



by Diana McCormick

CO-DRIVER Magnus is not impressed by my hill-starts as we snake through the Tuscan countryside in a Fiat Panda. True, I haven't driven a manual car in years, but he seems particularly irritated this evening.

Miraculously, after some heavy-footed clutch control, we arrive at our private Tuscan farmhouse on the 3,316-acre estate of Fattoria La Vialla. Magnus looks relieved and goes all quiet — but then, he is only five years old.

The farm, or *fattoria*, is in the Chianti countryside about an hour's drive from Florence and Siena and two hours from Pisa. It's a family-run agricultural enterprise and one of the oldest and largest organic-biodynamic farms in this gorgeous parcel of Italy.

Accommodation comprises 23 self-catering farmhouses scattered throughout the sprawling woodlands, olive groves and vineyards. Each is unique, and there are options ranging from one to five bedrooms. The impressive Spedale Grande farmhouse sleeps ten.

Our home is the charmingly named La Scampata ('the survivor'). It's comfortable and welcoming if fairly basic. I break into a cold sweat when cheerily informed that there's no Wifi or television — but I'm secretly delighted.

Luckily the menagerie of farm animals and explorative opportunities make sure Magnus experiences no withdrawal symptoms. Our resident cat is a big hit, to the point

A Tuscan feast to tempt the fussiest of children

where Magnus accuses me of neglect for shutting him out at night.

The main attraction of La Vialla is the food. Every Tuesday and Wednesday evening there's a Tuscan feast, starting with an aperitivo, followed by antipasti, pasta, a meat dish and pudding, all accompanied by free-flowing organic wine.

It is all 100 per cent organic and you can watch it being made right in front of you. There's not a processed

chicken nugget or fizzy drink in sight. An antipasti-style lunch is served at the farm daily. You can also have lunch and dinner at the onsite museum, there's no menu but you can be assured that everything is seasonal and tasty.

The small museum exhibits original farming tools and equipment from the past few centuries, all curated by a local resident.

If you choose to cook in your farmhouse, then La Vialla's shop sells a vast selection of pasta, sauces, cheese, salamis and seasonal fruit and vegetables. Mauro, our host, told me that he sometimes sees families

only once a week, when they come to refill their fridge, and the rest of the time they relax away from the outside world.

There are 60 guests all seated around one long trestle table complete with gingham tablecloth and candlelight, enjoying beautifully uncomplicated food.

Another big draw are the vineyards. Guests get to sample all the wines harvested on the farm. They're produced biodynamically, which means they are free from artificial chemicals. Guilt-free drinking, in other words.

Children are welcomed with



Italian hospitality: A banquet at the child-friendly Tuscan farmhouse

open arms everywhere at La Vialla, and, despite the language barriers, Magnus always has like-minded companions to chase the cats with.

There are plenty of options for day trips to nearby Tuscan towns and cities. For sporty types you have the choice of horse-riding or renting mountain bikes. Given the difficulty my Panda had getting up some of the gravel tracks, cycling wouldn't be for the faint-hearted.

But the beauty of La Vialla is its simplicity. It's a sanctuary of sorts and a tribute to proper Italian food.

When I was presented with a slimy slice of processed pizza at the airport I found myself craving a simple slice of La Vialla.

TRAVEL FACTS

British Airways (0844 493 0787, ba.com) flies to Florence from London City and Gatwick, from £132 return. Farmhouses at La Vialla (0039 0575 430020, laviolla.it) sleeping between two and seven people are available between April and October, from £100 per day. Cats and dogs are welcome.

CHECKING IN



HONOR BLACKMAN

WHERE DO YOU HOLIDAY?

I ADORE short trips to Paris or Amsterdam (pictured) where I can visit the galleries. But my favourite type of holiday is a villa with a garden and a swimming pool with my two grown-up children and grandchildren.

FAVOURITE DESTINATION?

Spain, where I have a small place. I do love sunshine. When I was married to my second husband, Maurice Kaufman, we used to cover ourselves in oil and turn over as if on a spit. Now I retire to the shade.

MOST MEMORABLE TRIP?

I MADE Shalako in Spain with Sean Connery as well as The Man In The Moon. I took the children to Sydney for eight months when I was appearing in Move Over Mrs Markham. For Goldfinger, made in 1964, we filmed in Kentucky and Miami as well as Pinewood.

WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO NEXT?

I'D LOVE to be in New England when all the leaves are so colourful in the autumn.

WITH WHOM DO YOU TRAVEL?

IDEALLY I'd like never to travel without my children and grandchildren. For my recent birthday [Honor turned 89 last month], my son took me on a wonderful short holiday to Sussex.



Pictures: GETTY/REX

HOW DO YOU PASS THE TIME AT THE AIRPORT AND ON FLIGHTS?

AT THE moment any spare time is spent writing my memories of being a World War II evacuee for a forthcoming BBC TV programme.

■ THIS year marks the 50th anniversary of the release of Goldfinger, in which Honor played Pussy Galore.

JOHN MCENTEE