

Condé Nast Traveller

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READERS' TRAVEL AWARDS 2010

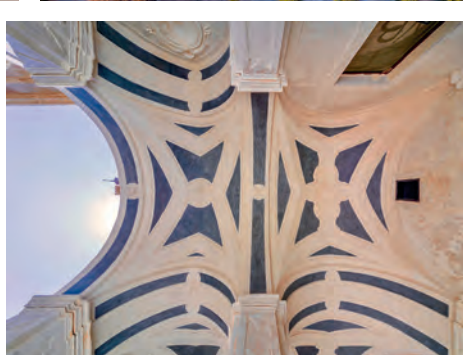
THE WORLD'S TOP 100

THE BEST ISLANDS, HOTELS,
SPAS, CITIES & COUNTRIES

FRESH LOWDOWNS
ON CLASSIC
DESTINATIONS

MEXICO, BARBADOS, NEW YORK, SICILY,
BUENOS AIRES, PROVENCE & TEL AVIV

WHERE TO STAY



THE CLEVER RESTORATION

CASTELLO DI UGENTO, PUGLIA

At the highest point of the small town of Ugento, 25km from Puglia's southernmost point, one gleaming monument stands out from its sun-faded neighbours. It took 18 months to sandblast Castello di Ugento's dilapidated *pietra leccese* walls back to their original honey hue, part of a €15 million renovation that breathed new life into the once-majestic palazzo. Puglia is dotted with masseria farmhouses turned boutique hotels; the challenge for Massimo Fasanella d'Amore, whose ancestors bought the castle in 1643, and his partner Diana Bianchi was to give it a year-round edge. So the Puglia Culinary Centre was born. Three state-of-the-art kitchens were built within the property for Culinary Institute of America students to learn authentic Italian cooking. It's a foodie's dream. The should-be-starred restaurant serves inventive twists on regional classics, and cookery lessons use ingredients sourced at nearby markets and grown within the walled gardens. Pugliese produce is championed elsewhere in the castle too, with embroidered fabrics, handmade ceramics and organic olive-oil soaps and shampoos. Design-savvy guests will appreciate the furniture, from Ceccotti loveseats to reupholstered vintage Poltrona Frau armchairs. The nine bedrooms combine original architectural features with contemporary cossetting: sleep under a star-vaulted ceiling or shower in a rediscovered vault. The marriage of ancient and avant-garde continues in the museum wing, where 17th-century frescoes provide a backdrop to modern-art exhibitions, and in the restaurant, where the glass floor reveals a Norman tower that was excavated during the renovations. The castello is set to be a big player on the Puglia scene, and one, cleverly, that will be as good in the winter as it is in high summer. SARAH ROYCE-GREENSILL castellodiugento.com. Doubles from about £290

