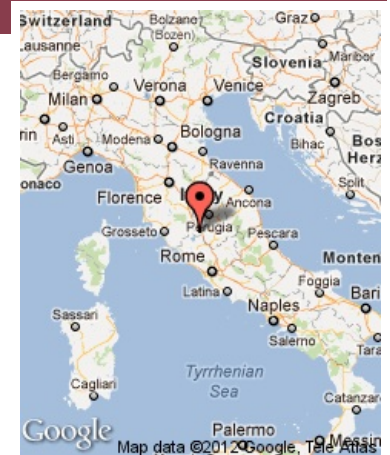


Wine Tasting & Cycling in Umbria



Highlights

Unwind with a fully guided holiday cycling in Umbria, central Italy, enjoying peaceful rides through the lush green countryside and learning about the great wines produced here.

Umbria is known as the 'green heart of Italy', a phrase borrowed from a famous poem by the Nobel prize-winning Giosuè Carducci. This is a somewhat apt description, especially since it is a lush countryside covered in greenery for ten months of the year the only region of Italy not bordered by a coast or another country. This bike tour starts in bordering Tuscany, with the two regions combined making a phenomenal stage for country cycling. Accompanied by an expert guide who knows the locale inside out, the tour includes some fantastic wine tasting experiences as well as treating you to superb cuisine at a variety of three star hotels.

This cycling tour is split across both Tuscany and Umbria, giving you a great feel for the beautiful rural parts of central Italy. The agricultural lands of both make for excellent landscapes to cycle through, and you'll find a fair proportion of hills, lakes and riversides in which to flex your muscles. While primarily a cycling and wine tasting holiday, it's impossible to travel through Italy without being impressed by its historical legacy. From the UNESCO-recognized town of Assisi with its awe inspiring basilica to the valleys where Hannibal defeated a 15,000 strong Roman army, there's plenty on the itinerary to capture the imagination.

Is it for me?

There are a couple of considerations to keep in mind before booking up - you'll drink a heck of a lot of vino during the course of the week (at a controlled pace, of course!) so anyone with an aversion to alcohol may wish to check out some of the other Italian country trips here on Tourdust. Also, since Umbria is known for its hilly landscape a small degree of fitness is required (though not compulsory, but you probably don't want to feel out of your depth.)

With the above boxes ticked, what you can expect during your time cycling in Umbria is a cracking bike tour put together by guides who know a thing or two about their craft. The cycling routes are as mixed as possible, usually following little known roads and trails, and a lot of the places of interest you'll visit (such as the unforgettable architecture in many towns) add up to make this a top grade tour of Italy.

Accommodation

Throughout your week cycling in Tuscany, you'll be welcomed to a fabulous meal and locally made beverages at a variety of three star hotels, which at the end of a long day's riding will seem like home away from home. All of the hotels are independently run and as a result you can expect great service from your hospitable hosts, as well as top notch facilities from indoor pools to tennis courts. All rooms are en-suite and a day cycling in the fresh air will guarantee you sleep like a log. As you'll see from the itinerary, there is a large emphasis on wine tasting and you'll become familiar with a variety of the region's top quality wines. All meals are included in the price from dinner on the arrival day, and feature mouth-watering examples of gourmet Italian cuisine. Please note that all beverages outside of the wine tasting experiences are at your own cost.

Itinerary

Day One: The cycling tour of Umbria begins in the small town of Sorano in southern Tuscany, right on the border with Umbria. Sorano is part of a triplet of sleepy towns to the west of Orvieto, all dating back to Etruscan times,

Prices from

1,525 GBP (7 days) per person

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and all showing signs of a long history marred with violence and power struggles. Tonight you'll stay at the Hotel Locanda Aldobrandeschi and share an absolute feast of a meal, setting somewhat of a precedent for the rest of the week!

Day Two: The first day of your Umbrian cycling tour takes will take you on a circular trip that visits both Sovana and Pitigliani, the two other nearby rural towns built on extinct volcanos, before returning back to Sorano. Along the way between each village you'll visit a few distinct wine producers, including the Cantina di Pitigliano who both make and store their wine in caves cut deep into nearby cliffs. Sovana is a tiny town these days, with barely 120 inhabitants. Despite its size, it's packed with historical curiosities from Etruscan tombs dating back to around 700 BC right through to grand architecture built by the Medici family in the 17th century. After lunch you'll head for Pitigliano, the largest of the three towns, and the most spectacular. Pitigliano was once a thriving Jewish centre, complete with a Jewish University before the Medici confined all Jews to a ghetto which still exists. A grim but interesting testament to Italy's rich cultural past! (20 Miles)

Day Three: The schedule today leads you into Umbria proper and towards the spectacular town of Orvieto, high on a volcanic summit. The route for most of the morning follows gentle to moderate-grade hills, passing through Onano and Acquapendente, then cross-country through Castel Viscardo before the heavy-going climb up to Orvieto. However, the hard work certainly pays off. Once you've gotten over the stunning views from the top of the volcanic plateau you'll begin to explore the town. The crowning glory is the Duomo, the astounding and intricate cathedral dominating the centre of the town, and the piazza surrounding it is an atmospheric place and perfect for enjoying a beer in the shadow of this architectural giant. Also not to be missed is St. Patrick's well, a vast water hole built on the behest of Pope Clement VII measuring 60 metres deep and 13 wide. (27 Miles)

Day Four: Leaving Orvieto along fairly busy roads, the route will take you across the river Paglia then downstream on a lovely quiet road to its confluence with the Tiber. The track will takes you alongside the scenic Lake Corbara, through the village of Corbara itself and then turning away from the lake and into hills. Deep in the Umbrian wine country, this is the area where many of the best Orvieto Classico wines are made, and you'll get to stop off for a tasting at Barbereni-Vallesanta in Cerreto. The afternoon features some fairly difficult cycling, following tiny back roads which lead Monte Castello. This was the site of one of the reputed 365 castles said to have surrounded Todi and owned by the Medici family. Dinner and overnight stay tonight is at the Il Castello, a converted 16th century town house. (30 Miles)

Day Five: A long day of cycling awaits you today, but thankfully a lot of it is downhill, beginning with a descent into the Tiber Valley. An eight mile ride along the scenic valley will bring you to Todi, another of Umbria's city states, boasting by repute the best proportioned piazza in Italy. It sits on top of a steep hill, and the Duomo looks out across the Piazza del Popolo surrounded by impressive municipal buildings. After a brief stop in Todi you'll cross the Tiber and head through the Vale of Spoleto. This is much gentler terrain, but there is the inevitable climb to the hill town of Montefalco (known as the 'Balcony of Umbria,' so you can imagine how good the views are!) While here you'll take some time out to sample some different wines, foremost among them are the wines made from Sagrantino grapes grown only around Montefalco. These are some of the most powerful and distinguished reds in all of Italy. Leaving Montefalco, the tour continues through Bevagna on the way to Spello. Overlooking the Vale of Spoleto, Spello is a classic medieval Umbrian town, and in the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore are the famous frescoes of Pinturichia. A superb dinner and overnight stay will be provided at the Alta Villa, three star hotel just below the old town. (36 Miles)

Day Six: Today features two of the major cities of Umbria, Perugia (the region's capital) and Assisi (perhaps the more famous city.) Assisi was the home of St. Francis, the Patron Saint of Italy and founder of the Franciscan order. His remains lie at the Basilica named after him, a behemoth of a structure built in the 13th century and recognised as a World Heritage site by UNESCO due to its massive cultural and historical importance. It is, in essence, one huge cathedral stacked upon another, and is the most important place of Christian pilgrimage in the country. Curiously, the remains of St. Francis were hidden by the Basilica's monks in 1230 to keep them from possible thieves from nearby Perugia. The monks did a fine job, since the remains were only found again in 1818. Perugia itself lies 12 miles away, with the route taking you back across the Tiber valley to Torgiano, once again in pursuit of a very interesting wine. The Torgiano Rosso Riserva is one of only two DOCG (high grade) wines in Umbria, along with the Sagrantino of Montefalco encountered earlier in the tour. Leaving Torgiano, hopefully sober, you'll head into Perugia where you'll be staying overnight. This is a spectacular city built on steep hillsides and the centre of the city is a bustle of shops, restaurants and bars. You'll also find the inevitable cathedral, huge town hall and ornamental fountain. (28 Miles)

Day Seven: The final cycling day of the tour will take you once again into the heart of the Umbrian countryside, passing to the north of Lake Trasimeno, Italy's largest inland lake, and back into Tuscany. Between Lake Trasimeno and the hills around it is a narrow plain. It was here that in 217 BC the great military tactician Hannibal defeated a massive army of 15,000 Roman centurions. It was one of the most successful and largest ambushes in military history, nearly spelling the end for the entire Roman Empire. Leaving the Trasimene shores behind you the route will lead to the ancient Etruscan town of Cortona, cycling the last five kilometres through vineyards and olive groves. It's a beautiful little town, with steep narrow roads, fantastic restaurants and commanding views across the Val di Chiana toward Montepulciano. The final overnight stay will be at the Hotel Italia, very close to the central piazza. (29 Miles)

Day Eight: Transfer back to Florence for international travel.

Details

Getting there

International flights service to Florence where you can transfer by train to Orvieto.

Price includes

Expert cycling guide from days two to seven, equipment hire, seven nights' accommodation, meals throughout (except lunches).

Price details

Price quoted above does not include single person supplement of £315.

Comfort level

Reasonably comfortable (Inns, B&Bs, luxury camping etc.)

Experience required

A reasonable level of fitness and interest is all that is needed

Travellers should bring

Bringing your own cycling helmet is advised, though not essential.