

FRONTIER FRESCOES THE HILLTOWNS OF UMBRIA

WEDNESDAY 15 – MONDAY 20 MAY 2019 (6 DAYS)

LECTURER: PAULA NUTTALL

£1985

- Visit Umbria & discover its lovely landscape & glorious hill towns sitting atop vine-draped slopes
- Magnificent frescoed churches, many associated with St Francis of Assisi & painted by Giotto, Gozzoli, Perugino & others
- Unhurried itinerary allowing ample time to explore
- Excellent hotel in centre of Perugia, with delicious food & wine throughout the visit



Spello, Santa Maria Maggiore, Pinturicchio's Adoration

OVERVIEW

Mention Umbria and immediately into the mind's eye there pops up a series of medieval hill towns stretching through the verdant Italian landscape. Of these, perhaps the most famous are Perugia, Orvieto and above all, Assisi, for ever associated with St Francis. This leisurely visit is designed to introduce you not only to these three famous oases of architecture, art and culture, but to other equally rewarding towns such as Spoleto, Spello, Montefalco and of course, the wonderful landscape itself.

The Umbrian countryside is known as the 'Green Heart of Italy' and its hills are covered with dense woodland, vines and olive groves. The oak forests are home to the famous Umbrian wild boar, a staple of the delicious local cuisine and the vines produce excellent wines, often in small quantities, such as *Sagrantino di Montefalco*, a truly wonderful mouthful.

The area takes its name from a group of early settlers, the *Umbri*, who occupied only a part of what is today called Umbria. A more settled and civilised lifestyle was established by first, the Etruscans and then the Romans and both civilisations have left a rich heritage of sites and artefacts to enjoy. Christianity put down firm roots in this part of Italy very early and St Benedict, founder of western monasticism, was born here. However, it is St Francis, that most gentle of saints, who now occupies centre stage in the religious history of the region.

Medieval Umbria was dominated by a series of independent cities and towns, all fiercely protective of their rights. As in so much of contemporary Italy, that independence was challenged both by the Holy Roman Emperors and the Popes. Over time, the cities and towns lost their independence and much of their territory was incorporated into the Papal States. It has to be said that as a consequence, Umbria then sank into sleepy provinciality, ignored alike by both pilgrims and Grand Tourists en route to Rome. This is the reason why so much of the area's best architecture and artwork dates from medieval and renaissance times, but not later. Thereafter, not much happened for several centuries until the unification of Italy in 1861. Since then it has become a beacon of industrial activity, which together with agriculture and tourism, forms the backbone of the local economy.

Those tempted by this visit will probably know of Umbria because of its wonderful artistic treasures. St Francis inspired many generations of painters and sculptors from the great Giotto, who with his workshop worked at Assisi, to later painters such as Gozzoli, Pinturicchio, Perugino and the young Raphael. All these artists have left wonderful frescoes and altarpieces scattered throughout Umbria, many of which we shall see. In addition to the church, the towns and cities were no less active and artists from all over medieval and renaissance Italy and beyond found their way to Perugia, Orvieto and elsewhere, creating some truly memorable works of art.

Led by Paula Nuttall, the well-known historian of Italian renaissance art, we spend five nights in Perugia staying at the comfortable, locally rated **5* Hotel Brufani Palace**. This is a traditional hotel, ideally placed in the centre of the city. It has excellent facilities including a highly regarded restaurant and an indoor swimming pool set above some Etruscan ruins, which can be seen below the water!

ITINERARY OUTLINE

Day 1: Wednesday 15 May – We fly from London Heathrow to Rome arriving in the afternoon. Joining our coach we drive north into Umbria through some spectacular countryside, towns and villages perched atop ledge-like precipices formed from the local tufa. We continue to **Perugia** and check into our hotel, the locally rated 5* **Brufani Palace** for a five-night stay. Dinner will be in a local restaurant - wine, water and coffee are included with all group lunches and dinners.

Day 2: Thursday 16 May – **Perugia** is the capital of Umbria and a full day will be spent exploring the principal buildings and collections of this great city. The **Duomo** may dominate but it is the **Palazzo dei Priori** that has the better architecture and contents. This palace contains two merchants' halls, one of which, the **Sala di Udienza del Collegio del Cambio**, has renowned frescoes by the famous local painter, Perugino, who was Raphael's teacher and a very fine artist in his own right. The palace is also home to the **National Gallery of Umbria**, with further works by Perugino and many other excellent paintings. Lunch is included today and the evening will be free.

Day 3: Friday 17 May – A highlight of this visit may well be our day spent in **Assisi**. Forever linked with St Francis, we shall visit some of the major sites associated with his life and work. A specialist guided tour of the **Basilica of San Francesco**, to include both the **Lower and Upper Churches** with Giotto's frescoes of the **Life of St Francis**, plus the **Crypt** which contains the Saint's remains, will be led by a member of the resident Franciscan community. We then explore the town of Assisi, visiting a number of other churches and monuments. These will include both **Santa Chiara** and **San Damiano** and some remarkable ancient **Roman** remains. We have a group lunch in Assisi and on our return to Perugia the evening will be free.

Day 4: Saturday 18 May – **Foligno** is a small, but handsome place and we visit **Palazzo Trinci**, a fifteenth century palace, now the **Civic Museum** to visit the small picture gallery, Not far away, **Spello**, dating from Roman times, lies on the slopes of Mount Subasio. Our stroll through this very pretty town will culminate at the church of **Santa Maria Maggiore**, where we shall see some very fine, recently restored frescoes by Pinturicchio in the **Cappella Baglioni**, painted about 1500. We then have a leisurely group lunch after which we return to Perugia where the rest of the afternoon and evening will be free.

Day 5: Sunday 19 May – **Montefalco** is known as the "Balcony of Umbria" due to its prominent position on top of a fine hill. The highlight is the **Civic Museum**, formerly the church of San Francesco. It contains fresco cycles of great interest, including one of the **Life of St Francis** by Benozzo Gozzoli, amongst his best works, painted in the 1450s. After coffee, we continue to **Spoleto**, famed for its Roman and medieval monuments. There is a good **Roman House** plus many other talismans of the city's important place on the ancient *Via Flaminia*. Of the medieval monuments, the most important is the **Duomo**, set in a magical square. It contains frescoes of the **Life of the Virgin** by Fra Filippo Lippi, perhaps his best work in this medium? Lunch (not included) can be taken once we arrive in Spoleto and our final group dinner will be in Perugia, in the rooftop restaurant of our hotel.

Day 6: Monday 20 May – **Orvieto** is a fine city with a long and distinguished history, dating back to Etruscan times. It is dominated by the renowned medieval **Duomo** with its exquisite portal sculptures. Inside, it has excellent sculptures and frescoes and most importantly the **Chapel of San Brizio** with an extraordinary fresco cycle of **The Last Judgement** by Luca Signorelli, painted about 1500 and anticipating Michelangelo's version in Rome by several decades. After a final group lunch, we continue to Rome for the return flight to Heathrow.

PRACTICALITIES

Price £1985 **Price without flights** £1820 **Deposit** £300 **Single Supplement** £239 (Double for Sole Use)

Please note that there is a £300 (total) discount if Hilltowns of Umbria is taken with The Villas & Gardens of Lazio

Hotel 5 nights with breakfast at the 5* Hotel Brufani Palace (Superior rooms)

Upgrades Deluxe £100 (per room), Junior Suite £595 (two sharing, per room)

Flights British Airways

Outward: **BA546** Depart London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **1045**, arrive Rome **1425**

Return: **BA555** Depart Rome **2015**, arrive London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **2150**

Price includes 2 dinners & 4 lunches with water, wine & coffee, all local transfers, entry fees & gratuities, services of Paula Nuttall & tour manager Geoffrey Nuttall

Not included Travel to/from Heathrow, 3 dinners & 1 lunch



CICERONI TRAVEL
2 The Square, Aynho, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX17 3BL
Telephone +44 (0) 1869 811167 Fax +44 (0) 1869 811188
Email info@ciceroni.co.uk Website www.ciceroni.co.uk

