

TRAVEL

A Workcation In Rural Tuscany To Skip The Spring Slump

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I write about current affairs and travel in Italy.

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Vineyards in the Chianti Region, Tuscany, Italy GETTY

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I inch up a stony path, convinced my little Fiat 500 car will beach on one of the mounds of pebbles or burst a tire. This dirt road is one of Tuscany’s *strade bianche*, part of the landscape and the heritage that, unfortunately for unprepared out-of-towners, can’t be asphalted. Soon, however, I’m distracted from the ordeal by the sight of the villa, atop a hill, ivy creeping up the facade and a vineyard spread out below it. I crunch to a slow halt and take a

moment to gaze at the paradise that will be my new temporary “office.”

While spring brings frothy blossoming trees, chirping birds and the first real days of warm sun, many workers also experience an annual spring slump. It may manifest as a feeling of stagnation, anhedonia — the inability to take pleasure in anything — or just frustration at being hunched over a desk while you could be frolicking in parks.

Help websites abound with tips on how to banish the spring blues, with some surprisingly effective advice like doing a spring clean of your desk. But I decided, as a travel writer, to opt for a change of scenery and book a workcation out in the remote Tuscan countryside. So here I am, sitting on a sunny stone-flagged terrace shaded by lemon trees heavy with fruit and drinking coffee as I edit an article.



One of the many terraces at Le Pratola. ESSENZA ESCAPES

Workcations sprung up during the pandemic, partly as employees realized they could work from a poolside rather than a makeshift home office and partly as the travel industry racked its brains for ways to adapt to coronavirus restrictions. [Hotels and resorts](#)

began offering packages to facilitate remote working while ensuring guests get the most out of their free time. That could mean early morning yoga on a hotel terrace, an afternoon sightseeing trip around Rome or evening spa sessions.

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But as the pandemic has dragged on, remote workers have realized their workcation doesn't just have to last a few days but could extend to weeks and even months. It was no longer about escaping the shackles of the home office but about relocating it to that pipe-dream escape. Suddenly, the phrase “[digital nomad](#)” was spreading like wildfire.

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Margherita Piliero, the founder of [Essenza Escapes](#) which provides travel consulting and rents luxury properties in Italy, decided to add long-stay workcations to their list of services amid this trend. I'm temporarily relocated at Le Pratola, their elegantly converted farmhouse in Tuscany's famed Chianti wine region.

Already upon settling in, I feel far more buoyant about work as I delight at the multiple workstations I could try out: the serious desk in the living room, the kitchen island, the long dining room table, or any of the numerous outdoor seating areas.



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The exterior of Le Pratole in Tuscany ESSENZA ESCAPES

I use the first afternoon to take stock of my surroundings and meander down into the valley town of Gaiole in Chianti. The tiny center of Gaiole is surprisingly lively, with several bars open and customers lounging at tables. Families are out walking in the

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afternoon sunshine. The greengrocer is having a chat with friends outside the shop when I arrive, and leisurely breaks off his conversation. I buy a couple of carrots, celery and onions and he hands them to me in a paper bag which I pop jauntily under my arm.

Then I stop in at the butcher's, a time capsule from centuries ago. While pushing lumps of meat into the mincing machine, the owner tells me about his storied shop. Niftily for an 80-year-old, he clammers onto a chair to fish out the photocopies of documents he found in the town hall attesting to the presence of the butcher shop since at least the 18th century. Ingredients purchased for my ragù sauce — a dish I've deliberately chosen for its long cooking time — I creep back up the gravel road in first gear to the villa.

For a longer-stay workcation, immersing yourself in local life is essential. Piliero realized early on that those wishing to relocate to a foreign country and potentially a rural location, [as is one of Italy's particular draws](#), were faced with plenty more challenges than a brief stay in a hotel. Beyond shopping, guests may need to make use of services like healthcare, schools, summer camps and car hire. So alongside the villa rental, Piliero handles all the daunting organizational side.





Central street in Gaiole in Chianti in the Province of Siena in the Italian region Tuscany.
GETTY

But Piliero is also firm that the “cation” part of a “workcation” be amply fulfilled. She gives me walking routes for my morning hikes, where I spot leaping deer and a rummaging badger. For a chilly evening, there’s Netflix at the touch of a button and heaps of DVDs. Being in the renowned Chianti wine region, excursions naturally center on vineyards.

Closest to Le Pratola is [Capannelle](#), a rustic farmhouse at the top of a hair-raisingly steep road. It has a warm, family feel in the spacious tasting area upstairs and lounges for guests staying in the resort’s rooms. Downstairs, I tour the cellars, crammed with dusty bottles, oak barrels and the mysterious Caveau di Capannelle, the winery’s equivalent of a bank vault. My guide Carlotta presses a button and the great steel doors stamped with a giant C hiss open. Inside, under soft lighting, are steel shelves with just a few bottles on each, labeled with the name of a restaurant, enoteca or hotel. These are bottles belonging to an exclusive club of businesses that can age their wine in this vault.



Capannelle Wine Resort produces Chianti Classico Riserva wine among other products.
CAPANNELLE

Back up at the villa in the evening, the ragù bubbles heartily away and I sip Capannelle’s fresh and fruity Chianti Classico Riserva

and leisurely read up on its history, spring slump entirely forgotten.

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I am a journalist based in Venice and originally from Scotland. I have been writing about my adopted country... **Read More**

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