifully furnished. Its crowning jewel is the huge garden room, complete with an electric baby-grand piano, and views across to the River Medina. A separate summer house, dubbed the Kitchen Garden, comprises a kitchen, dining area, cinema projector and a glass-walled bathroom, where you can soak in the tub while looking out for red squirrels playing on the grass. Finally, there's a boathouse, with canoes you can take out onto the water and a garage that's been converted into a private yoga studio and gym.



This is the spot for anyone wanting a sheltered, dog-friendly paradise. It was pretty unbeatable, even in bad weather—Biblical-style rain fell on our second day—and, after a morning splashing through the woods in wellies and raincoats, our group was only too glad to snuggle up in front of the log burner, play board games and mix the odd drink using Pinkmead's very own gin. *TK Mulberry Cottages* (01227 464958; www.mulberrycottages.com) offer three nights from £1,600 or seven nights from £2,700