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THE SUNDAY TIMES
Home

Six-page guide to our
favourite places to buy
a bolt hole in Europe **12-17**

Très bien

Plus DIY Q&A: Fuse boards explained **4** Community Land Trusts **10** Bear Grylls interview **18**

The bestsellers that made us sell up



The Tuscan town
of Castiglione
della Pescaia

Cephalonia, Syros, Naxos and Lefkada are interesting options."

Expect to pay between €600,000 and €800,000 for a good quality three-bedroom house on Cephalonia, Savvaidis says. "On Mykonos a three-bedroom house that would have cost €300,000 in 2000 would now start from €1 million, while a property selling for €180,000 on Corfu in 2000 would now be €700,000."

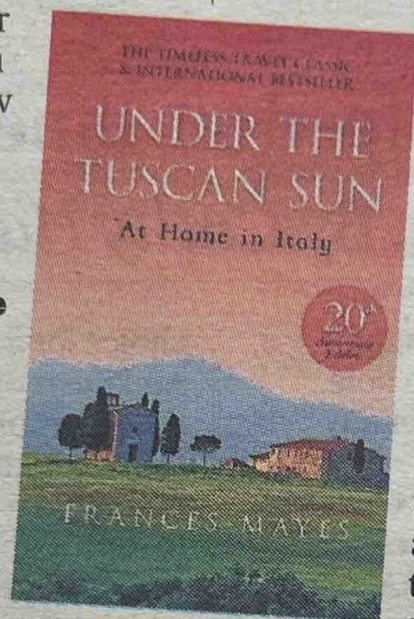
1996 UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN

130 weeks on The New York Times bestseller list

Under the Tuscan Sun tells the story of the American Frances Mayes's renovation of Bramasole, an elegant villa in rural Cortona, on the Tuscany-Umbria border.

"*Under the Tuscan Sun* drove interest in property-buying in the area," says Gemma Bruce from the luxury property website the-viewing.com. "Back in the 1990s it was possible to buy a restored country house for €300,000 to €400,000,

whereas today you would need €1 million-plus. Cortona is not the most accessible Tuscan town, well over two hours from Pisa and Rome airports, which usually lessens buyer interest. Not in Cortona, though – a sign of the impact the book had on property and values. Just a few kilometres to the south, over the border into Umbria, prices come down."



Cortona property prices have doubled in the past 20 years and are on average about 30 per cent below those in Florence, says Bill Thomson from Knight Frank Italy. "It's a charming, historic and sophisticated town built on a steep hill.

Wherever you walk you seem to be always going up, like an Escher drawing," he says.

Directly above Cortona, in a sought-after, semi-rural location, Knight Frank is selling a property that has been owned by Americans for the past ten years. "*Under the Tuscan Sun* inspired them originally to buy in Cortona,"

Thomson says. "The impact the book had on the visibility of Cortona, especially in the USA, was huge. Truly astonishing."

When Graham and Carol Knowles from the Midlands bought a house close to Cortona in 1999, *Under the Tuscan Sun* became a source of great inspiration. "It pointed us towards places to visit, plants for the garden, delicious dishes to try," Graham says. "The book is truly authentic to the area and its wonderful rural lifestyle. That's why we've always loved it."

The couple paid €100,000 for a run-down former cow barn that today, fully renovated, is valued at close to €1 million.

"Cortona was quieter 25 years ago, with a few traditional shops and some trattorias. It's busier today. In many respects we're happy to have seen Cortona evolve and change," he says. "The book attracted tourists and property owners who want more high-end restaurants, aperitivo bars, stylish shops, art festivals and so on. Now we head to Cortona when we want a more sophisticated evening out."