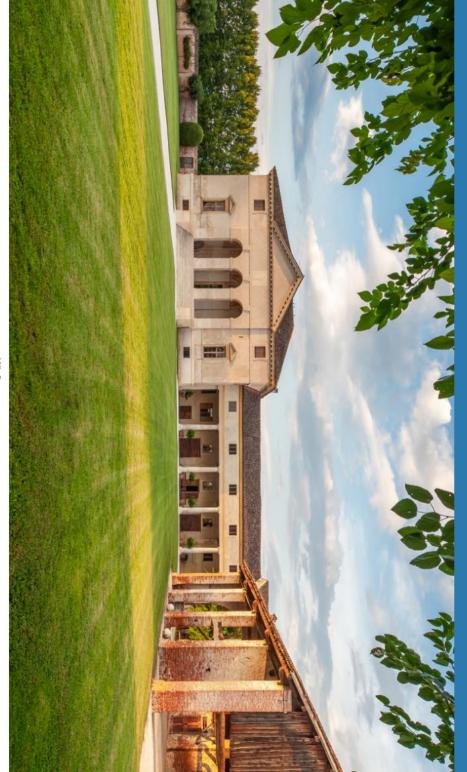
The palatial Veneto villas for an Italian house party

An atmospheric 16th-century stay is the ideal introduction to this beautiful region, says Matthew Bell



LANDMARK TRUST Villa Saraceno

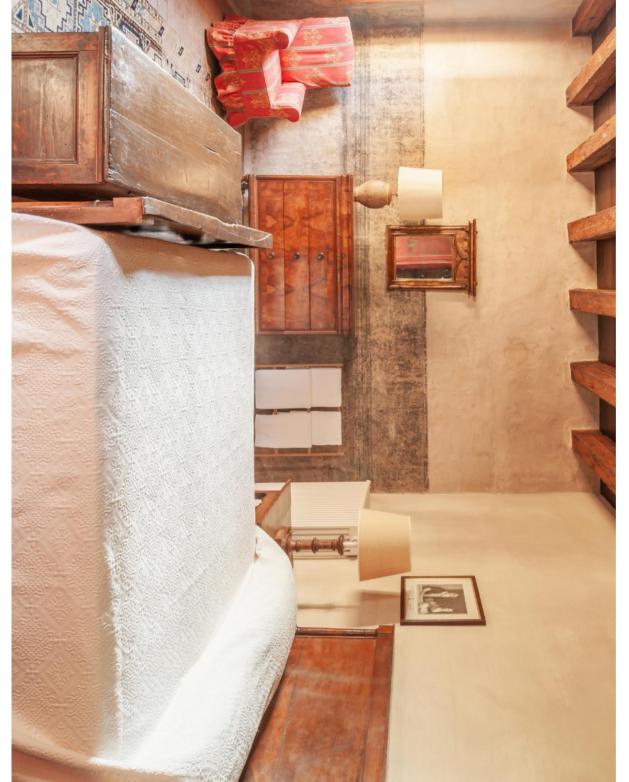


Stansted. It's similar to when everyone was getting married, but now they all weekend birthday celebrations are stacking up like Ryanair jets once did over dearest for a weekend of revelry? That is the thought process that many of my have babies too. friends and contemporaries seem to be going through — the invitations to ou know you're hurtling towards 40 when you would rather go on do both? Rent a 16-bedroom villa and fill it with your nearest and holiday in Italy than throw an all-night party for friends. But why not

Event there were not a nanny in eight when I ctayed at Villa Caraceno in the

the other Palladian villas of the Veneto. a house so important that Unesco has deemed it a world heritage site — with all champagne and party until an unsensible bedtime under the frescoed ceilings of Palladian villa, without squawks of "Daddy, I'm bored". We could drink Padua, Verona and Vicenza, along with the neoclassical proportions of this home or had yet to beget any, so we were free to admire the nearby towns of assemble a party of friends who were either thrilled to leave their children at and Milan in the east, and Bologna in the south. Our host had managed to agricultural plain in the shadow of the Dolomites. It stretches towards Verona Veneto. This is the region that surrounds Venice, its capital, forming an Except there was not a nappy in sight when I stayed at Villa Saraceno, in the

smaller, less significant buildings, and set up the Landmark Trust (LT) to let National Trust, he decided it was a pity that the organisation was unable to save imagination and foresight of Sir John Smith. In 1965, while a trustee of the still be standing, let alone available to rent. And that is thanks to the It seems remarkable that a house designed by Andrea Palladio in 1546 should them as holiday homes. The LT has 200 properties today; four of them in Italy.



Eight more Veneto villas

I. Dimora Palladio

featuring a pool and gazebo. tiles. Outside you can enjoy the elegant public gardens, but also a private space classically designed interiors featuring parquet floors and hand-painted Vietri the house, are ever willing to offer advice on the local area. The apartment has floor of one of the villa's wings. The friendly owners, who live in another part of this four-bedroom apartment 20 minutes' drive from Treviso is on the upper Another rare opportunity to stay in a 16th-century villa designed by Palladio,

Details Seven nights' self-catering for eight from £2,400 (hiddenitaly.com). Fly

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elegantly traditional and the garden is a delight, with two terraces for outdoor self-catering for 12 from £3,510 (trustandtravel.com). Fly to Venice Rotonda, perhaps the most famous of Palladio's creations. Details Seven nights' two close by: Villa Valmarana ai Nani, with frescoes by Tiepolo; and Villa La dining. It's an ideal base for exploring the Unesco-listed villas of the Veneto, with overlooks the Valle di Silenzio, which lives up to its name. Furnishings are This white-stuccoed country house with a pool, in the hills just outside Vicenza



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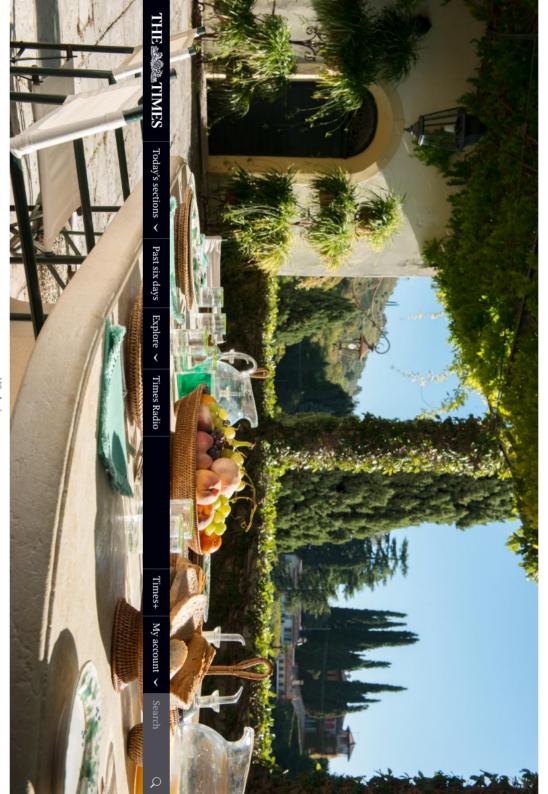
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3. Villa Arianna

deliverance from the Black Death. The villa was the summer residence of the beautiful fold of hills fed by thermal springs. The gardens were laid out in 1631 floor and sumptuous interiors throughout. doge. Today it has been stylishly updated, with Crittall windows on the ground by Luigi Bernini, brother of the sculptor Gian Lorenzo, as a celebration of the most magical gardens in Italy, featuring a maze and grotto. It is tucked into a This pink-pedimented villa near Valsanzibio, southwest of Padua, has some of

to Venice Details Seven nights' self-catering for II, price on request (bellinitravel. com). Fly

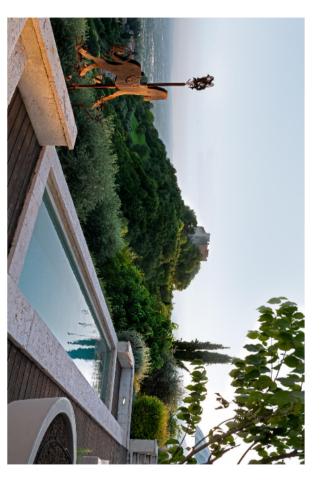


Villa Asolo BELLINI TRAVEL

5. Villa Asolo

the dampness. decor of pinks and pale greens makes it feel like a Venetian palazzo, but without an hour north of Venice to the charming hill town of Asolo. Centred on a perfect views. This 17th-century villa is set in acres of gardens with a splendid pool. A piazza, it's a well-kept secret, loved for its old-world glamour and far-reaching If you love the Veneto's towns and palaces but find the flatness a bit much, drive

Fly to Venice Details Seven nights' self-catering for 13, price on request (bellinitravel. com).



Casa Asolo HIDDEN ITALY

6. Casa Asolo

A smaller option in Asolo is this stylish house, with far-reaching views across the valley from its terrace and infinity pool. It features exposed stonework and wooden floorboards, plus luxurious touches such as marble-clad baths. But the best thing about it is the mesmerising views, which make you feel as though you're perched in a crow's nest. Children will like the 12-acre gardens, but access is not easy for the less able.

Details Seven nights' self-catering for six from £2,967 (<u>hiddenitaly.com</u>). Fly to Venice



7. Il Tempietto

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to the pool within the park. columns where you can eat lunch and dinner in the summer months, and access open fire and plenty of books to while away the winter. There's also a loggia with and had a makeover in 2009. It has two bedrooms, a cosy sitting room with an without the expense. It was built in 1822 in the grounds of the Frasanelle estate This delightful neoclassical lodge has all the grandeur of a Palladian villa but

to Venice Details Seven nights' self-catering for four from £830 (trustandtravel.com). Fly

8. Villa La Quadrata

you can wander down through the rose garden to the striped pool for drinks at of the Euganean Hills. your own bar. The nearest village is the charming Bastia di Rovolon, on the edge has ten acres dotted with modern sculptures. After lunch on the covered terrace, An excellent choice for a family get-together, this traditional 19th-century villa

Details Four nights' self-catering for 15 from £1,330 (villalaquadrata.it). Fly to

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