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A Look Back at Your Recommendations for 2000
ITALY

Sunday, December 31, 0

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SIENA CASTLE

Friends of mine recently got married in a medieval castle near Siena, Italy, and I've never been to a more beautiful wedding.

Castello di Montalto is incredible. It was built nearly 1,000 years ago and is surrounded by woods and fields. That particular area of the Chianti hills is greener than I expected and virtually unspoiled.

Besides hosting weddings, the owners rent out a frescoed apartment in the main building and some ancient stone houses around it by the week. We stayed in one of the village houses and it was like living in the past - but with modern plumbing.

Among the modern comforts were private washing machines and a good-sized swimming pool and tennis court that we all shared. Our house was simple but quite comfortable, with a fireplace, fantastic views and its own little garden.

We had privacy and independence you never get in a hotel. Our hosts were very friendly and helpful. The owner's wife is American, so we had no language problems.

There's no restaurant, but for an extra charge the staff will do cooking or cleaning for you. The big basket of vegetables from the garden that was put out every morning for people to choose from (just in summer I think), the list of restaurants they gave us with useful comments, the shelves of interesting books and the mountain bikes we could borrow at no extra charge all helped make it a memorable vacation.

For a two-bedroom house we paid under \$1,000 for the week. The full daily price is close to \$100 per bedroom a day; reservations for less than a week are not normally accepted. The special apartment inside the castle costs more; the outlying farmhouses are cheaper. There are discounts for longer and off-season stays.

Contact: Giovanni or Diana Coda-Nunziante, Castello di Montalto, Strada di Montalto 16, 53019 Castelnuovo Berardenga, Siena, Italy; phone: 011-39-0577- 355675; fax: 011-39-0577-355682; e-mail: info@montalto.it; Web site: www.montalto.it

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Crab delight
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