



Above: Renaissance jousting festival in Umbria
Credit: Gino Cianci, Courtesy: Fototeca ENIT

Left: Perugia's Fontana Maggiore at Piazza IV Novembre
Credit: Vito Arcomano, Courtesy: Fototeca ENIT

UMBRIA

Holiday

By Monique Burns

Medieval hill-towns like Assisi, Orvieto, Perugia and Spoleto perch high above lush valleys. Family-owned vineyards produce world-class wines and age-old olive groves yield fragrant extra virgin oils. From local farms come organic pork and lamb, lentils and chickpeas. Thick forests of oaks, elms and chestnuts shelter the region's prized black truffles.

Known as "Italy's green heart," Umbria tempts all the senses. But it also transports the soul. The region's misty blue hills inspired the likes of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Clare, St. Benedict, and St. Valentine, patron saint of lovers. Today, visitors explore rock-bound hermitages, hilltop shrines, and cathedrals adorned with frescoes by Giotto, Luca Signorelli, and Perugino, who schooled the great Renaissance painter, Raphael.

Two years after the 2016 earthquake, Umbria is back to its former glory. Boasting cultural and culinary riches rivaling Tuscany, its northerly neighbor, Umbria is far less expensive and less crowded. Accommodations, among Central Italy's best, include inns, small hotels, restored monasteries, and luxurious hilltop resorts like **Castello di Gallano Resort** outside Assisi and **Altarocca Wine Resort** near Orvieto.

EXPLORING PERUGIA

To savor Umbria's best, plan a leisurely 10 to 14-day visit. Arriving at Rome's Fiumicino Airport, drive 2 1/2 hours northeast to Perugia

(<http://turismo.comune.perugia.it>), Umbria's capital and home to the Umbria Jazz Festival (www.umbriajazz.com), celebrating its 45th season in July. En route, stop in tiny San Gemini to lunch on local cheeses, salami and wines at La Pecora Nera.

Once in Perugia, check into four-star **Hotel Sangallo Palace** (www.sangallo.it) in the Lower Town. Along with airy, wood-paneled rooms, adorned with prints of famous local frescoes, you'll find a restaurant, indoor pool and fitness center.

Steps away, a city escalator winds through 16th-century Rocca Paolina fortress to Perugia's Upper Town. At **La Rosetta Hotel & Restaurant** (www.larosetta.eu), dine in the leafy courtyard garden or in elegant salons with vaulted ceilings and frescoes.

Back in the Upper Town the next day, stroll Corso Vannucci, the city's main street, passing the Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, known for early Renaissance works. The Perugia Card (www.perugiacittamuseo.it) provides free admission to five city museums, including the Museo Nazionale Archeologico dell'Umbria.

Steps from the gallery, on Piazza IV Novembre, see intricately carved 13th-century Fontana Maggiore and art-adorned Cathedral of San Lorenzo. In the Lower Town below, the monumental Etruscan Arch rises, part of ancient walls still surrounding the city.

The Carducci Gardens, at the other end of town, offer splendid views of rolling Umbrian hills punctuated by red-tiled roofs and brick belfries. Call ahead to visit nearby Museo Laboratorio Studio Moretti Caselli (www.studiomoretticaselli.it) where, since 1860, five generations have created stained glass for estates and churches from Umbria to Los Angeles.

AN ASSISI PILGRIMAGE

Leaving Perugia, drive 16 miles east, past Monte Subasio Regional Park (www.parks.it), to Capodacqua di Assisi and Tili Vini (www.tilivini.com). Tour family-run vineyards and modern facilities where organic wines are made from typically Umbrian grapes like Grechetto and Sagrantino.

Then tuck into a hearty five-course farmhouse lunch of bruschette with homemade olive oil, ravioli-like cappellacci, braised meat with roasted vegetables, arugula salad, and strudel-like Rocciata Umbra, stuffed with raisins, figs, apples and nuts.

If Tili wines transport the tastebuds, Assisi (www.visit-assisi.it), home of St. Francis and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, elevates the spirit. On Monte Subasio's western slope, the stunning 13th-century Papal Basilica of San Francesco d'Assisi (www.sanfrancescoassisi.org) has a Lower Church adorned with Giotto and Cimabue frescoes, an Upper Church with 28 Giotto panels illustrating St. Francis' life and a subterranean shrine housing his tomb.

Pick up the discount Assisi CARD (www.assisicard.com), then spend two days visiting landmarks, including Assisi Cathedral where St. Francis was baptized in 1182; the Church of Santo Stefano where, legend has it, bells rang



Basilica of San Francesco d'Assisi
Credit: Umbria Tourism



CELESTYAL CRUISES ANNOUNCES NEW ITINERARIES AND BIG COMMISSIONS!

By: Doug Cooke, CTC

I UNDERSTAND THAT CELESTYAL CRUISES IS EXPERIENCING RECORD GROWTH AND IS LAUNCHING NEW ITINERARIES IN 2018/19.

Yes, from a North American perspective we have seen triple digit growth in the Aegean. Our new 7-day, all-inclusive, Idyllic itinerary has been extremely popular due to the new overnight stays in Mykonos and Santorini. These itineraries give almost two full days in both ports. Also included is a new port of call, the island of Milos, with the Aegean's most beautiful beaches. Other ports of call include Crete, where the Minoan Palace of Knossos awaits adventurers; and Turkey's Kusadasi, where cruisers are sure to be awestruck on an in-depth shore excursion to explore Ancient Ephesus.

We are also re-affirming our commitment to supporting tourism in Turkey with the new all-inclusive Eclectic itinerary that will reintroduce the port of Istanbul to our cruise programs. With weekly sailings from October

21st through November 25th of 2019, this itinerary will sail round-trip from Athens' port of Piraeus and include an overnight in exotic Istanbul. The itinerary also introduces two new destinations: Greece's Volos, the perfect port for taking in Meteora's hanging monasteries, and Turkey's Canakkale, gateway to Troy. An overnight stay in Mykonos and visits to Crete and Santorini round out this offering.

The Three Continents sailings, also new, will commence in December of 2019 with five sailings from the 2nd through the 30th, visiting destinations on the three continents of Europe, Asia and Africa including cities and villages in Greece, Egypt, Israel, Cyprus, the Greek Islands, and Turkey.

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR WORKING WITH YOUR TRAVEL AGENT PARTNERS FOR 2018 AND BEYOND?

We are celebrating the launch of our newest itineraries with a 20% commission special on

7-day all-inclusive cruise bookings. We

are pleased to demonstrate this ongoing commitment to our North American travel agent partners, rewarding them with commission across the majority of components, including the cruise fare (which includes standard unrestricted drinks package and select shore excursions), additional pre-sold shore excursions, and pre-sold premium drinks upgrade package. This special commission offer is applicable on new bookings made between now and June 30th, 2018 for any 7-day all-inclusive cruise departing in 2018, 2019, and 2020.

We are also offering travel agents the ability to experience our product at a 60% discount. Once agents experience the product, we find that the sharing of their experience on social media and with their peers is driving our growth. Seeing is believing.

We are also launching a new trade Facebook page to provide up to the minute content and information to our trade partners.

on their own when the saint died in 1226, and the fresco-filled Basilica of Santa Chiara where St. Clare, founder of the Poor Clare Sisters, is entombed.

A short taxi ride or a tough trek 2 1/2 miles up Monte Subasio takes you to the steep gorge where St. Francis often prayed. Steps from Ermo delle Carceri hermitage is the little stone bridge where he preached his famous "Sermon to the Birds."

Consider basing yourself outside Assisi since hotels are often crowded, especially during summer, major religious holidays, and special events like the Feast Day of St. Francis (October 3, 4) and autumn's 18-mile March for Peace.

Commanding its own hilltop in Valtopina, a 30-minute drive east, **Castello di Gallano Resort** (www.castellodigallano.com) offers 32 spacious, country-chic apartments with modern kitchens, stylish stone baths and outdoor terraces. Also on site: Two outdoor pools and the superb gourmet restaurant Il Borgo di Gallano.

SPOLETO AND ORVIETO

From Valtopina, it's 13 miles south to family-run **Tenuta San Pietro a Pettine** (www.sanpietroapettine.it), devoted to Umbria's revered black truffle. Join a hunter and his truffle-sniffing dogs for a rollicking romp through the woods followed by a leisurely truffle-filled lunch at estate-run La Cucina.

Five miles south, Campello sul Clitunno (www.comune.campello.pg.it) is known for its sacred springs, the Fonti del Clitunno (www.fontidelclitunno.it), and its fifth-century Roman temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Tour Marfuga Olive Mill (www.marfuga.it), family-run since 1817, taste award-winning organic extra virgin olive oils with bruschette or a multicourse lunch, and buy intriguing olive-

based products like pâtés and cosmetics. For rent nearby is **Marfuga Holiday Farm** (www.agriturismo.marfuga.it) with its rambling farmhouse and outdoor pool.

Renowned since antiquity, Spoleto (www.comunespoleto.gov.it), seven miles south, is famous today for its Festival dei Due Mondi (www.festivaldispoleto.com), a two-week music, ballet and opera extravaganza held every summer since 1957.

Book 2-3 nights at the 49-room **Hotel dei Duchi** (www.hoteldeiduchi.com) whose main dining room overlooks the 1st-century Roman Theatre. The Spoleto Card (www.spoletocard.it) offers free admission to all museums, including the Museo Archeologico Nazionale next door.

Just east, the Arco di Druso, built by Emperor Tiberius in 23 A.D., leads to Piazza del Mercato, the former Roman Forum. Stroll winding, cobblestone streets and browse handmade jewelry and pottery. Farther east is the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta, its facade adorned with Byzantine mosaics. Inside, marvel at 15th-century frescoes by Fra' Filippo Lippi, who lies buried there.

The next morning, pack your bags and head to Valnerina, a lush river valley surrounded by craggy peaks. In Ferentillo, 10 miles southeast of Spoleto, **Abbazia San Pietro in Valle** (www.sanpietroinvalle.com), in a sprawling 7th-century Benedictine abbey, offers 22 rooms and splendid hilltop views.

From there, it's 55 miles west to Orvieto (www.comune.orvieto.tr.it) whose Carta Orvieto Unica (www.orvietoonline.com) provides discounts to museums and monuments. Site of Umbria Jazz Winter, the city is best known for its Orvieto Classico wines and its splendid 13th-century cathedral. Don't miss Luca Signorelli's 15th-century masterpiece, "The Last Judgment," so sublime it inspired Michelan-

Spoleto Cathedral at Piazza Duomo
Credit: Umbria Tourism



gelo's frescoes in the Sistine Chapel.

Base yourself for 2-3 days at hilltop **Altarocca Wine Resort** (www.altaroccawineresort.com), four miles outside Orvieto. Sequestered amid vineyards, fruit trees and fragrant herbs, two-story stone townhouses offer beautifully appointed rooms with spacious marble baths, and airy balconies and terraces.

Before leaving Umbria, dine at the resort's elegant Cantina Altarocca. Savor local specialties like chickpea soup with rosemary, umbri-celli in pesto sauce with bacon and arugula, and pork fillet with fennel while casting farewell glances at the sparkling lights of Umbria's incomparable hill-towns.

For flight information, contact **Alitalia** (www.alitalia.com), Italy's national carrier. For travel information, visit www.umbriatourism.it and www.italiantourism.com