

THE ULTIMATE TRAVEL COMPANY

THE WALKING PARTY

ITINERARY FOR FIVE DAYS ITALY: UMBRIA/TUSCANY

Price: £1150 Single Supplement: £170

Dates: 19th – 23rd June 2010

Distance : 14 miles

Walking : moderate +



This is a five day trip to take you through Umbria and a flash of Tuscany to show you the best that there is in terms of culture and gastronomy. It is a teaser for you to go back and look at everything in more depth. Umbria the green heart of Italy, as it is known, has an unending quantity of gems in each category be it gastronomic, floral, cultural or of just outstanding landscape beauty. Two of the great Christian saints were born here. You stay in Norcia the birthplace of St Benedict, nestled at the foot of the Sibillini mountains. You visit the resting place of St Francis in Assisi, which is, much to Francis' chagrin, the most opulent monument of medieval art in Italy. In Florence you visit the Accademia to see the wonderful Michelangelo sculptures and then the ethereal frescoes of Fra Angelico painted some sixty years earlier in the Convent of San Marco just nearby. One night in a beautiful family run hotel here full of charm which allows us time in Florence at night. Then off to Orvieto the following day!

Day 1 ARRIVAL You will be met in Rome at the Fiumicino airport for the BA afternoon flight arrival (scheduled at the moment for 16.15) by James and Diana and driven to the Grotta Azzura Hotel in the centre of the village of Norcia. It is a wonderful ancient hotel with true Fellini character: lots of action, "Mama mia!" and "Madonna!" and doors flapping to and fro. It is the central buzz area of this remote part of Umbria! Norcia is the birthplace of St Benedict and sits within its curtain wall surrounded by the towering tops of the Sibillini mountains. We have a great welcome from Anna and Carlo Bianconi and this is the perfect place to start the Umbrian experience! It is truly fifties in character and the rooms can be seen as having little changed since. Should you feel that you may like to have a slightly more modern and spacious room then we could upgrade you to the Palazzo Seneca (situated next door and owned too by the Bianconi family) but there would of course be a surcharge for this. Please ask for details.

Day 2 WALK DAY You awake to the peel of the church bells. After blood red orange juice and strong black coffee and all other breakfast delights we leave behind the curtain wall of Norcia and climb the mountains in the vehicles to meet Roberto our muleteer and the mules to set off for the mornings walk through the beautiful beech woods to Sant' Eutizio. This small abbey was a founding stone of the Benedictine movement and we will eat lunch in the tiny *ristorante* opposite. After lunch we will return to Norcia for a cooking lesson with the head chef of the Grotta Azzurra. This is a great cooking event and you will see just how much work is involved in making your own tortellini! Dinner at the hotel. *Walk: 6 miles*

Day 3 ASSISI and PERUGIA After an early morning breakfast, we leave by car for Assisi and the great Christian masterwork of San Francesco. We will have a look at the outstanding fresco cycles attributed to Giotto of the beginning of 14th century and then, in the lower church, spend some time on the magical chapel of San Martino painted by Simone Martini only ten years later. We will see instantly the difference between the Sienese and Florentine schools. Both majestically beautiful but one more concerned with a two dimensional surface and the beauty of line and expression and the other preoccupied with the sense of mass in space. We move on then by car for a walk to the pretty walled medieval village of Bevagna. Lunch here 'alla tavola' with the beautiful Assunta. We drive after lunch to the great city of Perugia. Here we will visit the most extraordinary wonderful work of Perugino in the Collegio di Cambio and the equally extraordinary Collegio della Mercanzia next door. You will stay in the Hotel Fortuna this night and eat out overlooking the magnificent fountain the Fontana Maggiore built in the thirteenth century by Nicola and Giovanni Pisano. *Walk: 8 miles*

Day 4 FLORENCE An early start as we drive to Florence to visit two great works within this wonderful city. The first works to see will be the Michelangelos in the Accademia. The great statue of David stands at the end of a corridor which is alive with half sculpted 'slaves' for the tomb of Julius II. So alive they seem to wrestle within their stone blocks. This unfinished state was to become a great influence on the work of the French sculptor Rodin. It is a totally awe inspiring experience. We will then walk across the square for a visit to the wonderfully spiritual Monastery of San Marco. Here about sixty years before Michelangelo's David, Fra Angelico and his pupils painted the most extraordinary sequence of frescoes in the monks cells. It is a great contrast to Michelangelo's solid massive statement and beautifully poetic. After a light lunch there will be time for you to roam in the this great city before returning to your hotel in time for dinner. You will stay at the Hotel Morandi alla Crocetta – a charming family owned hotel in the heart of the old city. There is an optional afternoon visit to the Uffizi. We would like to know now who may be interested so that we can buy tickets ahead to avoid the queues! There will be a supplement to pay for this.



Day 5 ORVIETO We drive down to the great citadel of Orvieto which sits like the Acropolis in majesty on a dramatic rock outcrop dominated by its towering Gothic cathedral. We will visit the great fresco cycle by Signorelli which blames mankind for his woes. Extraordinary depictions of damnation and Armageddon, the Apocalypse and the end of the world! It is the fresco cycle to finish the holiday! After lunch in Orvieto we continue for the flight in Rome.

Of course there is always the option to stay a couple of days in Rome and we would be delighted to help with that itinerary.

NOTE: This tour starts & ends at the Rome airports of Fiumicino and Ciampino. The itinerary is subject to change according to local conditions. All mileages shown are approximate.

**For further information and reservations please contact
Jane Robinson on 020 7386 4695**