

Italy: Umbria Assisi to Orvieto 6 or 9 days.

Tour code: JUM

Revised: Nov 07

This walk into the green heart of Italy reveals historical delights that the earthquakes of autumn 1997 had very little impact upon. If you had watched the News at that time, you might have thought that the town of Assisi had been flattened. Infact there was only limited damage to the famous interior of the Basilica of St Francis and 90% of the famous frescoes by Cimabue, Giotto, Lorenzetti and Martini have remained intact. The town is a wonderful place to start one's visit to Umbria; winding mediaeval streets taking you under flying buttresses and up and down steps to discover yet another church or convent. The town square (Piazza del Commune) is dominated by the Roman columns of the Temple of Minerva, whilst there is also a beautiful Romanesque cathedral in the guise of San Rufino and a teetering castle. Our itinerary then takes you along the old pilgrim's route to the cave hermitage where St. Francis used to spend time in isolation and meditation; then across the flanks (or for the more energetic the summit ridge) of Monte Subasio, now a National Park, before descending through beautiful Holm oak forests and olive fields to Spello – a small walled mediaeval town with enough Roman features of its own to boast about.

From Spello you traverse the heart of Umbria in a generally south-westerly direction; first across the broad Val di Spoleto with its vast extent of vineyards, and into the beautiful forested Monte Martani hills, passing such attractive towns as Bevagna for lunch (famous as the location of St. Francis's sermon the the Birds) and then up to Montefalco; as the name suggests, The Balcony of Umbria; from where you can see all the way back to Spello and, on a clear day, even to Assisi! The town is also famous for its Sagrantino wine, produced from a special grape grown uniquely on the surrounding hillsides. From here you are transferred into the depths of rurality: The fortified village of Giano del'Umbria where, after a look round, you can walk to the historic hill town of Todi, overlooking the Tiber valley. Todi has some famous mouments including the ensemble of buildings around the Piazza del Popolo and the fine Renaissance Church of Santa Maria della Consolazione. Here the shorter (5 night) tour ends. The longer tour continues ever deeper across more delightful hilly country with fine views westwards towards Tuscany, staying at an isolated agriturismo (farm guest houses; much praised by previous clients) and passing picturesque hill villages such as Montecchio before the final ascent through the vineyards to the Etrusco - Roman and mediaeval city of Orvieto on its precipitous hill-top site. This has one of the finest Cathedrals in the whole of Italy, and a whole host of other attractions including St. Patrick's Well and the Rocca.



Travel Information

Season: April to November.

Please note: that dates between late June and late August can be very hot for walking.

Arrival: The tour starts in Assisi. From Rome (Fiumicino) airport shuttle train (half-hourly service) to Roma Termini station, then by train to Foligno and local train to Assisi. Buy one-way through tickets to Assisi at the airport train station. Combined train fare including inter-city supplement is around 21 Euros (£15 stg). Journey time, from Rome to Assisi around 3 hours. Or from Florence by train to Assisi, changing trains en route at Terontola. Bus or taxi from Assisi station to Assisi (8 km). The bus service is half-hourly and takes 20 minutes. Or from Siena by bus

direct via Perugia: 2 hours. Journey from the airport to the first hotel is not included in the tour price.

End of Tour: The tour ends after breakfast either at Todi on Day 6 or at Orvieto on Day 9. From Todi taxi or bus to train station, then train to Roma Termini, changing trains en route at Terni (journey time approx. 2 hours); or, from Todi by train to Florence, change trains twice en route at Perugia and at Terontola (journey time approx. 4 hours). From Orvieto taxi or public bus to station then direct train to Roma Termini (1 hour 20 mins) or to Florence (1 hour 40mins). From Roma Termini shuttle trains every half hour to Rome Fiumicino airport. If traveling to Rome, book through tickets to Rome airport from Todi or Orvieto. None of these transfers is included in the tour price.

Level of Difficulty

Grade: Moderate. The walking is not technically difficult, but there are many hills (up and down) and some rough surfaces. It is especially demanding in hot weather. Some days are long, and there will be some full walking days, although there are on occasion options for shortening days by taking public transport, or with the judicious use of taxis.

Fitness: High standard of fitness is not necessary but clients should be able to walk at a steady pace for up to 7 hours a day in hot sun on dusty, hilly terrain.

Waymarking and Maps: There are only a few waymarked trails and in general it is necessary to follow our specially researched route descriptions provided together with the maps, which are at 1:50,000 (tourist) and 1:25,000 (military) scales. The military maps are uncoloured and some of the detail is very out of date. The tourist maps are more up-to-date but only provide partial coverage. The walking route is highlighted on the maps and the accommodations are marked.

General Information

Baths: it is not normal for your room to have a bath, the main reason being that it takes up a lot of space, some hotels/guesthouses may have a separate room in the house where a bath is available to guests, but in the main it is showers.

Breakfasts: in countries such as Italy usually consist of coffee and croissant; sometimes, bread rolls, yoghurts, ham and cheese as well. If you want more for breakfast then we would suggest you purchase some food the night before. It is important for you to tell us if you have any dietary requirements when you book your holiday so that we can inform everyone that you are staying with.

Single Supplements: are payable on most of our tours. **1)** The single supplement guarantees the privacy of your own room, however, rooms can at times be small and in some places may not enjoy the same facilities as double/twin rooms. **2)** You are not just paying a supplement on the room but the luggage transfer costs you are paying in full. The cost of moving 1 bag or 2 bags etc remains the same. On some of our trips it is possible to reduce the cost of the single supplement if you happen to be a 3rd person travelling, or have chosen a date when other clients are booked.

Language: Note that you will not necessarily come across people speaking English. Remember you have left home to find things different bring a phrase book, try to learn a bit of Italian!

Luggage: When staying in hotels, sometimes your luggage may have been taken to your room awaiting your arrival. However don't be surprised if your luggage is waiting for you to take it up to your room please politely ask someone if you need assistance.

Accommodation & Meals

Accommodation and meal arrangements are on a half-board basis (evening meal, bed and breakfast) for 4 nights on the 9 day; and for 2 nights on the 6 day tour; bed and breakfast only in the larger towns (Assisi, Todi and Orvieto) where there is a good choice of restaurants for an evening meal. Picnic lunches are not included in the tour price, but materials may be purchased in the towns and villages where you stay, or a picnic lunch pack can normally be obtained from your hotel. According to Italian Law, all restaurants, including those in hotels, must close on one night each week, so it may happen that customers are given a voucher to eat dinner at another nearby

restaurant. Please note that on occasion when we cannot get you into our normal accommodations as listed below, we will offer you hotels / agriturismo of a similar standard to our original choice.

❑ **Night 1:** Assisi. A small family-run hotel in a quiet back street just off the town's main square, Piazza del Comune. There is a wonderful view over the town and the Umbrian plain from its pretty terrace garden.

❑ **Nights 2 & 3:** Spello. A 3* hotel in the historic old town near the Augustus Gate. It is an elegantly restored building from the 18th Century. The hotel's terrace has a fine panorama over the Umbrian plain.

❑ **Night 4:** Montefalco. Here there are two possibilities. Our first choice is normally an agriturismo (country guest house). It is only a short walk (800m) from this small historic town. Most of our customers stay here and it has been well praised by previous clients. As an alternative (supplement payable) there is a 3* hotel in the historic centre of the town. The hotel shares its structure with the mediaeval church of the village. All the rooms are modernised and well-appointed.

❑ **Night 5:** Todi. When available (it is normally) our first choice in Todi is a small but particularly well-appointed *residence d'epoca* (period town house) in the historic centre. Otherwise we use a 3* hotel with a swimming pool 15 minutes walk from the *Porta Romana* (Roman Gate).

❑ **Night 6:** Asproli. Our first choice is very comfortable accommodation with full en suite rooms and its own attached restaurant in a restored country house dating from the 16th century. An idyllic situation in the hills west of Todi; the attached farm includes olive groves and cereal fields. Produce includes oil, wine, truffles, honey and preserves. When fully booked our second choice is another well-appointed farm guesthouse in the same rural area, also close to the village of Asproli.

Note: it is not always possible to secure accommodation in Asproli due to the very limited accommodation here. If this is the case then you will walk as normal to Asproli and we will organize for a taxi to collect you at a certain point and time, you will then return to Todi for the night. The following morning the taxi will collect you and drop you in Asproli so that you can continue your walk as normal to Montecchio. Sherpa will cover the additional taxi transfers. More details of this arrangement will also be given in the route notes

❑ **Night 7:** Montecchio. One of two small agriturismo (farm guest houses, both of them on working farms) set at around 350m above sea level in quiet countryside near the village of Montecchio. One of the farms produces grapes, olives, cereals, sunflowers, truffles and other fruits and vegetables as well as goats and pigs! 'A quiet and peaceful oasis surrounded by 36 acres of wood, olive trees, vineyards, truffle grounds and green pastures.' The other is slightly larger and has a wide range of produce, including jams and honey.

❑ **Night 8:** Orvieto. 3* hotel on the main street of the historic town, Corso Cavour. The rooms have private bath, TV, radio, mini-bar and direct dial phone. Buffet breakfast served in a pleasant breakfast room.

Outline Itinerary

❑ **Day 1:** Arrive Assisi. You should take the opportunity to explore the mediaeval city of Assisi. You can join the crowds to visit the upper and lower Basilicas of St Francis, although you can normally visit the lower shrine of St. Francis early tomorrow from 06:30 if you want a more quiet time. However there is plenty more to see, including the Duomo (cathedral) on Piazza Rufino and the Temple of Minerva on the Piazza del Comune. There are numerous other churches of which San Pietro (13thC) and the Basilica of Santa Chiara are perhaps the most interesting.

The interiors of some of these buildings may not be accessible at certain times. Overnight Assisi.

□ **Day 2:** There is a choice of two walking routes from Assisi (420m) to Spello (220m): either an easy-to-moderate traverse of the farmed and forested lower slopes of Monte Subasio, following lanes and tracks (8 miles/13km/4 hours), or a more strenuous route, much of it on footpaths (12 miles/19km/6 hours), which crosses the open summit area (1290m) above the trees within the confines of the National Park. Both routes start very steeply. You should have some very fine views across the Val di Spoleto to the Martani Hills, which you will cross later in the week. On arrival in the mediaeval town of Spello there are more antiquities, including the church of Santa Maria Maggiore, which contains frescoes by Pinturicchio and two Roman gates and a Roman arch. Overnight Spello.

□ **Day 3:** As you have 2 nights in Spello, today we advise that you take the train to the nearby town of Spoleto and then do a circular walk, starting from the church of S. Pietro, rising up to the monastic church of S. Giuliano, passing the small hamlet of Monteluco, finishing at the Roman bridge below the fortress of Spoleto. Before you start and at the end there is a suggested walk throughout Spoleto visiting the several sites and the narrow roads. Apart from the first ascent to S. Giuliano the walk is not that difficult and will take you about 3 hours. A good combination is to visit the town and the surrounding forests. Take a torch with you as you need to go through a dark tunnel.

□ **Day 4:** The first part of today's walk is relatively gentle, as you cross the low ground of the Val di Spoleto, which is largely agrarian fields, orchards and vineyards. Around lunchtime you reach the mediaeval village of Bevagna (225m) on the ancient Via Flaminia, described by The Rough Guide as 'even more serene and handsome a backwater than Spello, with a central piazza of austere perfection...two of Umbria's finest Romanesque churches'. If lunch in Bevagna turns out to be too filling there is a bus service on to the hill town of Montefalco (472m) - otherwise it's a gradual uphill walk with a bit of a sting in its tail. Montefalco, the 'Balcony of Umbria', is celebrated for its panoramic view over vineyards and olive groves back over the Val di Spoleto, for its 14th century ramparts and for its famous local dry red *Sagrantino* wine (but note: *Sagrantino Passito* is a *sweet* wine!). 12.5 miles/20km/6 hours. Overnight Montefalco.

□ **Day 5:** After breakfast you will have a transfer southwards across the undulating plateau of farmland and wooded hills to the remote hill village or *borgo* (fortified hamlet) of Giano dell' Umbria (546m), surrounded by olive groves and pastureland. Then walk across more delightful hilly Umbrian countryside today as you approach Todi. Today you will come out onto high moor and grassland, before descending through the forests once again, this time to the town of Massa Martana, from where there is a bus service to Todi. Todi is, like many other Umbrian towns, built on a hill. There are Etruscan and Roman walls, mediaeval streets, Renaissance palaces and the magnificent Renaissance church of Santa Maria della Consolazione. There is plenty to see here. Overnight Todi. (7.5 miles/12km/4 hours) walking to Massa Martana.

□ **Day 6:** *Either* (6-day tour) Depart Todi by taxi to train station, then train to Roma Termini, changing trains en route at Terni. Journey time 2 hours. Book through tickets from Todi to Rome airport. Or (on the 9 day tour) Todi to Asproli. Today's walk is relatively short, so there is time for some sightseeing in the morning. An easy walk into the hills west of Todi. Overnight Asproli. Your accommodation

is in a delightful rural setting tonight amongst the Almond and Strawberry Trees. (8miles/13km/4.5 hours walking).

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□ **Day 7:** Asproli to a farm guesthouse near Montecchio. A day's walk through the hilly countryside between Monte Croce di Serra and the Corbara reservoir (138m) which now occupies the valley of the Tiber. Overnight on a farm near Montecchio (377m). 9.3 miles/15km (to Poggio Volara) or 12 miles/ 19km (to Podere Casette). Add 2.5 miles/ 4km if including the diversion to Civitella del Lago.

□ **Day 8:** Farm guesthouse near Montecchio to Baschi. Today you descend from the hills to approach the River Tiber at Baschi (165m). We recommend using public transport (bus and/or (on weekdays) train; not included in tour price) from Baschi to Orvieto Scalo to shorten the latter part of the day's walk. The distance walked varies between 12 and 16 km (7.5 miles - 10miles) according to where you start the day and whether you make the diversion to Montecchio village. It is also possible (but considerably further) to walk all the way to Orvieto Scalo. From Orvieto Scalo there is a *funicolare* (cable railway) to take you up to Orvieto itself. Overnight Orvieto, a real gem of a city with several beautiful piazzas and churches. On the one hand there is the magnificent Gothic cathedral with some alabaster lights and the amazing (newly restored) frescoes by Signorelli. On the other hand try to find the beautiful small church of St. Lawrence with its Etruscan (sacrificial slab) alter and the sky light fashioned in the form of Christ crucified.

□ **Day 9:** Depart Orvieto. Taxi to station then train to Roma Termini (1 hour 20 mins) or to Florence (1 hour 40mins). From Roma Termini shuttles train every half hour to Rome Fiumicino airport. Book through tickets to Rome airport from Orvieto.

Extra nights

For those who would like more time to explore any of these fascinating towns & cities, you could consider an extra night in Assisi, Todi, or in Orvieto.

Escorted Departures 2008

*EJUM29 Sat 29 March – Sun 6 April

*"Research & Development". The tour starting on the 29 March only has been designated "Research & Development". This means that the leader will be checking routes and possibly trying out new variations during the trip. Historically this has been done without clients in tow but we thought that some clients might like to take advantage of lower prices and join the trip with a pioneering spirit and the acceptance that on occasion they may have to retrace steps to find the way or take a break while the leader checks out the route.