



THE NEW ERA OF LONGEVITY TRAVEL

WHY WELLNESS DESTINATIONS ARE
BECOMING ESSENTIAL, NOT ASPIRATIONAL

By ANDREA THOMPSON

Wellness used to be a pleasant add on to travel, a massage after meetings, a steam room before dinner, a yoga class squeezed between flights. But over the past decade, and especially in the years since global routines were disrupted, wellness has shifted from indulgence to intention.

Travellers are no longer looking for a break; they're looking for a reset and that shift has given rise to a new category altogether: longevity travel.

Longevity destinations go far beyond the traditional spa model. They blend medical insight with restorative environments, pairing diagnostics with nature, and science with ritual. They are places where guests arrive tired, curious, or depleted and leave recalibrated. The appeal is obvious: modern life is fast, fragmented, and relentlessly connected. Executives, entrepreneurs and frequent travellers are increasingly seeking structured, evidence based programmes that help them feel sharper, lighter, and more resilient and they want to do it in places where the surroundings work as hard as the treatments.

Switzerland has long understood this. Its wellness culture is rooted in centuries old traditions of thermal waters, mountain air and clinical precision. The healing reputation of its thermal regions dates back to the 13th century, when mineral rich waters were first discovered deep within Alpine gorges,

flowing at a constant naturally warm temperature and believed to restore strength and vitality. Over time, these waters became the foundation for a modern approach to wellbeing that blends nature with medical expertise. Switzerland's philosophy is clear: let the landscape do the talking, and let science refine the rest.

Italy, meanwhile, approaches longevity from a different angle. Where Switzerland offers precision, Italy offers warmth, a philosophy of wellbeing shaped by food, landscape, culture and the Mediterranean way of living. Italian longevity retreats often weave together nutrition, movement, sleep and emotional balance, drawing on traditions that feel both ancient and instinctively human. While the experience feels soulful rather than clinical, there is a quiet medical intelligence running through it particularly in the way food is used as a tool for metabolic reset, gut health, inflammation reduction and long term vitality. The result is not a clinical reset but a culinary one: a reminder that wellbeing can be deeply pleasurable, rooted in flavour, seasonality and the simple act of eating with intention.

What unites these destinations whether in the Alps or the Apennines is the growing recognition that people want more from their time away. They want to understand their bodies better. They want to feel energised rather than simply rested. They want programmes that are personalised, not prescriptive and environments that support long term change, not just short term escape.

Longevity travel is booming because it answers a need that traditional holidays no longer meet. It offers structure without stress, expertise without intimidation, and transformation without the performative gloss of "wellness culture." It's not about chasing youth; it's about extending vitality. It's about feeling capable, clear headed and grounded, qualities that matter as much in the boardroom as they do on a mountain trail.

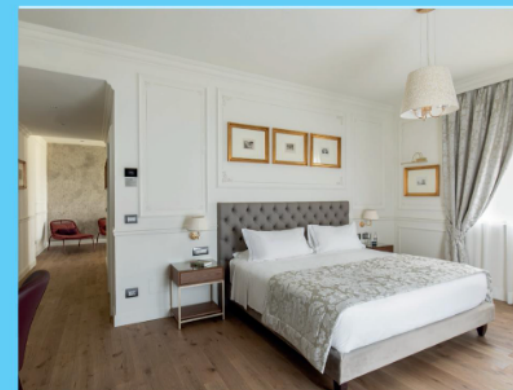
As we explore two very different destinations, one in Switzerland, one in Italy this introduction sets the stage. They are not competing. They are complementary expressions of the same global shift: a move toward travel that doesn't just take you somewhere, but brings you back better.

PALAZZO DI VARIGNANA

There are places that promise wellness, and then there are places that embody it. Palazzo di Varignana belongs firmly to the latter. Set across rolling hills outside Bologna, the estate is more than a resort; it is a philosophy made tangible, a living expression of the Italian *ars vivendi*, the art of well living.



A CULTIVATED RETREAT FOR LONGEVITY,
TASTE AND TIMELESS ITALIAN LIVING



From the moment you arrive, it becomes clear that this is not a retreat built around fleeting trends or superficial pampering. Instead, it is a place where longevity is approached with scientific depth, cultural richness and an almost monastic respect for nature.

The vision behind Palazzo di Varignana is rooted in the belief that wellbeing is multi layered. It is shaped by what you eat, how you move, how you sleep, how you connect with your surroundings and how you nourish your emotional landscape. The estate's founder imagined a sanctuary where these elements could coexist in harmony, supported by the land itself - its vineyards, olive groves, orchards, gardens and

ancient architecture. The result is a destination that feels both timeless and forward thinking, a place where the past and future of wellness meet.

At the centre of this philosophy is Dr Annamaria Acquaviva, the resort's Scientific Director, whose longevity methodology informs every aspect of the guest experience. Her five pillar mantra of nutrition, movement, sleep, emotional balance and targeted treatments is not presented as doctrine but as an invitation. Her approach is warm, human and deeply knowledgeable, and her presence gives the resort a sense of intellectual grounding that elevates it far beyond the typical spa escape.

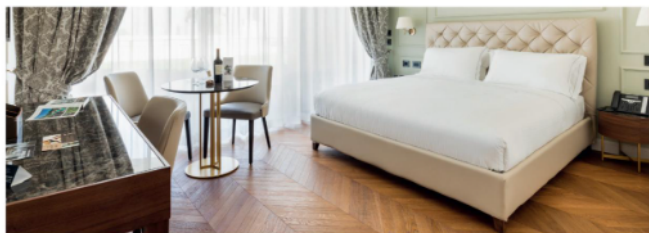
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THE RESORT AND ROOMS

The heart of the estate is the beautifully restored 18th century Palazzo Bentivoglio, a building that anchors the resort with its historic gravitas. Around it, a series of contemporary structures blend seamlessly into the landscape, creating a resort that feels expansive yet intimate. The architecture is a thoughtful interplay of terracotta, stone, warm woods and soft plaster, echoing the colours of the surrounding hills.



It is a place where longevity is lived, not lectured; where food is medicine but also joy; where art, agriculture, architecture and science coexist; where transformation feels natural, not forced



The resort offers 150 rooms and suites, each designed with a quiet, contemporary elegance. Interiors are warm and refined, with natural fabrics, handcrafted furnishings and a palette inspired by the Emilia Romagna countryside. Large windows frame views of gardens, vineyards or rolling hills, and the sense of space is calming. Rooms are equipped with everything you would expect from a luxury property with Nespresso machines, curated minibars, plush bedding but what stands

out is the attention to detail. Nothing feels generic. Everything feels considered.

Bathrooms are particularly impressive, finished in smooth stone and marble, with generous walk in rainfall showers and deep soaking tubs in the higher categories and the Natural Remedies toiletries infused with botanical extracts from the estate's own gardens. It is the kind of bathroom you linger in, not because you need to, but because it feels like part of the retreat.

THE VILLAS AND FARMHOUSES

Beyond the main resort lies the Villas Collection, a series of restored farmhouses and contemporary villas scattered across the hillside. These properties offer a level of privacy and immersion that makes them ideal for longer stays, families or guests seeking a more secluded wellness experience. Each villa has its own personality, but all share the same refined aesthetic: natural materials, soft colours, expansive terraces and panoramic views.

The farmhouses retain their rustic charm but have been elevated with modern comforts. They feel authentic, rooted in the agricultural heritage of the region, yet polished enough to satisfy even the most design conscious traveller. Many villas come with private pools, gardens and fully equipped kitchens, allowing guests to live at their own pace while still accessing the full breadth of the resort's wellness and gastronomic offerings.

RESTAURANTS AND GASTRONOMIC VISION

Food is not merely a pleasure at Palazzo di Varignana; it is a pillar of the resort's longevity philosophy. The estate's agricultural project spans vineyards, orchards, vegetable gardens, olive groves and saffron fields, all cultivated with a focus on biodiversity and regenerative practices. This connection to the land is evident in every dish served across the resort's restaurants.

Dining here is a celebration of flavour, seasonality and nutritional intelligence. This is Italy, after all and pleasure is part of the prescription drawing on the estate's produce to craft meals that feel alive with colour and freshness.

One of the most memorable experiences of my stay was a pasta making class with Chef Francesco Manograsso. In a sunlit kitchen overlooking the hills, we learned to make traditional sfoglia by hand, rolling dough into thin, silky sheets before shaping it into tortelloni. There was something grounding about the process from the rhythm of kneading, the scent of flour, the laughter shared between guests. It was a reminder that wellness is not only about discipline; it is also about joy, creativity and connection.

LONGEVITY AND THE GINKGO RESTAURANT

The intellectual and emotional core of the resort is its longevity programme, led by Dr Acquaviva. Her five pillar approach is woven



into every aspect of the guest experience, from the personalised consultations to the movement programmes to the spa treatments. But nowhere is her influence more evident than in the Ginkgo Longevity Restaurant.

Ginkgo is a culinary expression of the resort's scientific philosophy. Menus are tailored to individual metabolic needs, drawing on anti-inflammatory principles and the estate's own produce. Dishes are beautifully presented, vibrant and deeply nourishing. Eating here feels like an act of self care, but also of pleasure. It is rare to find a restaurant that manages to be both gastronomically exciting and nutritionally precise, but Ginkgo achieves this with ease.

THE WINERY

The estate's winery sits on a hill overlooking the amphitheatre, surrounded by vines that produce four types of wine. The tasting experience is intimate and atmospheric, with a terrace that opens onto sweeping views of the countryside. The wines reflect the character of Emilia Romagna elegant, expressive and shaped by the mineral rich soil.

Tasting them while looking out over the amphitheatre, with the late afternoon light turning the hills gold, was one of the most memorable moments of my stay. It was a reminder that wellness is not about abstinence; it is about balance, pleasure and connection to place.

MICE SPACES AND THE ART COLLECTION

Palazzo di Varignana is also a destination for meetings and events, with a range of MICE spaces that blend modern technology with historic charm. The settings are inspiring ideal for leadership retreats, wellness focused corporate gatherings or creative workshops.

The estate's private art and antiques collection is extraordinary. Throughout the

property, you encounter pieces that surprise and delight: a terracotta soldier, ancient mosaics on loan from museums, rare artefacts displayed in quiet corners. One of the most intriguing objects is an engraved grain of rice, displayed via projection so that its microscopic detail becomes visible. It is a small but powerful symbol of the estate's fascination with craftsmanship, precision and the beauty of the minute.

THE GROUNDS AND OLIVE OIL

The grounds of Palazzo di Varignana are immaculate manicured yet abundant, filled with flowers, herbs, fruit trees and native plants. Walking through them feels like moving through a living botanical library. The gardens are not merely decorative; they are integral to the resort's agricultural and wellness philosophy.

Above the olive groves stand the estate's native olive trees, which produce five types of olive oil, all sold at Eataly. The oils are exceptional peppery, grassy, complex and reflect the estate's commitment to agricultural excellence. The estate also grows saffron, adding another layer to its culinary identity.

VARSANA SPA AND THE ART OF WELL LIVING

The Varsana Spa is a sanctuary of water, heat and ritual. It includes indoor and outdoor pools, a hammam, a sauna circuit, sensory showers, relaxation lounges and treatment rooms. The Japanese Ofuro and the traditional tea ceremony add a layer of cultural richness to the experience, blending Eastern and Western wellness traditions.

The spa's philosophy aligns with the longevity programme where treatments are designed to support metabolic balance, reduce inflammation, improve circulation and restore emotional equilibrium. The Ars Vivendi programme offers private wellness rituals

that feel deeply immersive, drawing on both scientific principles and ancient practices.

MOVEMENT, TRAILS AND OUTDOOR LIVING

Movement is a core pillar of the retreat, and the estate offers endless ways to engage with the landscape. There are guided hikes, sports facilities, fitness classes, cycling routes and a beautifully designed maze. Walking trails wind through olive groves and vineyards, inviting guests to explore the land at their own pace. The landscape itself becomes part of the therapy grounding, expansive and restorative.

THE LOCOMOTIVE

One of the estate's most extraordinary features is the fully restored Series 740 steam carriage, factory number 722. Once a working locomotive, it has been transformed into a fine dining venue a jewel of craftsmanship and history. Inside, the carriage is elegant and atmospheric, with polished wood, soft lighting and a sense of nostalgia.

Outside reception sits a glass garage which houses a red sports car, a playful unexpected detail that adds to the estate's eclectic charm.

WHY PALAZZO DI VARGINANA STANDS APART

Because it is not simply a resort. It is a philosophy, a landscape, a cultural project, a scientific endeavour and a deeply human experience. It is a place where longevity is lived, not lectured; where food is medicine but also joy; where art, agriculture, architecture and science coexist; where transformation feels natural, not forced.

Without hesitation, among the most exceptional places I have ever stayed and dined.