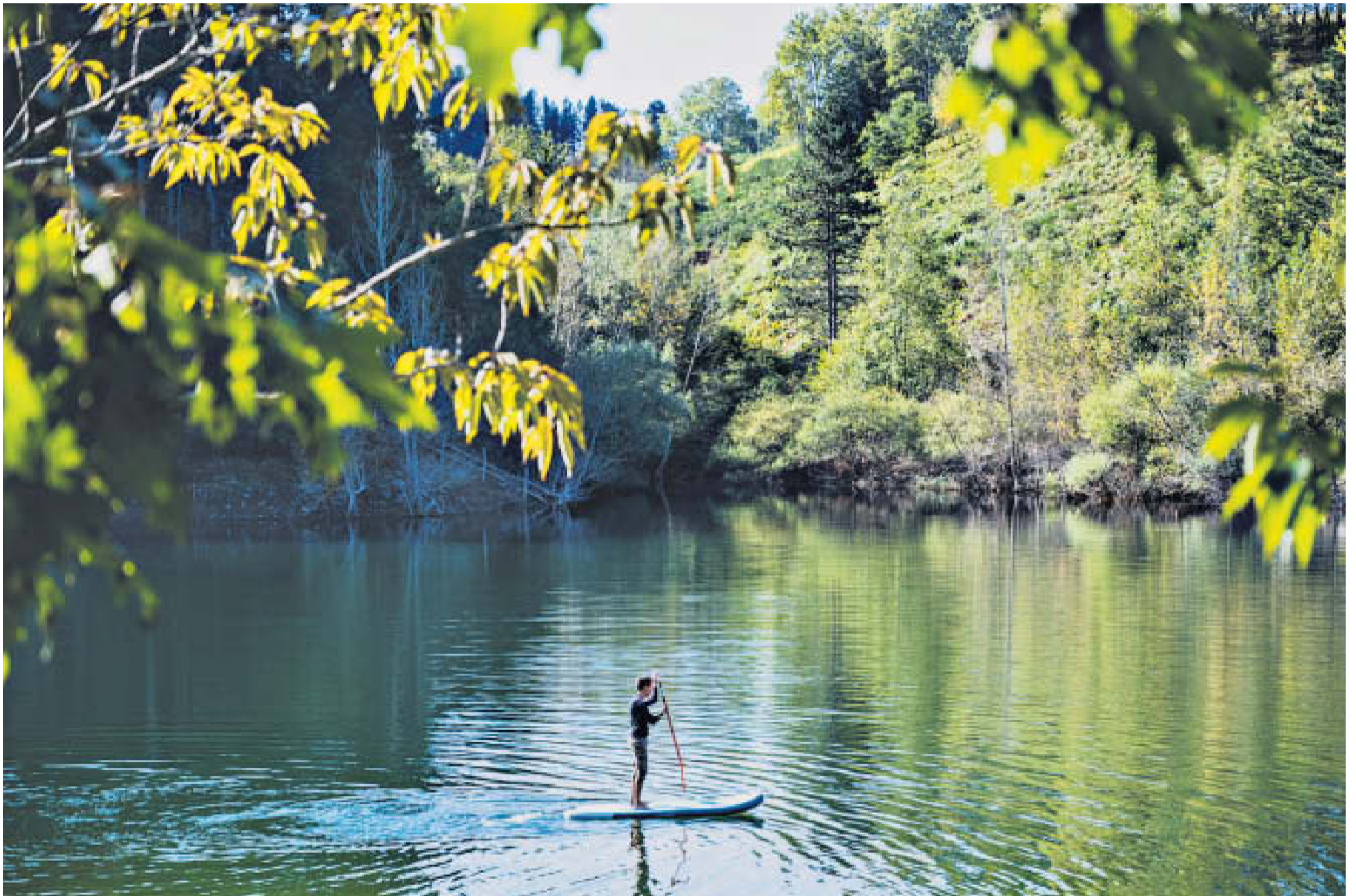


## TRAVEL

# Farm stays just got fancy

Infinity pools, yoga, prosecco under a pergola? Agritourism has come a long way from its rustic roots – and Aoife O’Riordain knows 20 places in Europe that offer a taste of the good life



Picture the scene. Your day begins with a leisurely breakfast of freshly laid eggs as you gaze out over bloom-filled gardens and pastoral scenes of grazing animals. Then you might lounge by the pool for a few hours or take a leisurely stroll through an olive grove or a swaying wildflower meadow. As the sun sinks, your attention turns to dinner, the ingredients for which have invariably been harvested from the surrounding fields.

Who would not be seduced by the promise of this bucolic bliss? Except these days you are more likely to slip between crisply laundered linen sheets than lie on a bed of straw, and your day might also involve a spot of yoga, a spa treatment using a cult holistic brand such as Susanne Kaufmann, and a tour of the garden to learn about permaculture. The pool will be of the infinity variety – or better still, free-form, chemical-free and cleansed by aquatic plants – and your organic farm-to-table fare will be drizzled with your host’s own-label, hand-pressed, extra virgin olive oil. Welcome to rural redux: the rebirth of the “agriturismo”, or farm stay.

Agritourism has come a long way from its origins in 1960s Italy, where farmers began welcoming tourists into their homes in an effort to both earn extra income and reverse the post-war trend of migration from country to city. Captivating a whole generation of travellers eager for a more authentic

experience, a new holiday phenomenon was born.

There are now more than 20,000 agriturismi across Italy, preserving livelihoods and historic buildings all over the country. Bound by official regulations set out by the Italian Ministry of Agriculture and specific region-to-region rules regarding how much produce served to guests must be from the local area, farms range in comfort from the very simple to the more sophisticated.

Like many good ideas, the farm stay has flourished by retaining the original ethos, albeit in a more relaxed fashion and with the addition of more five-star frills. But what all farm stays have in common is the celebration of life’s simple pleasures, a slower pace and a back-to-nature appeal.

Opened in April, the Oasyhotel in Tuscany’s Apennine mountains is Italy’s most recent, next-level iteration: 16 custom-built eco cabins set in a 2,500-acre nature reserve managed by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), where wild boar and wolves roam free. This is rural tourism on a sumptuous scale, with one of the luxuries being the remoteness of the location. With its own farm and food label, the hotel’s income also supports the work of the Dynamo Foundation, which provides holidays for disadvantaged and terminally ill children.

Fancy farm stays are not just an Italian thing, however: the rural renaissance has

▲ Still waters: visitors to the Oasyhotel can enjoy paddleboarding on a natural lake

*‘Many UK stays wave hot tubs, wood-burning stoves and sophisticated interior design’*

spread to the citrus groves of Andalucia, the olive estates of Portugal’s Alentejo and the sheep farms of Scotland. Hitherto known for its hedonism, Ibiza is another hotspot, featuring boho-chic boltholes such as Can Martí, Can Sastre and Can Gasi. Even the recently opened Six Senses Ibiza channels an agrarian vibe, with vintage Porsche tractors parked outside the entrance and its own farm to supply its restaurants.

This new wave of rustic yet refined stays is growing in popularity throughout the UK. David Hall, a director of Farm Stay UK (farmstay.co.uk), a not-for-profit farmer-owned listing site for this type of accommodation, has also noted the increasing demand. “Members that have joined Farm Stay over the last few years have been pushing the boundaries,” he says. “Many now have hot tubs, wood-burning stoves and sophisticated interior design.”

Coombeshead Farm, in Cornwall, and Glebe House, which opened last year in Devon’s Coly Valley, are stand-out examples of how the farm stay has gone fancy at home.

You might decide that the only mud you want to be slathered in is during your spa treatment, but there are now plenty of options for even the most discerning traveller to get down on the farm. Here are some suggestions.

### Oasyhotel Tuscany, Italy

This farm cum nature reserve sits more than 3,280ft up in Tuscany’s mountainous San Marcello Piteglio region and is just one part of a large-scale philanthropic and conservation project that includes the WWF-protected reserve, the charitable Oasi Dynamo Foundation and the Oasi Dynamo Farm.

The farm-to-fork ethos here is strong, with almost three quarters of all food served produced on the reserve, while guests sleep in 16 custom-built, low-impact yet luxurious eco-lodges scattered throughout the wilderness.

Limousin cattle and Cinta Senese pigs roam the landscape and there is orienteering, wolf tracking, foraging, swimming and paddle boarding on a natural lake to enjoy. The farm’s open-air Casa Luigi – one of two restaurants – hosts lunches and outdoor barbecues.

Doubles from £475, including breakfast (00 39 057317 160623; oasyhotel.com)