

COUNTRY LIFE[®]

TRAVEL

Come on in!



WINTER 2009/10

Heights of luxury

Flora Howard reports on hotel news

New doors open

Redefining luxury deep within the city's *medina*, the Royal Mansour, Marrakech, is made up of a labyrinth of tunnels leading to 53 individual and private *riads* (00 21 25 24 37 83 39; www.royalmansour.ma)



Castel Monastero

In March 2010, Gordon Ramsay will launch a fine-dining restaurant and cookery school at Castel Monastero, Tuscany, where guests can learn to cook his dishes under the watchful eye of Alessandro Delfanti. Set in 1,000-year-old walls above the Ombrone Valley, this 76-room retreat has 13th-century wine cellars, a winery and a spa. Courses start at €170 per person (00 39 05 77 57 00 01; www.castelmonastero.com)

The Mardan Palace

Designed by its billionaire owner Tellman Ismailov as a lavish Ottoman palace, the Mardan Palace, Turkey, has European and Anatolian wings, which flank the pool. Wild parties light up the night with fireworks and acrobats launch from balconies and dance on wires 100ft above your head. From €360 a night to €14,000 for a royal suite (00 90 242 310 4100; www.mardanpalace.com)



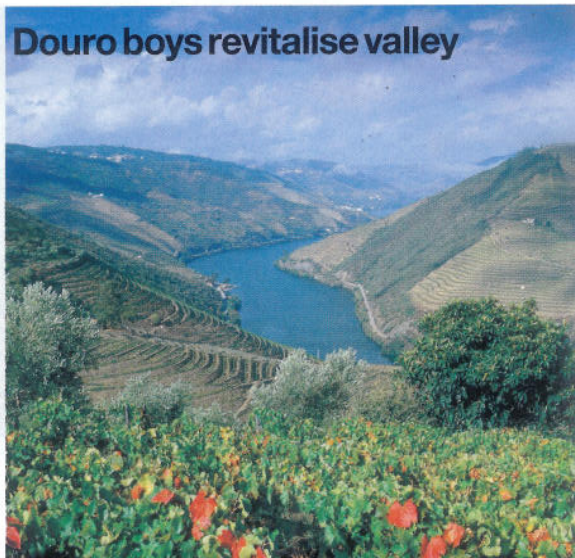
Swiss chic at Villars

The stylish old Swiss skiing resort of Villars has a new five-star hotel. The squeaky-clean Chalet Royalp Hotel & Spa has superb beds and food, plus a fantastical swimming pool with a roaring fire and views to the Dents du Midi. You can ski down the mountain to the hotel door—wild by torchlight—and travel up it to the nearby train station, an atmospheric journey from Bex (1hr 40min from Geneva, buy an all-inclusive Swiss rail pass).

Villars is chic and reassuringly traditional—patrons include David Coulthard, Jacques Villeneuve, Roger Moore, Vladimir Putin (reputedly) and the Rolling Stones, who, cashless, had to wash up after lunch at the ancient Refuge de Fricence restaurant. Set on a plateau above the vineyards of Lake Geneva in the Vaudoise Alps, Villars has family friendly skiing, including the 10,000ft glacier at Les Diablalets, but beware indifferent conditions on lower slopes. A week's stay through Inghams (020-8780 4433; www.inghams.co.uk), including flights, costs from £1,528. Chalet Royalp (00 41 24 495 9090; www.royalp.ch).



Douro boys revitalise valley



The heads of five Douro Valley families, the 'Douro boys', have banded together to market their wine, attracting wine lovers to the area. The Douro is unspoilt, and the new Hotel Aquapura, Regia, aims to attract those seeking an alternative to Tuscany or Provence. Two hours upriver from Porto's port cellars, it's a 19th-century manor house with a spa and infinity pool above the river. From €250 a night (00 35 1 254 660 600; www.aquapurahotels.com).