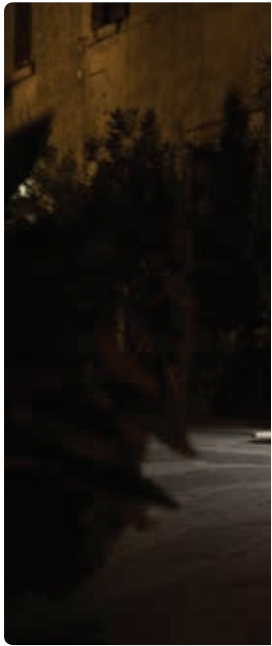




ITALIAN SOJOURN

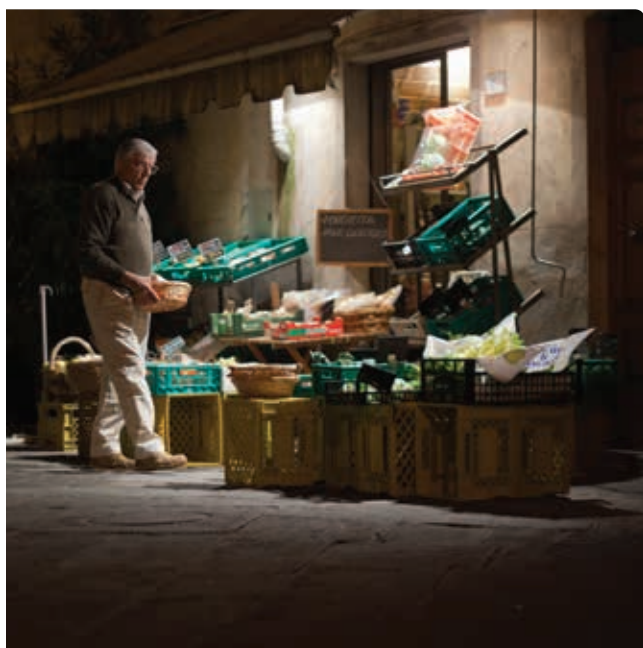
When a group of longtime friends spends a week at a storybook estate in Tuscany, complete with local chef and a romantic surprise, it could become the trip of a lifetime.





JENNA BUSH-HAGER KNOWS a thing or two about traveling. Personally committed to myriad causes around the globe, she spends most of her time abroad in her work with UNICEF, helping children in need. But not all of her high-flying journeys involve labor over leisure. Recently, the two-time author and regular *Today* show correspondent took time off to tour Tuscany with her husband of four years, Henry Hager, and eight of their closest friends. The tight-knit group checked into the luxurious and sprawling Il Campanile, located near Siena on a private estate originally built by the Arrighieri del Porrina family, medieval members of Longobard nobility.

"It was amazing," says Bush-Hager about the experience. "From the second we arrived everyone was so gracious and kind. We had such high expectations, and every single one of them was met." ➔



Moments to Treasure

When former first daughter Jenna Bush-Hager and close friends travel to a 14th century hilltop estate in Tuscany, lifelong memories become a daily departure. BY LAUREN PAIGE KENNEDY

Il Campanile

The breathtaking estate is a mix of 14th-century ambiance and 21st-century amenities with original architecture restored, brick by brick, in all three of the guest residences—La Villetta, Villa Belleza and Villa Collina. Think fully equipped, state-of-the-art kitchens with private chefs and cooking demonstrations, roaring fireplaces outfitted with pizza ovens, and a serene swimming pool surrounded by chaise lounges and lush Italian terrain. With nine bedrooms, nine and a half baths and 12,700 square feet for roaming and relaxing—the only reason to venture off the estate is to explore the nearby rolling hills and picturesque towns.

“WE SAMPLED SPECIAL WINES FROM TUSCANY AND MET THE PEOPLE WHO OWN THE VINEYARDS AND HEARD THEIR STORIES. THOSE DAYS WERE JUST UNBELIEVABLE.”

The friends' escape brought many adventures. Among the most memorable, Bush-Hager describes a starlit evening when a couple among them got engaged to the surprise and delight of everyone in attendance. Surrounded by their closest pals, the newly betrothed celebrated well into the night in “the most romantic place imaginable,” Bush-Hager gushes.

“We'd always planned to dress up and have a masquerade-themed last meal,” she says. “We all brought cocktail dresses, and the boys their tuxedos or suits, but we didn't know our friends would be engaged, so of course that made it even more special. And we went around the table and gave toasts to the trip, and shared our favorite memories, and toasted the future bride and groom. It was a wonderful engagement!”

Exploring Tuscany

But there were plenty of other once-in-a-lifetime moments along the way. For instance, in Siena, the friends were directed by the Il Campanile chef to a truly hidden gem. “We walked all around the town, saw the old church and strolled the streets and shops. And then we went to a little restaurant that we would never have known about if Sophie the chef hadn't recommended it,” she recalls.

They also toured the region's array of vineyards. “We sampled special wines from Tuscany and met the people who own the vineyards—these amazing people—and heard their stories. Those days were just unbelievable.”

Bush-Hager, who's frequently photographed by the tabloids working up a sweat while taking New York City spin classes, recounts the group bike trek they took into the Italian countryside.

“We're all super-athletic, but the hills of Tuscany were a bit more than we bargained for,” she says, laughing. “It was hard, but also really cool because we saw all these medieval towns and stopped at a vineyard, and we ended up at the owner of the bicycle tour's home, off a dirt road with his kids running around. His wife cooked us this very fresh, really delicious, really authentic meal and told us all these wonderful tales. It was lovely to sit in his garden, their home and backyard, and [enjoy a meal] they would serve to their own family. Those are the authentic moments with people who live in the region that we loved.”

Savoring the Culture

But Bush-Hager has a special spot in her heart for the Il Campanile estate itself. “On one of our favorite nights,” she recalls, “we had a chef come in and cook pizza in the pizza ovens in the house, right there in the courtyard. And on another night Sophie gave us a cooking lesson, and we made this incredible menu together. It was great learning the customs and culture of Italy through food.”

So what did they prepare in the kitchen that night? “Sophie taught us how to make homemade pasta, which is a very complicated process if you've ever done it. Plus bruschetta,” she recalls. “Sophie brought in all the ingredients from her own garden. It couldn't have been any fresher. We also made two kinds

**DOING WELL
BY DOING GOOD**

Once famed for keeping her Secret Service detail on its toes—she and her sister, Barbara, loved nothing more than outsmarting and losing the agents assigned to them—a more seasoned Jenna Bush-Hager now focuses on work, travel, philanthropy and social consciousness, not hijinks.

**UNICEF'S NEXT
GENERATION**

Bush-Hager is the chair of Next Generation, launched in 2009 to “save, protect and improve the lives of children around the world,” according to the organization's website.

The former first daughter adds, “By volunteering, fundraising and advocating for UNICEF's lifesaving programs, we hope to mobilize a new generation and end the senseless deaths of so many young children.” The group tackles malnutrition as a first-line defense in developing nations, plus raises funds and awareness.

UNICEFUSA.ORG/ABOUT/UNICEFS-NEXT-GENERATION

THE NOVO PROJECT

Close friends and founders of The Novo Project, Bush-Hager and Mia Baxter “share a passion for travel, food, art, stories and photos of the people and things that are making an impact in the global community,” claims their website. Its mission is to spotlight game-changers, thought-influencers and serve as inspiration for innovations in design and creative pursuits. For example, “we might highlight a sustainable bakery,” Bush-Hager tells us. “Or anything that shapes our culture.”

THENOVOPROJECT.COM



of sauces, one with vegetables and one classic bolognese sauce. And tiramisu for dessert...The typical, delicious Italian meal.”

On the Road Again

Bush-Hager was in London this summer to broadcast a story on the Olympics for NBC, and next she will “travel around Europe a bit,” she says. “I've been...a few times; Henry and I are trying to find someplace new to explore.”

They also want to do more jetsetting before starting a family, which she demurely admits her parents, George W. and former first lady Laura Bush, would love to see happen soon. For now, the couple is quite content with “our pet Barney,” once famously known as America's first dog, now pushing 13 years old. Besides, she insists, there are so many more exotic lands to discover.

“I've always had serious wanderlust,” she explains. “My husband and I both have jobs that keep us traveling incessantly. I've never been to Asia, and I'm really hoping to get there sooner rather than later. I'm also dying to go to India. I'd say those will be my two next trips whenever I get a second. And sometimes it's nice, since we're so busy, to just have a weekend at home in New York—it feels almost luxurious. But I love, love, love traveling.” ☺





**CELEBRATING
IN STYLE**

The group threw a formal masquerade ball on the last night of the trip, a fitting way to top off the week of vineyard and bicycle tours and candlelit dinners under the Tuscan moon.

