

ITALY – SMALL GROUP GUIDED CYCLING TOURS IN UMBRIA



Cycling in Europe has been a passion of ours for many years. We appreciate the importance of a well-chosen route – away from the maddening crowds and busy roads. We appreciate the value of well-maintained bikes suitable for the terrain; carefully selected accommodation with a focus on regional cuisine; good wine and we appreciate the knowledge and experience of professional guides.

We appreciate the company of a small group of like-minded cyclists who share an interest not just in lots of fast kilometres – although the cycling is important - but in the scenery, the culture, the history and the wine and cuisine of some of the most spectacular cycling regions in Europe. And Italians welcome cyclists with respect and enthusiasm.

Our 8-day small group cycling program offers stunning scenery and quiet roads. This tour begins deep in southern Tuscany near the Umbrian border. To the west of **Orvieto** are three beautiful little towns in the **Maremma** region; Sorano, Sovana and Pitigliano are three jewels dating back to Etruscan times that lie far from the usual tourist routes. All three towns are built on the outcrops of extinct volcanoes, although Sovano is low-lying while both Sorano and Pitigliano soar high above their river valleys on high cliffs.

Umbria is hilly and this tour offers good rides but at times challenging hill climbs. You will experience wine tastings, olive groves and medieval Umbrian towns, visit cathedrals and religious centres and cycle deep into the stunning Umbrian countryside.

A guide is with you on the road and detailed route maps are provided. All baggage is carried from hotel to hotel, leaving you free to enjoy each day. **Food is important** to these tours and each evening the restaurants we choose will highlight the region's cuisine. These tours are recommended for anyone who is reasonably fit and they are ideal for more experienced cyclists, as our guides are often happy to accompany those who wish to do a few more kilometres.

Cost per person: AU\$4165 (including return local transfers as shown) Single room supplement AU\$685

Departs: 29th May; 12th June, 11th or 25th September 2010

Tours Includes: 7-nights in carefully selected hotels, 7-breakfasts & dinners, route notes, sightseeing, daily luggage transfers, cycle tour guide, quality multi-geared bicycle hire and return railway station transfers (but no support vehicle)

Cycling: Moderate to challenging routes - 32 to 60km per day - Umbria offers some challenging hills with long climbs and fast descents. Inexperienced or beginner cyclist and week-ender cyclist not used to multi-day rides with some hills are advised to make a specific preparation in order to enjoy these holiday on bike – talk to our staff for suggestions. Extra rides (extensions and loop rides) may be available each day.

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations

Suggested itinerary:

Day 1 Saturday – Arrive Orvieto

Our transfers depart from Orvieto train station at 4.00pm (there are frequent connection by train from Rome). We drive to Sorano, where we stay at a hotel in the middle of town and tonight is a feast of gourmet food.

Day 2 Sunday - Three Etruscan Jewels

The first day takes us on a circular route to Sovana and Pitigliani, before returning back to Sorano. Sovana is a tiny town these days, with barely 120 inhabitants. Many of the roads approaching the town follow the traditional sunken roads of the **Etruscans**, and the famous Etruscan tombs are in evidence everywhere. Sovana was once the capital of the Aldobrandeschi family that were said to own a castle for every day of the year. There is a large cathedral, or Duomo and a beautifully proportioned square of fishbone-patterned bricks laid by the Medicis in the 16th century. Sovana is a beautiful little place and here we take lunch.

After lunch we head for Pitigliano, once a thriving Jewish centre, complete with Jewish University. The main wine in these parts is the Bianco di Pitigliano, a gentle, neutral wine which at its best is compared to the better known whites of **Orvieto**. During our week in **Umbria** we will explore wines that are almost unknown outside their region, and we'll start right here with a wine tasting in Pitigliano.

In the late afternoon we'll return to Sorano. It's a bit of a climb up into the town, but a truly spectacular approach, past cliffs littered with Etruscan tombs. Total riding distance @ 32 Km.

Day 3 Monday – Sorano to Orvieto

Our destination today is **Orvieto** built on top of a volcanic plug rising more than 300 metres above the surrounding plain. We leave Sorano on small roads several miles to the north of Lago di Bolsena. We get some great views today because of the challenging hills! Nothing too frightening, but we'll have earned our dinner tonight.

Passing through Onano and Acquapendente, we travel cross-country through Castel Viscardo before we get our first view of **Orvieto**, where we stay at the 3-star Hotel Duomo in the centre. The piazza and the area around it has a lovely atmosphere, perfect to enjoy a well-earned beer.

Almost rivalling the Duomo is fascinating underground **Orvieto**. More than 1200 caves have been discovered so far, many dating back to the Etruscans. We'll find the time to visit either on Monday afternoon or on Tuesday morning. 44 Km

Day 4 Tuesday - Wine tasting Orvieto Classico

Today we cycle alongside a lake at last, but I'm afraid we get our fair share of hills as well. Leaving **Orvieto** along fairly busy roads, we take the first opportunity to cross the river Paglia, then following it downstream on a lovely quiet road to its confluence with the Tiber. Our route takes us alongside Lake Corbara, through the village of Corbara itself and then we turn away from the lake and into hills. Into wine country. This is the area where many of the best of the **Orvieto** Classico are made, and we'll stop off for a tasting at Barbereni-Vallesanta in Cerreto.

Our afternoon ride is to Monte Castello. This was the site of one of the reputed 365 castles said to have surrounded Todi, but the most striking feature is its location, like an eagle's nest high above the Tiber valley. We stay at the Il Castello, a converted 16th century town house. 48 Km

Day 5 Wednesday - Todi to Montefalco and Spello

We start off with a great descent into the Tiber valley and bike about 12km into Todi which sits on top of a steep hill, and its Duomo looks out across the Piazza del Popolo, surrounded by impressive municipal buildings. A perfect place for a gelato, the traditional Italian ice cream.

From Todi we cross the Tiber and head across the Vale of Spoleto toward Montefalco. This is much gentler terrain, but there is the inevitable climb to the hill town of Montefalco, known as the 'Balcony of Umbria'. We continue through Bevagna on our way to Spello. Overlooking the Vale of Spoleto, with the slopes of Mount Subasio behind it, Spello is a classic medieval Umbrian town, and in the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore are the famous frescoes of Pinturicchio. We stay at the 3-star Alta Villa Hotel just below the old town. Today is our longest ride at @ 60 Km.

Day 6 Thursday – Spello to Assisi

Today is perhaps the most spectacular ride and we end the day in Perugia, the capital of **Umbria**. Assisi was the home of St Francis, the Patron Saint of Italy and to enjoy Assisi, it's worth knowing a little bit about St Francis, how important he was, and why. His faith was based on poverty, plus the usual trappings of chastity and obedience. His great innovation was the glorification of God through the wonders of the natural world, summed up best in his beautiful 'Canticle To The Sun'. He established a women's order, the Poor Clares, but died, after a full and no doubt exhausting life aged just 44.

The Basilica at Assisi now houses his remains and it is enormous. It consists, literally, of two cathedrals, built one on top of the other. The body of St Francis had been hidden within until its discovery only in the 19th Century.

We head into Perugia, a spectacular city built on steep hillsides. The centre of the city is a bustle of shops, restaurants and bars with the inevitable Duomo, huge town hall and ornamental fountain. Perugia is a busy and thriving City and we take the best route that we can to avoid the traffic, ending up at the Hotel Priori, close to the centre. 46 Km.

Day 7 Friday – Lake Trasimeno to Cortona

Passing to the north of Lake Trasimeno, Italy's largest inland lake, we ride back into **Tuscany**, ending our tour in the beautiful town of Cortona. As we approach the ancient Etruscan town of Cortona we cycle 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. We stay at the Hotel Italia very close to the central piazza. 47 Km

Day 8 Saturday - A well-earned rest from the saddle, and back to Florence.

The tour ends after breakfast and we arrange transfers to Camucia-Cortona station.



These are just a few of the many small group guided or self-guided inn-to-inn cycling tours we offer in Europe - including river rides from Passau to Vienna along the Danube or from Vienna to Budapest.

Other cycling holiday destinations include several areas of Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Holland, Ireland, England and Scotland, Hungary, in the Czech Republic, New Zealand & Australia.

Outdoor Travel also offer group guided Bike & Barge cruises in many destinations including France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Italy, the Dalmation Coast of Croatia, the islands of Greece, the Lycian coast of Turkey, Vietnam or Canada.

Contact Outdoor Travel direct for more details and reservations

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