



Umbria & Le Marche

Rolling hills, jagged mountains, swathes of olive orchards and ancient stone buildings... Umbria and Le Marche make up the less famous two-thirds of Central Italy, but offer a landscape that rivals the more popular Tuscany.

There are few cities in either Umbria or Le Marche, and this is what gives the area its charm. Both regions are quite proud of their agricultural traditions and have transitioned easily into 'Slow Food' destinations. Don't be surprised if you spend two to three hours at one meal, served by six members of the same family.

Most towns in the two regions are steeped in histories that have continued for thousands of years. Many locales like Perugia, Ascoli Piceno and Orvieto still bear the ancient markings of Etruscan, Umbri or Piceni tribes. Rome conquered its way through the regions and left the pockmarks of Roman culture – roads, amphitheatres and city walls. Labyrinthine medieval villages such as Todi, Gubbio and Assisi inspire visitors to want to pick up a paint brush and capture the light, or cower in the ominous shadow of the papal fortresses.

Modern-day Umbria and Le Marche astound visitors for a span of reasons. Spoleto's festival brings together some of the finest dance and music performances in Italy each year. Myriad sun-seekers flock to Pesaro and the coast of Le Marche to bronze under the Italian sun. Still others head to Ancona to take a ferry to ever more exotic lands. Often missed are the regions' natural destinations – Monti Sibillini's mystical peaks or Monte Cònero's subtle charms. But no matter what visitors come here for, they will almost certainly slow down their pace of life.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Visit where the best of 13th-century art, religion and history intersect at the **Basilica di San Francesco** (p565) in Assisi
- Meander through fields of wildflowers or trek up snow-capped peaks on the Le Marche or Umbrian side of **Monti Sibillini** (p577 and p600)
- Get in touch with your inner Willy Wonka on a tour at the **Perugia chocolate factory** (p553) in Perugia
- Dine off the beaten path in one of any number of excellent fish restaurants in the stunning **Parco Naturale del Monte Cònero** (p589)
- Try your hand at throwing majolica ceramics at **Maioliche Nulli** (p560) in Deruta



■ POPULATION: Umbria 867,868;
Le Marche 1,528,809

■ AREA: Umbria 8,456 sq km;
Le Marche 9,694 sq km

UMBRIA

Every inch of Umbria is ancient. The landscape of rolling hills and meandering country roads has been perfected over three millennia. Known as 'the green heart of Italy', it's the only region that borders neither the sea nor another country.

Umbria has retained many of Italy's old-world traditions. You'll see grandmothers in aprons making pasta by hand and front doors that haven't been locked in a century. In spring the countryside is splashed with red, pink, yellow, purple and blue wildflowers. In summer it explodes with the vibrant yellow of the sunflowers harvested to make cooking oil. The rolling mountains of the Apennines in the north and east descend into hills, many capped by medieval towns, and eventually flatten out into lush valleys along the river Tiber.

An Umbrian adventure can span from nightlife in the region's student-filled capital, Perugia, alive with its famous Università per Stranieri (University for Foreigners), to a peaceful stroll through 2700-year-old rural villages. Assisi is one of Umbria's most magnificent hill towns, with buildings that glow pink in the sunset. To boot, it also happens to be the home town of St Francis who, not surprisingly, preached about the beauty of the natural world. He wandered through towns like Gubbio, a stately medieval stronghold, and Todi, once called 'the most liveable city in the world'.

In the southeast, Spoleto attracts art patrons to an international festival that has put the charming city on the map year-round, and in the southwest, Orvieto's cathedral wows millions of visitors.

Vacationing foodies will delight in Umbrian food and wine. The earthy, addictive *tartufo* (truffle) finds its way onto every menu, gracing the local *strangozzi* or *umbricelli* pastas. Pork from the Norcia area is so well respected, quality pork butchers throughout Italy are known as *Norcineria*. Orvieto's golden wines and the Sagrantino of Montefalco have made their way onto tables around the world.

History

The first two major tribes to share Umbria were the Umbri and the Etruscans. Although the Etruscans have received more press, the

Umbri settled the region first, as far back as 1000 BC. The river Tiber (Tevere in Italian) mostly divided the two: Umbri on the east, Etruscan on the west. The Umbri tribe flourished early on in eastern towns such as Spoleto, Gubbio, Città di Castello and Assisi. Etruscans established towns we know today as Perugia, Orvieto and Città della Pieve, eventually creating 12 powerful city-states. Traces of this past can still be seen in the excellent Museo Archeologico Nazionale dell'Umbria (p553) in Perugia.

Things seriously changed in Umbria around 300 BC. Soldiers from a little upstart village to the south called Rome came knocking. In 295 BC, Rome conquered the Etruscans, and their lands – including Umbria – fell under Roman rule.

Despite the legendary Roman plundering and pillaging, things weren't totally bad. The Romans initiated public works that are still visible to this day. Emperor Gaius Flaminius built the Via Flaminia in 220 BC, a road which connected Rome to Ancona and the Adriatic Sea, and passed through towns such as Narni, Terni, Spoleto and Foligno, all of which are still littered with Roman ruins. A spur ran to Perugia, whose prominence as the capital of Umbria was growing. In 90 BC, Umbrians were granted full Roman citizenship and, for a handful of centuries, the region thrived.

After Rome fell, invasions by Saracens, Goths, Lombards, Byzantines and a whole host of barbarians led to an economic and cultural decline. Starvation and disease were rampant. Umbrians retreated to fortified medieval hill towns such as Gubbio and Todi. Conditions were perfect for the new Roman cult of Christianity to flourish. The church of Sant'Angelo (p553) in Perugia, built over a former pagan temple around the 5th and 6th centuries AD, is one of Italy's oldest extant churches outside of Rome.

The political-power gap during the Middle Ages was quickly filled by the Lombard Duchy of Spoleto from the 6th to the 13th centuries, until Umbria became a papal territory. Prominent Umbrian families tended to favour rule by either the pope or the Holy Roman Empire, creating a split between Guelphs (papal supporters) and Ghibellines (champions of the emperors).

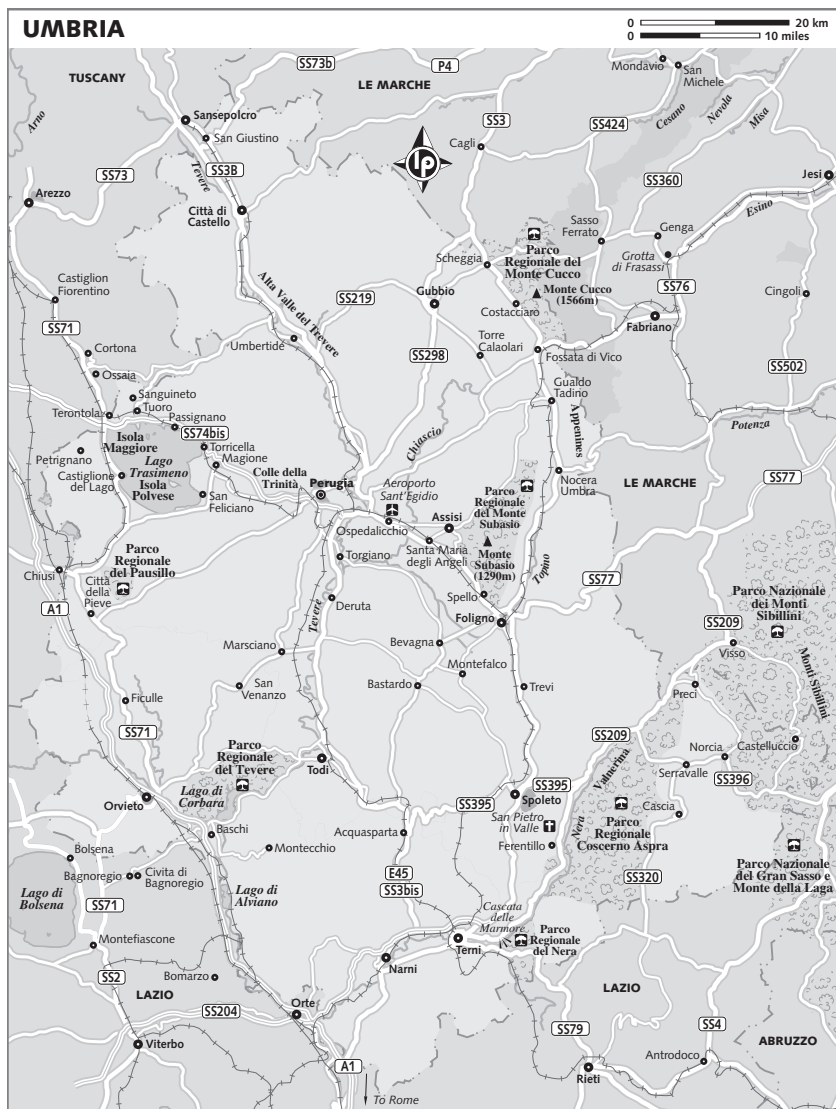
Spoleto and Todi became Ghibelline cities while Perugia and Orvieto, which both

benefited initially from Papal rule, became Guelph cities. The remnants of the conflict still dot Umbria today in the form of the *rocca*, or Papal fortress, examples of which can be seen in Perugia, Assisi and Narni.

Many important saints (Benedict of Norcia for one, who became the patron of Europe) had put Umbria on the mystical map, but it

was in the 13th century when Umbria's most famous son, born in one of its most famous towns – St Francis of Assisi – cemented Umbria's reputation as a centre for spirituality, which continues to this day.

Historians of Umbrian culture like to say that time stopped in 1540. The pope installed a salt tax, resulting in a Salt War that led to a



FARMHOUSE HOLIDAY

Trade museums and Manolos for barns and bunnies at an *agriturismo* (farm-stay accommodation), the most peaceful of Italian accommodation choices. Quickly gaining in popularity, *agriturismi* embody central Italy's agricultural roots. Italy requires *agriturismi* to grow at least one of their own products and they can run the gamut from a country house with a handful of olive trees to a fully functioning working farm where guests can pitch in.

To find one of hundreds of *agriturismi*, check with any tourist office for the brochure *Agriturismi*, updated each year, or check online:

- www.agritour.net
- www.agriturismo.net
- www.agriturismo.it
- www.bellaumbria.net
- www.woof.org (for work exchange holidays on organic farms)

standstill in Umbrian culture, which means the Renaissance didn't flourish here like it did in neighbouring Tuscany, but it also preserved the medieval hearts of most Umbrian towns. To this day, Umbria still retains much of its ancient history, and time seems to move a little slower, even for visitors.

National Parks & Reserves

Umbria shares the beautiful Parco Nazionale dei Monti Sibillini with Le Marche (see p600). Filled with waterfalls, walking trails, camp sites and the odd wolf, this is a world away from the vineyards and medieval art that make up the rest of central Italy. Check the official website at www.sibillini.net for more information on activities and accommodation.

Getting Around

Getting around Umbria on public transport requires some forethought. Conversely, having a car is a hindrance in several congested hill towns. The best way to see Umbria is to take the train or bus to congested towns such as Assisi, Spoleto, Perugia, Orvieto, Spello and Gubbio and then rent a car for a week and wander through the countryside.

Buses head from Perugia to every town in this chapter; check at the tourist office or the bus station for exact details. The **state train system** (Ferrovie dello Stato; ☎ 147 88 80 88; www.trenitalia.com) sparsely crisscrosses Umbria, but the private **Ferrovie Centrali Umbra** (FCU; Umbrian Central Railway; ☎ 075 57 54 01; www.fcu.it in Italian) and several bus companies fill in the blanks. For general Umbria transport information, call ☎ 800 51 21 41. You will rarely be connected to someone who speaks English, but if you're well practised in Italian numbers, and can tell them the city, they'll usually patiently tell you the prices and times of day that trains leave.

PERUGIA

pop 161,400

One of Italy's best-preserved hill towns replete with museums and churches, Perugia is also a hip student-town with a never-ending stream of cultural events and concerts. Within the city walls, little has changed architecturally for over 400 years, and a few hotels and restaurants are in triple-digit ages. Culturally, however, Perugia is on the edge. Two major universities, a steady stream of foreigners and a thriving art scene ensure that Perugia melds the modern with its past.

History

Although the Umbri tribe once inhabited the surrounding area and controlled land stretching from present-day Tuscany into Le Marche, it was the Etruscans who founded the city, leading to its zenith in the 6th century BC. It fell to the Romans in 310 BC and was given the name Perusia.

During the Middle Ages the city was racked by the internal feuding of the Baglioni and Oddi families. In 1538 the city was incorporated into the Papal States under Pope Paul III, remaining under papal control for almost three centuries.

Perugia has a strong artistic tradition. In the 15th century it was home to fresco painters Bernardino Pinturicchio and his master Pietro Vannucci (known as Perugino), who would later teach the famous painter Raphael. Its cultural tradition continues to this day with the University of Perugia and several other universities, including the famous Università per Stranieri (University for Foreigners), which teach Italian, art and culture to thousands of students from around the world.

Orientation

Old Perugia's main strip, Corso Vannucci (named after hometown artist Pietro Vannucci, aka Perugino), runs north from the top of Rocca Paolina through Piazza Italia to the heart of the city, Piazza IV Novembre, where you'll find the Fontana Maggiore and the cathedral. Almost every place listed in this section is within a kilometre of here.

Urbano (city) buses originate from Piazza Italia while *extraurbano* (intercity) buses drop you off at Piazza Partigiani. From here, take a few sets of *scale mobili* (elevators) through the Rocca Paolina to reach Piazza Italia. If you have heavy luggage, watch out: *scale mobili* interchange with staircases up the steep hillside. From the train station it's an enormous hike, especially with that luggage, or a quick €1 bus ride, 1.5km up the hill to Piazza Italia.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

La Libreria (☎ 075 573 50 57; Via Oberdan 52; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm & 4.30-8pm Sun) Stocks a selection of English-language books, as well as maps and Lonely Planet guides in Italian and English.

Libreria Betti (☎ 075 573 16 67; Corso Vannucci 107; ☎ 9am-8pm, closed Sun) A good selection of English-language books, cookbooks, guides and dictionaries.

EMERGENCY

Police station (☎ 075 572 32 32; Palazzo dei Priori)

INTERNET ACCESS

Over a dozen internet cafés have popped up recently, most charging around €1.50 per hour. If you're sticking around, ask for an *abbonamento* discount card from the café you frequent the most, which will save you about 15% on 10 hours. Many cafés now have Skype, with accompanying headphones and cameras.

Coffee Break (☎ 075 571 63 22; Via Danzetti 22; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Sat, 10am-11pm Sun; €1 per hr, free wi-fi) Buy anything from the café downstairs and use its (slow) wi-fi as long as you'd like.

Tempo Reale (☎ 075 573 55 33; Via del Forno 17; ☎ 10am-11.30pm) Central and friendly with high-speed connection, ample opening hours and cheap long-distance telephone service.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Perugia Online (www.perugiaonline.com) Offers info on accommodation, restaurants, history, activities and sights. The main site, www.umbriaonline.com, lists

information for every tourist town in Umbria in Italian or English.

LAUNDRY

67 Laundry (Via Pinturicchio; ☎ 8am-10pm) Wash €3, dry €3, single serve detergents €1.

LEFT LUGGAGE

Stazione Fontivegge (per bag €3 for 1st 12hr, €2 every 12hr thereafter; ☎ 6.30am-7.30pm)

MEDIA

Little Blue What-to-Do This free English-language booklet is a must-have for students or anyone staying longer than a few hours. Known as the 'little blue book', it's available at the Teatro del Pavone, the tourist office and newsstands. Find restaurants, housing suggestions, side trips and a description of local characters.

Viva Perugia – What, Where, When The comune di Perugia's monthly publication (€0.80 from newsstands) lists events and public transportation schedules.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Emergency doctor (☎ 075 3 40 24; ☎ weekends & nights)

Farmacia San Martino (pharmacy; Piazza Matteotti 26) Has a list of all the pharmacies open 24 hours.

Ospedale Silvestrini (hospital; ☎ 075 57 81; S Andrea delle Frate)

MONEY

Banks line Corso Vannucci. All have ATMs, known as *bancomats*.

POST

Mail Boxes Etc (☎ 075 50 17 98; Via D'Andreotto 71) Just uphill a one-way street from the train station, or take bus 7 and it's just past the Agip petrol station on the left.

Post office (Piazza Matteotti; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Sat)

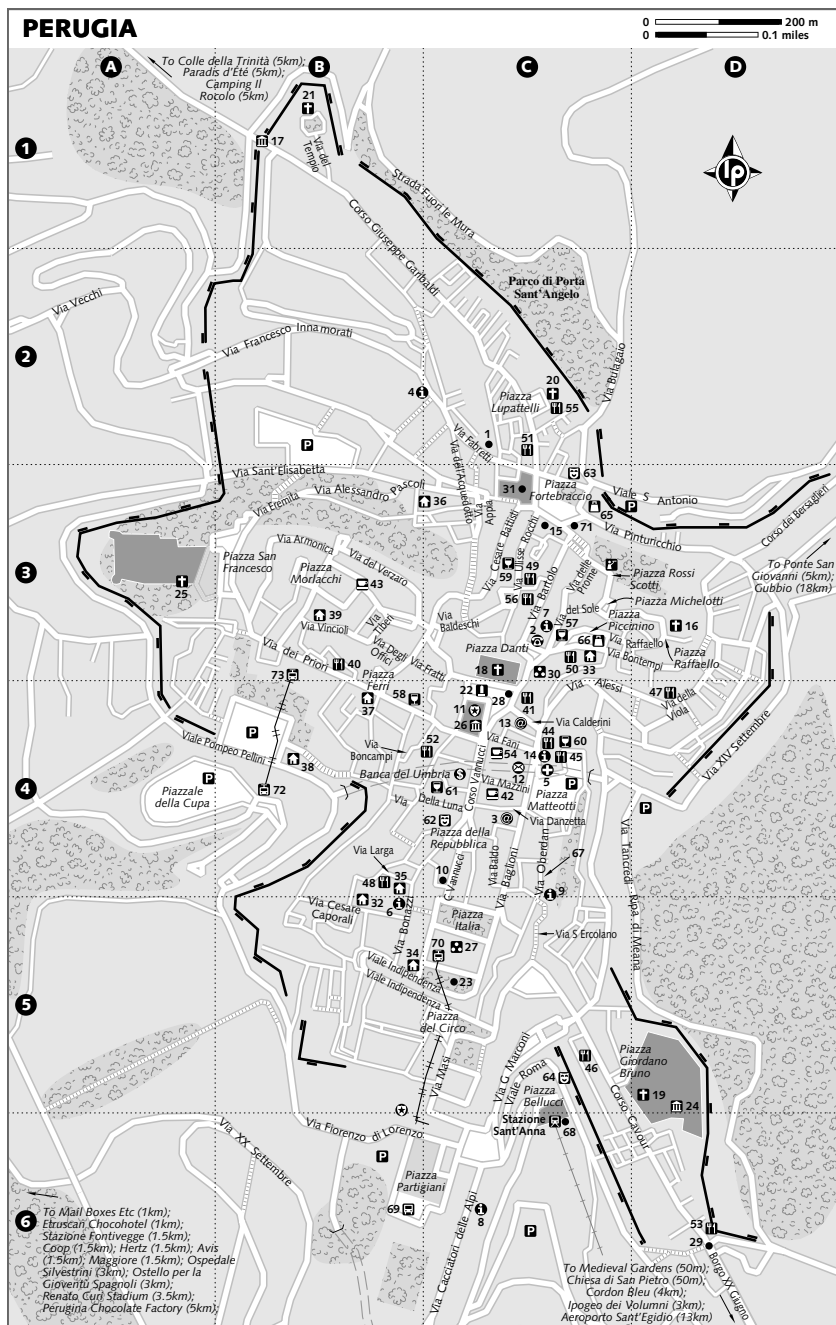
TELEPHONE

Centro Omnitel (☎ 075 572 37 78; Piazza Danti 17) Buy your indispensable Italian *telefonino* (mobile phone) here, or if you already have a GSM-compatible phone, purchase an Italian SIM card to pop into your own phone. You can then purchase *ricariche* (charge cards) here or in many *tabacchi* (tobacconists shops) for more talk-time.

Tempo Reale (☎ 075 573 55 33; Via del Forno 17; ☎ 10am-11.30pm) Internet phone calls for around €0.03 a minute to most major countries.

TOILETS

A growing drug problem in Perugia means it's best to use the *bagni* at a bar or restaurant to steer clear of public toilets (and syringes etc).



TOURIST INFORMATION

eGeneration (☎ 075 585 23 87; www.egeneration.pg.it; Via Fabretti 48; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3.30-6pm) Website and office have up-to-date information on concerts, arts, student events. Organises very low-cost trips to various Italian cities.

InfoUmbria (☎ 075 57 57; www.infoumbria.com in Italian; Piazza Partigiani Intercity bus station, Largo Cacciatori delle Alpi 3; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Private InfoUmbria, also known as InfoTourist, offers information on all of Umbria, and is a fantastic resource for *agriturismi* (farm-stay accommodation), festivals, sights, hotels and general information.

Marco Bellanca (☎ 075 573 68 53, 347 600 22 09; bellsista@yahoo.com; 3/6hr €100/200 for up to 16 people) Will meet guests in any town in Umbria, but specialises in art and history in Perugia and Assisi. Umbrian-born, fluent in German and English.

Tourist office (☎ 075 573 64 58; info@iat.perugia.it; Piazza Matteotti 18; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) Famously unhelpful, the office nevertheless offers scads of tourist pamphlets (behind the desk) for hotels, activities, events etc. Also has the most up-to-date bus and train timetables.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Grifo Viagge (☎ 075 572 48 41; www.grifoviagge.it; Via Bonazzi 31/33; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3.30-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-12.30pm Sat) Basic full-service travel agency.

Il Periscopio (☎ 075 573 08 08; Via del Sole 6)

Arranges excursions, escorted tours and trips within Italy or abroad. The owner speaks fluent English and French.

Sights**CORSO VANNUCCI**

The centre of Perugia – and therefore the centre of all of Umbria – is Piazza IV Novembre. For thousands of years, it was the meeting point for the ancient Etruscan and Roman civilisations. In the medieval period, it was the political centre of Perugia. Now both students and tourists gather here to eat gelato.

On the north end of the piazza is the **Cathedral of San Lorenzo** (☎ 075 572 38 32; Piazza IV Novembre; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2.30-5.30pm Tue-Sun). Although a church has been on this land since the 900s, the version you see was begun in 1345 from designs created by Fra Bevignate in 1300. Building of the cathedral continued until 1587, and the doorway was built in the late 1700s; however, the main façade was never completed. Inside you'll find dramatic Gothic architecture, an altarpiece by Signorelli and sculptures by Duccio. The steps in front of the pink façade are where seemingly all of Perugia congregates.

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Nobile Collegio della					
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In the very centre of the piazza stands the **Fontana Maggiore** (Great Fountain). It was designed by Fra Bevignate, and father-son team Nicola and Giovanni Pisano built the fountain between 1275 and 1278. Along the edge are bas-relief statues representing scenes from the Old Testament, the founding of Rome, the 'liberal arts', and a griffin and lion. Look for the griffin all over Perugia – it's the city's symbol. The lion is the symbol for the Guelphs, the Middle Ages faction that favoured rule by the papacy over rule by the Holy Roman Empire.

The **Palazzo dei Priori** houses some of the best museums in Perugia. The foremost art gallery in Umbria is the stunning **Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria** (National Gallery of Umbria; ☎/fax 800 69 76 16; Palazzo dei Priori, Corso Vannucci 19; adult/concession €6.50/3.25; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm), entered from Corso Vannucci. It's an art historian's dream, with 30 rooms of artwork dating back to Byzantine-like art from the 13th century, as well as rooms dedicated to works from hometown heroes Pinturicchio and Perugia.

Also in the same building is what some consider the most beautiful bank in the world, the **Nobile Collegio del Cambio** (Exchange Hall; ☎ 075 572 85 99; Corso Vannucci 25; admission €2.60; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat summer, 2.30-5.30pm winter), which has three rooms: the Sala dei Legisti (Legist Chamber), with wooden stalls carved by Giampiero Zuccari in the 17th century; the Sala dell'Udienza (Audience Chamber), with frescoes by Perugino; and the Chapel of San Giovanni Battista, painted by a student of Perugino's, Giannicola di Paolo. The **Nobile Collegio della Mercanzia** (Merchant's Hall; ☎ 075 573 03 66; Corso Vannucci 15; admission with Collegio del Cambio €3.10; ☎ core hours 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-5.50pm Tue-Sun summer, often closed afternoon winter) highlights an older audience chamber, from the 13th century, covered in wood panelling by northern craftsmen.

The **Sala dei Notari** (Notaries' Hall; ☎ 075 577 23 39; Piazza IV Novembre, Palazzo dei Priori; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun) was built from 1293 to 1297 and is where the nobility met. The arches supporting the vaults are Romanesque, covered with frescoes depicting biblical scenes and Aesop's fables. To reach the hall, walk up the steps from the Piazza IV Novembre.

At the southern end of Corso Vannucci is the tiny **Giardini Carducci**, which has lovely views of the countryside and hosts the antiques market. The gardens stand atop a once-massive

16th-century fortress (Palazzo della Provincia), now known as the **Rocca Paolina** (main entrance Piazza Italia, entrances on Via Marzia, Via Masi & Viale Indipendenza; admission free; ☎ 8am-7pm). Pope Paolo III Farnese built the monstrosity in the 1540s, wiping out entire sections of what had been a wealthy neighbourhood. Now used as the thoroughway for the *scale mobili*, you can still see former homes of Perugia's powerful medieval families, capped with the bricked-over roof of the Papal fortress. Its nooks and crannies are now used for art exhibits throughout the year, and the last weekend of the month sees the antiques market held here.

You can buy a combined ticket called the **Perugia City Museum Circuit** (adult/child/senior €2.50/1/2) at any of the three following sights; the ticket is valid for one week. First, you can venture down into the 3rd-century-BC **Pozzo Etrusco** (Etruscan Well; ☎ 075 573 36 69; Piazza Danti 18; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Apr-Oct, 10.30am-1.30pm & 2.30-5pm Nov-Mar, Wed-Mon except in Apr & Aug). The 36m-deep well was the main water reservoir of the Etruscan town, and, more recently, the source of water during WWII bombing raids. The second stop is the **Capella di San Severo** (☎ 075 573 38 64; Piazza Raffaello, Porta Sole; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Apr-Oct, 10.30am-1.30pm & 2.30-5pm Nov-Mar, Wed-Mon except in Apr & Aug), decorated with Raphael's *Trinity with Saints* (thought by many to be his first fresco) during the artist's residence in Perugia (1505-508) and frescoes by his pupil Perugino, dating to 1521. The third museum included is the **Cassero di Porta Sant'Angelo** (Scenic Tower; ☎ 075 4 16 70; Porta Sant'Angelo, Corso Garibaldi; ☎ 11am-1.30pm & 3-6.30pm Apr-Oct, 11am-1.30pm & 3-5pm Nov-Mar, Wed-Mon except in Apr & Aug). The panoramic view facing back onto Perugia is the main reason to come out here, plus it offers a historical briefing of the three city walls.

CORSO GIUSEPPE GARIBALDI

At the end of Ulisse Rocchi facing Piazza Forabbraccio and the Università per Stranieri are the ancient city gates, the **Arco Etrusco** (Etruscan Arch) dating from the 3rd century BC. The upper part is Roman and bears the inscription 'Augusta Perusia'. The loggia on top dates from the Renaissance.

North along Corso Giuseppe Garibaldi is the **Chiesa di Sant'Agostino** (Piazza Lupattelli; ☎ 8am-noon & 4pm-sunset), a church with a beautiful 16th-century choir by sculptor and architect Baccio d'Agnolo. Small signs forlornly mark

the places where artworks once hung before they were carried off to France by Napoleon and his men. Further north along the same thoroughfare, Via del Tempio branches off to the Romanesque **Chiesa di Sant'Angelo** (☎ 075 57 22 64; Via Sant'Angelo; ☎ 10am-noon & 4-6pm), one of Italy's oldest churches, dating back to the 5th and 6th centuries. However, the remnants are even older; it's said to stand on the site of a pagan temple, and several of its inside columns were taken from Roman structures.

DOWN CORSO CAVOUR

The city's largest church is the early-14th-century **Chiesa di San Domenico** (☎ 075 573 15 68; Piazza Giordano Bruno; ☎ 8am-noon & 4pm-sunset). It has a Romanesque interior, lightened by the immense stained-glass windows, that was replaced by austere Gothic fittings in the 16th century. Pope Benedict XI, who died after eating poisoned figs in 1325, lies buried here.

The adjoining convent is home to the **Museo Archeologico Nazionale dell'Umbria** (☎ 075 572 71 41; Piazza Giordano Bruno 10; adult/concession €4/2; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun, 10am-7.30pm Mon), which will boggle the mind with its collection of Etruscan and prehistoric artefacts – carved funerary urns, coins, Bronze Age statuary – dating back to the 16th century BC. The *Cippo Perugino* (Perugian Memorial Stone) has the longest Etruscan-language engraving ever found, offering a new window into the language.

Just past the Porta di San Pietro is the 10th-century **Chiesa di San Pietro** (☎ 075 3 47 70; Borgo XX Giugno; ☎ 8am-noon & 4pm-sunset), entered through a frescoed doorway in the first courtyard. The interior is an incredible mix of gilt and marble and contains a *pietà* (a sculpture, drawing or painting of the dead Christ supported by the Madonna) by Perugino. Many of the paintings in this church feature depictions of biblical women.

Take a stroll or picnic at the **Medieval Gardens** (☎ 075 585 64 32; Borgo XX Giugno 74; admission free; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri), entered from behind the Chiesa di San Pietro. During the medieval period, monasteries often created gardens reminiscent of the Garden of Eden and biblical stories, with plants that symbolised myths and sacred stories.

Numbered locations through this garden include: 3, the Cosmic Tree, symbolising the forefather of all trees; 6, the Tree of Light and Knowledge; 7, the Tree of Good and Evil; 11 and 12, medicinal and edible plants used for

centuries; 16, remnants from an ancient fish pond; 20, the Cosmogonic Ovulation Spring (a lily-pad pond); and 24, the exit of the Medieval Gardens, symbolising the elevation of man from the natural plane.

Be sure to check out the groovy alchemist's studio tucked into the corner near number 20, the Yggdrasil Incline.

OUT OF TOWN

About 5km southeast of the city is the **Ipogeo dei Volumni** (☎ 075 39 33 29; Via Assisana 53; adult/concession €3/1.50; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm Sep-Jun, 9am-12.30pm & 4.30-7pm Jul & Aug), a 2nd-century-BC Etruscan burial site. An underground chamber contains a series of recesses holding the funerary urns of the Volumnio family. The surrounding grounds are a massive expanse of partially unearthed burial chambers with several buildings housing artefacts that haven't been stolen over the years. Take a train or APM bus 3 from Piazza Italia to Ponte San Giovanni and walk west from there. By car, take the Bonanzano exit heading south on the E45.

The trick for independent travellers visiting the **Perugina chocolate factory** (☎ 075 527 67 96; Van San Sisto; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Fri year-round, 9am-1pm Sat Oct-Jan & Mar-May) is to either call ahead to arrange a guided tour, or simply latch on to a tour group (conducted in either Italian or English). After visiting the simple museum, you'll wend your way through an enclosed sky bridge, watching as the white-outfitted Oomp-, er, factory workers go about their god-granted talent of creating chocolate. Drive through the gates of the humorously nondescript factory entrance marked Nestlé, or take bus 7 to San Sisto.

Courses

Check with the tourist office for lists of all current classes in and around Perugia.

Comitato Linguistico (☎ 075 572 14 71; www.comitatolinguistico.com; Largo Cacciatori delle Alpi 5, 3rd fl) Catering to a more serious crowd, the lessons here are slightly more rigorous than Stranieri. Two- and four-week courses start throughout the year, priced from €130 per week. The school can arrange private or family accommodation.

Cordon Bleu Perugia (☎ 075 592 50 12 in Italian, 075 692 02 49 in English; www.cordonbleuperugia.com; Via dei Lilla 3, Casaglia) Come for a three-hour beginners' class or a week-long professional chef course on Italian cuisine. Day courses teach newbies how to make bread, pasta, Umbrian

appetisers, and there is even a singles' cooking course. Week-long courses cost €350 to €600.

Università per Stranieri (☎ 075 5 74 61; www.unistrappg.it; Palazzo Gallenga, Piazza Fortebraccio 4) This is Italy's foremost academic institution for foreigners, offering courses in language, literature, history, art, music, opera and architecture, to name a few. A series of degree courses is available, as well as one-, two- and three-month intensive language courses starting at €300 a month and semester-long accredited programmes for students.

Festivals & Events

Perugia – and Umbria in general – has no less than 80 gazillion events, festivals, concerts, summer outdoor movies and *sagre* (traditional festivals). Check www.bellaumbria.net or www.umbria2000.it for details.

Eurochocolate (☎ 075 502 58 80; www.eurochocolate.com) Most Perugini know to run, run far away from this most overhyped of festivals, which often sees up to one million visitors. Held around the third week of October, hundreds of booths sell every known concoction of cacao, cocoa and chocolate. If you must, plan your hotel stay months in advance and don't even think of driving.

Sagra Musicale Umbra (Holy Music Festival; ☎ 075 572 22 71; www.perugiamusicaclassica.com in Italian; ticket office Via Danzetti 7; tickets €7-50) One of the oldest music festivals in Europe. Begun in 1937, it's held in Perugia from mid to late September and features world-renowned conductors and musicians.

Umbria Jazz (☎ 800 46 23 11, 075 500 11 07; www.umbriajazz.com in Italian) This attracts topnotch international performers for 10 days each July, usually around the middle of the month. In the past, the festival has featured performances by hundreds of jazz greats, including Pat Metheny, the Buena Vista Social Club, Chick Corea and Al Jarreau. Single tickets cost €10 to €100, and week-long or weekend passes are also available. Be sure to check out Giardini Carducci during the day or any number of restaurants or nightspots for impromptu concerts.

Sleeping

Perugia has a decent array of hotels and *pensioni*, and is a good place to stay if you're visiting Umbria by train or bus, as many towns can be visited on day trips from Perugia. There's no reason to stay outside the historic centre: it's noisier, less charming and not much cheaper.

BUDGET

Camping & Hostels

The city has two camp sites, both in Colle della Trinità, 5km northwest of the city, reached by taking bus 9 from Piazza Italia. Ask the

driver to drop you off at the Superal supermarket, from where it's a 300m walk to the camp sites.

Paradis d'Été (☎ 075 517 31 21; www.wel.it/paradis; Strada Fontana Trinità 29h, Colle della Trinità; per person €5.50-7, per car/tent €3/5; ☎ Mar-Oct; 📺) This camp site has 46 well-shaded sites in a parklike setting with a swimming pool. Facilities include hot showers, laundry sinks, bar and children's playground.

Camping Il Rocolo (☎ /fax 075 517 85 50; www.ilrocolo.it; Str Fontana 1/n, Loc. Colle della Trinità; per person €5-6.50, per car/tent €3/5.50; ☎ Easter-Sep & during Eurochocolate; 📺) International newspapers, Skype telephone connection, 24-hour hot showers and 100 shaded sites make this a safe choice, and there's also an on-site restaurant, friendly multilingual staff and plenty of extras (barbecue pit, TV area, *bocce* party, small market, proximity to a bus into Perugia).

Ostello per la Gioventù Spagnoli (☎ 075 501 13 66; www.ostellionline.org; Via Cortonese 4; dm/s/d/tr incl breakfast & sheets €15/22/34/51) A few kilometres from the city centre is Perugia's main HI hostel. It's large (80 beds) and doesn't have the romance of the city centre hostel (below), but it's clean (towels €1, laundry €3), there's no curfew and the lockout is only 10am to 2pm. Take buses 9 and 10.

Centro Internazionale per la Gioventù (☎ 075 572 28 80; www.ostello.perugia.it; Via Bontempi 13; dm €15; ☎ mid-Jan-mid-Dec; 📺) If the 9.30am to 4pm lockout and the midnight curfew (*no exceptions*) don't scare you off, then you'll appreciate the sweeping countryside view and wafting sounds of church bells from the hostel's terrace, where guests often gather after making dinner in the well-stocked kitchen. Enjoy the 16th-century frescoed ceilings and tidy four-to six-person rooms. Sheets cost €2.

B&Bs & Hotels

Pensione Paola (☎ 075 572 38 16; Via della Canapina 5; s/d €33/52) It's a great bet if you want use of your own kitchen but don't want the lockout of the hostel. It has eight simply furnished rooms. Take bus 6 or 7 heading towards Piazza Italia and get off at the Pellini car park. Signs will guide you up the steps to the right. From the city centre, walk down Via dei Priori.

Casa Spagnoli Bed & Breakfast (☎ 075 573 51 27, 340 350 38 93; www.perugiaonline.com/bbspagnoli; Via Caporali 17; s incl breakfast without bathroom €30-38, d €50-58, tr €60-75) The motto is *semplice*: simple. Although the slightly cantankerous Spanish-speaking

grandmother now runs daily operations, this private-home B&B is still great value, and perfectly located near Piazza Italia.

Pensione Anna (☎ /fax 075 573 63 04; www.albergoanna.it; Via dei Priori 48; s/d/tr from €35-45/50-70/54-80, without bathroom €25-35/45-56; (P)) On the 4th floor with no elevator, this eclectic place is great if you want central and fairly quiet, but don't have a lot of heavy luggage.

Hotel San Sebastiano (☎ 075 573 78 65; www.hotelansebastiano.it; Via San Sebastiano 4; s/d incl breakfast €40-50/50-70, s without bathroom €25-40) Near Perugia's university is an old-school family-style *pensione*. Its side-street location guarantees a good night's sleep in its sparse rooms.

MIDRANGE

Primavera Minihotel (☎ 075 572 16 57; www.primaveraminihotel.it; Via Vincioli 8; s €42-48, d €60-70, tr €84-90; (P) (☎) (📺)) This central and quiet hotel run by a dedicated English- and French-speaking mother-daughter team is a fabulous find, quietly tucked in a corner. The magnificent views complement the bright and airy rooms and common areas. Breakfast costs €3 to €6. All rooms come with private bath, telephone and TV. Great value.

Etruscan Chocohotel (☎ 075 583 73 14; www.chocohotel.it; Via Campo di Marte 134; s €42-65, d €64-124; (P) (☎) (📺) (📺)) This has to be the first hotel in the world dedicated to chocolate. Try items from the restaurant's 'chocomenu', shop at the 'chocostore' or swim in the rooftop pool (sadly, filled with water). Free on-site parking, lobby wireless and triple-paned windows make up for the location (on a busy street near the train station).

Hotel Fortuna (☎ 075 572 28 45; www.umbriahotels.com; Via Bonazzi 9; s incl breakfast €69-98, d €99-128, ste €147; (P) (☎) (📺)) In a location both quiet and central, this spotless hotel is partially housed in a building dating back to the 1300s. Ancient stone, frescoes, and Venetian plaster walls accompany comfortable new furnishings, new parquet floors and (thankfully) modern bathrooms. Eschew the lower-priced doubles, as they're located in a musty reconverted one-star hotel with no air-con.

TOP END

Hotel Brufani Palace (☎ 075 573 25 41; www.sinahotels.com; Piazza Italia 12; s/d €215/320, ste €440-850; (P) (☎) (📺) (📺)) One of Umbria's two five-star hotels, and a truly spectacular experience, the palace's special touches include frescoed main rooms,

impeccably decorated bedrooms and suites, a garden terrace for summer dining, and helpful trilingual staff. Swim over Etruscan ruins in the subterranean fitness centre. It has a 24-hour concierge, high-end Umbrian restaurant, wi-fi (€3 per hour) and is wheelchair accessible.

Eating

Because of the great number of students and tourists, the amount of places at which to eat in Perugia is staggering. The first days the mercury rises above 15 degrees or so (usually in March) sees dozens of open-air locales spring up along Corso Vannucci. The best two are Ristorante Il Bacio (this page) and Caffè di Perugia (p556).

RESTAURANTS

Tuttotesto (☎ 075 573 66 66; Corso Garibaldi 15; meals €9; (☎) Tue-Sun) Beyond Perugia's pasta-and-meat focus is this casual university spot where professors and students debate Nietzsche over sweet and savoury crepes, salads and *torta al testo* (Umbrian flatbread sandwiches).

Ristorante dal Mi' Cocco (☎ 075 573 25 11; Corso Garibaldi 12; set meals €14; (☎) Tue-Sun) Don't ask for a menu because there isn't one at this most traditional Perugian restaurant. Diners receive a set menu of a starter, main course, side dish and dessert. You may receive asparagus risotto in May, or *tagliatelle* (long, ribbon-shaped pasta) with peas and ham in November. Extremely popular with students, it's best to call ahead.

Ristorante Il Bacio (☎ 075 572 09 09; Via Boncampi 6; meals around €11; (☎) to 12.30am Thu-Tue) This rather cavernous *ristorante* and pizzeria sells good, cheap meals and also sets up a decent outdoor café on Corso Vannucci, but its selling point is that it's one of the only late-night restaurants in the historic centre.

Pizzeria Mediterranea (☎ 075 572 13 22; Piazza Piccinino 11/12; meals €11; (☎) Wed-Mon) Perugini (Perugians) know to come here for the best pizza in town. A spaceship-sized wood-fired brick oven heats up pizzas from the simplest margherita to the 12-topping 'his and hers'. Add delectable *mozzarella di bufala* (buffalo mozzarella) to any pizza for an additional €1.60. It gets busy enough to queue, especially Thursday and Saturday nights.

Il Segreto di Pulcinella (☎ 075 573 62 84; Via Larga 8; meals €18; (☎) Tue-Sun) The only 'real' Neapolitan pizza in Perugia, as well as a beautiful selection of salads and pasta dishes.

Ristorante Nanà (☎ 075 573 35 71; Corso Cavour 206; meals €23.50; ☎ Mon-Sat) It's a good sign when approximately 47 members of the same family run a 15-table restaurant. Simply furnished with a small menu, the food is 'nuovo italiano': pâté with Sardinian flatbread (€7) or *gnocchetti* (little gnocchi) in a pepper and radicchio cream sauce (€6.50). The wine list is equally impressive and affordable.

Wine Bartolo Hosteria (☎ 075 571 60 27; Via Bartolo 30; meals €32; ☎ Thu-Tue) Descend a staircase into a hobbitlike burrow that's surrounded by walls of wine bottles around a handful of cosy tables underneath a low brick ceiling. Staff do beautiful things with Chianina beef – stewed with Sangiovese or as a carpaccio with lemon over radicchio.

Enone (☎ 075 572 19 50; www.enone.it; Corso Cavour 61; meals €26; ☎ 7pm-1am Wed-Mon) The new trendy hot spot on the Perugian dining and drinking scene, Enone is a mix between a wine bar, restaurant and club. The vaulted brick walls hide all sorts of goings-on, such as live music (usually Monday) and sushi made by a Japanese chef (usually Thursday). The regular menu features funky dishes like carrot and black truffle gnocchi in a parmesan basket.

Il Gufo (☎ 075 573 41 26; Via della Viola 18; meals €26; ☎ 8pm-1am Tue-Sat) The owner/chef gathers ingredients from local markets and cooks up whatever is fresh and in season. Try dishes such as *cinghiale* (wild boar) with fennel (€9) or *riso nero* (black rice) with grilled vegetables and brie (€9). There is always a good selection of salads for €5.

CAFÉS

Many of the restaurants that line Corso Vannucci open up pavement cafés in the warmer months. Don't expect the food to be top-notch, as you're paying for atmosphere.

Sandri (☎ 075 572 41 12; Corso Vannucci 32; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Sun) When you enter into your third century of business, something must be right. Known for delectable chocolate cakes, candied fruit, espresso and pastries. They wrap all take-home purchases (picked up at the counter but paid for at the till), no matter how small, in beautiful red paper with a ribbon bow.

Caffè Morlacchi (☎ 075 572 17 60; Piazza Morlacchi 6/8; ☎ 8am-1am Mon-Sat) Bring your bongo drums and leftist rhetoric to this most hip of establishments. Students, professors and expats nosh on international fare, sipping tea

or hot chocolate during the day and cocktails at night.

Bar Centrale (Piazza IV Novembre 35; ☎ 7am-11pm) This is a popular meeting place for students with an indoor salon and umbrella-topped outdoor tables where you can munch a *panini* and watch students on the cathedral steps.

Caffè di Perugia (☎ 075 573 18 63; Via Mazzini 10; meals €29; ☎ noon-3pm & 7pm-midnight Wed-Mon) The fanciest sit-down café in town, its desserts are worth the high prices. It also serves a fine choice of basic pasta and meat dishes and offers outdoor seating in summer and a smoking room indoors.

SELF-CATERING

Coop (Piazza Matteotti; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat) The largest grocery store in the historic centre sells all the staples, fruits and vegetables, and has a deli counter with fresh pasta and cheeses.

Covered market (☎ 7am-1.30pm Mon-Sat) Found below Coop, you can buy fresh produce, bread, cheese and meat from this market. From Piazza Matteotti, head down the stairs of the arched doorway labelled #18A.

Coop (☎ 075 501 65 04; Piazza Vittorio Veneto; ☎ 9am-7.45pm Mon-Sat) Another Coop, supersized, with its own parking garage directly across from the train station (two hours' free parking with validation).

Bangladeshi Alimentari (☎ 075 572 36 41; Via dei Priori 71; ☎ 11am-10pm daily) This grocery just sells the basics, but check out the opening hours.

Drinking

Lunabar (☎ 075 572 29 66; Via Scura 1/6; ☎ 8am-2am Tue-Sun) Atmospherically equidistant between New York and Umbria, the city centre lounge off Corso Vannucci spins together frescoed, Venetian plaster walls with a grey and onyx bar and space-age restrooms. Smokers enjoy their own room and the hungry will appreciate the *aperitivo* (happy hour snacks) selection.

Cinastik (☎ 075 572 09 99; Via dei Priori 36; ☎ 6.30pm-2.30am Mon-Sat) You'll feel very much like you're on the Continent in this swanky hot spot. The downstairs is pumping with sultry music and the mixed drinks are flowing. The upstairs is a little quieter (make sure you check out the coolest bathrooms in Perugia).

Bottega del Vino (☎ /fax 075 571 61 81; Via del Sole 1; ☎ 7pm-1am Mon-Sat) A fire or candles burn atmospherically on the terrace, while inside, live jazz and hundreds of bottles of wine lining the walls add to the romance of the setting. You

can taste dozens of Umbrian wines, which you can purchase with the help of sommelierlike experts.

La Terrazza (Via Matteotti 18a; ☺ summer only) Should you sit in the park and enjoy the view of the sun setting over the Umbrian hillside, or head into a darkened pub for a drink? Well, you can come here for both. On the back terrace of the building that houses the Coop and covered markets is this open-air bar, perfect for an evening *apéritif*.

La Tana dell'Orso (☎ 075 572 95 36; Via Ulisse Rocchi 32; ☺ noon-4pm & 6pm-2am Tue-Sun) Between the cathedral and the Arco Etrusco is this up-and-coming wine-bar-cum-nightspot. Part casual restaurant, part pub and part hopping club, it serves up meals at lunch and dinner time and DJ-hosted dancing after hours. Happy hour from 10pm to 11pm.

Entertainment

Much of Perugia's nightlife parades outside the cathedral and around Fontana Maggiore. Hundreds of local and foreign students congregate here practically every night, playing guitars and drums and chatting with friends. Tourists mix in easily, slurping gelati and enjoying this fascinating version of outdoor theatre. When the student population grows, some of the clubs on the outskirts of town run a bus to Palazzo Gallenga, starting around 11pm. Students get paid to hand out flyers on Corso Vannucci, so check with them or ask at the steps. Most clubs get going around midnight, so be warned on your way back into town: the *scale mobili* stop running at about 1am.

Cinema Teatro del Pavone (☎ 075 572 49 11; www.cinegatti.it; Corso Vannucci 67) This grand theatre now shows films – on Mondays in their original language (usually English) – for €4. Come early to grab a box seat. During the summer, the owners run outdoor movies; check at the cinema for schedules and directions.

Contrappunto (☎ 075 573 36 67; Via Scortica 4/a; ☺ evenings until late Tue-Sun) What was a jazz club now opens its doors to all sorts of music. Jazz jams are just on Wednesday now, but try live rock on Thursday, disco on Friday and world-famous DJs on Saturdays (until 5am). Food is available; try the huge antipasto plate for two to four people for €16.

Velvet (☎ 075 572 13 21; Viale Roma 20; ☺ Tue-Sun) Come to where the beautiful people play. It opens around 10pm, but the well-dressed party here until the wee hours.

Perugia football team (☎ 075 500 66 41; www.perugiacalcio.it; Renato Curi Stadium, Via Piccolpasso 48; tickets €2-40) Perugia Calcio has been knocking back and forth between Serie A, B and C, and ticket availability goes up (or down) with the tide, as does the gossip, a favourite discussion topic for Perugia's residents. Take bus 9, 11 or 13 to the stadium.

Shopping

If you're lucky enough to be in Perugia on the fourth weekend of the month, spend a few hours in the Mercato Mensile Antiquariato (antiques market) around the Piazza Italia and in the Giardini Carducci. It's a great place to pick up old prints, frames, furniture, jewellery, postcards and stamps. Open from 9am until 6pm or 7pm, or when it rains.

Look for the banner reading Via Oberdan – Shopping Street. It's the place for boutiques, jewellery, shoes and music shops.

On the first Sunday of the month, check out the **Umbria Terraviva** (organic market; ☎ 075 835 50 62; Piazza Piccinino) located along the side of the Duomo heading towards Via Bonanzi. You'll find all sorts of organic fruits, vegetables and fabulous canned or packaged items to take home as gifts.

Giordano worked for Perugia on 25 years. In 2000, he opened his own shop, **Augusta Perusia Cioccolato e Gelateria** (☎ 075 573 45 77; www.cioccolatoaugustaperusia.it in Italian; Via Pinturicchio 2; ☺ 10.30am-8pm Mon-Sat), creating delectables from the old tradition, including *baci* (hazelnut 'kisses' covered in chocolate) from the original Perugian recipe. Delicious handmade chocolate bars come in boxes with old paintings of Perugia – great for gifts – or pick up some of the city's best gelato for yourself.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Aeroporto Sant'Egidio (PEG; ☎ 075 59 21 41; www.airport.umbria.it), 13km east of the city, offers at least three daily Alitalia flights to Milan, plus a new Ryanair service to London Stansted thrice weekly. A one-way or round-trip taxi to Sant'Egidio costs €25 from the city centre, or there's an extremely convenient bus line, **Sulga** (☎ 800 09 96 61; www.sulga.it; €3.50), which coincides with all arrivals and departures. The white shuttle-buses leave from Piazza Italia about an hour and 10 minutes before a scheduled departure, stopping at the train station 15

minutes into the journey. From the airport, buses leave once everyone is off the planes with their luggage.

BUS

Several towns in Umbria have no train station, but several buses pick up the slack, except on Sundays, when it's impossible to get just about anywhere by bus. APM Perugia has recently upgraded its fleet with two dozen ecologically friendly buses.

Intercity buses leave from Piazza Partigiani (take the *scale mobili* from Piazza Italia). Sulga also offers a Perugia–Florence service (€10.50, 2½ hours) that runs once daily, except Sunday, leaving Perugia at 7.30am and Florence at 6pm (from Piazza Adua at Santa Maria Novella). Most routes within Umbria are operated by **APM** (☎ 800 51 21 41, 075 573 17 07 from mobile; www.apmperugia.com) in the north and **SSIT** (☎ 074 267 07 46; www.spoletina.com) or **ATC Terni** (☎ 0744 40 94 57; www.atcterni.it) in the south.

Buses head to Deruta (€2.60, 25 minutes, 13 daily), Torgiano (€1.60, 25 minutes, nine daily) by *extraurbano* or by city bus 5A, Assisi (€3, 50 minutes, nine daily), Todi (€4.30, one hour and 10 minutes, seven daily), Gubbio (€4.30, one hour and 10 minutes, 10 daily), Gualdo Tadino (€5.20, one hour and 20 minutes, five daily) and Lago Trasimeno towns (€3 to €4.70, 50 minutes to one hour and 10 minutes, six to 10 daily). To get to Narni or Amelia, take an ATC Terni bus from Piazza Partigiani or preferably the FCU train to Terni and switch there. Check the TV monitors above the terminals. It's best

ARRIVING FROM FIUMICINO?

It's quite easy to take a direct bus from Rome's Fiumicino (FCO) airport directly to Perugia. Pick up a blue **Sulga** (☎ 800 09 96 61; www.sulga.it; €3.50) bus across the street from international terminal C. From Monday through Saturday, there are four daily buses to Perugia (€15, 3½ to four hours) at 9am, 12.30pm, 2.30pm and 5pm and two on Sundays and holidays at 12.30pm and 4.30pm. Heading back to Fiumicino, buses leave Piazza Partigiani at 6am, 8am and 9am Monday to Saturday and 7.30am and 8.30am on Sundays and holidays. Several buses stop in Assisi. Check the website for details.

to take the train to Spello, Foligno, Spoleto or Orvieto.

Current train and bus routes, company details and timetables are listed in the monthly booklet *Viva Perugia* (€1), available at the tourist office, hotels and some newsstands.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

From Rome, leave the A1 at the Orte exit and follow the signs for Terni. Once there, take the SS3bis/E45 for Perugia. From the north, exit the A1 at Valdichiana and take dual carriageway SS75 for Perugia. The SS75 to the east connects the city with Assisi.

You'll find three car-rental companies at the main train station. All are open from 8.30am to 1pm and 3.30pm to 7pm Monday to Friday, and from 8.30am to 1pm Saturday.

Avis (☎ /fax 075 500 03 95; alvalrent@hotmail.com)

Hertz (☎ 075 500 24 39; hertzperugia@tiscali.it)

Maggiore (☎ 075 500 74 99; www.maggiore.it in Italian)

Airport Sant'Egidio agencies also include:

Europcar (☎ 075 692 06 15; www.europcar; ☎ 8.30am–1pm & 3–7pm Mon–Fri, 8.30am–12.30pm Sat, by request Sun)

TRAIN

Although Perugia's main train station is named 'Stazione Fontivegge', the sign at the station simply reads 'Perugia'. It is on Piazza Vittorio Veneto, a few kilometres west of the city centre and easily accessible by frequent buses from Piazza Italia. The ticket office is open from 6.30am to 8.10pm (closed for lunch 12.50pm to 1.20pm), but you can buy tickets at the automated machines at any time of day with a credit card or cash. For train information, call **Tren Italia** (☎ 89 20 21).

Perugia is on a spur line, so there's almost always a change in Foligno to the southeast or Terontola to the northwest. Regular trains run to Rome (€10.12 to €18.45, 2¼ to three hours), Florence (€7.90 to €12.50, two hours) and Arezzo (€4.50, one hour and 10 minutes, every two hours). Within Umbria, it's easy to reach Assisi (€1.65, 25 minutes, hourly), Gubbio (€4.30, 1½ hours, seven daily, change in Foligno), Spello (€2.05, 30 minutes, hourly) and Orvieto (€6.10 to €6.80, 1¼ hours, at least every other hour).

About half of the tourist destinations in Umbria require a ride on the **Ferrovia Central Umbra** (FCU; ☎ 075 57 54 01; www.fcu.it in Italian; Stazione Sant'Anna, Piazzale Bellucci). These adorable graffiti'd

'Thomas the Tank Engine' trains also head to Rome (switch in Terni). You must validate your ticket on board, not before boarding as with all other Italian trains.

Take the FCU south to Fratta Todina for Monte Castello di Vibio (€2.05, 40 minutes, 18 daily), Todi (€2.55, 50 minutes, 18 daily) or Terni (€4.40, 1½ hours, 17 daily). The Sansepolcro line heads north to Umbertide (€2.05, 45 minutes, 19 daily) and Città di Castello (€3.05, one hour and 10 minutes, 16 daily).

Getting Around

It's a steep 1.5km climb uphill from Perugia's train station, so a bus is highly recommended, essential for those with luggage. The city bus costs €1 and takes you as far as Piazza Italia in the historic centre. Be sure to validate your ticket upon boarding or you will be fined on the spot. If you haven't bought a ticket, you can buy one on the bus for €1.50. Buses 6, 7, 9, 11 and 15 run between the train station and Piazza Italia. Buy your bus ticket from the small green bus kiosk in front of the train station (or in Piazza Italia, or at many *tabacchi* throughout the city). If you're going to stick around for a while, buy a 10-ticket pass for €8.60. The 'minimetro' light rail system was supposed to have been finished by 2003, so expect it to be running by 2012 or so.

Give **Scootyrent** (☎ 075 572 07 10, 333 102 65 05; www.scootyrent.com; Via Pinturicchio 76) a call for scooter hire. For about €20 a day, you can feel like a real Italian, transporting yourself and taking your life in your hands, all at the same time.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Perugia is humorously difficult to navigate and most of the city centre is only open to residential or commercial traffic (although tourists may drive to their hotels to drop off luggage). Rumour has it that parking police are more lenient on rental cars, but if you park illegally for too long you run the risk of getting towed.

Perugia has six fee-charging car parks: Piazza Partigiani and the Mercato Coperto are the most central and convenient, plus Viale Sant'Antonio, Viale Pellini, Briglie di Braccio and Piazzale Europa. The free car park is located at Piazza Cupa. *Scale mobili* or *ascensori* (lifts) lead from each car park towards the city centre, but take note: they don't operate 24

USEFUL WEBSITES ON UMBRIA

Bella Umbria (www.bellaumbria.net) The comprehensive website on Umbria; lists almost all accommodation in Umbria and the Events and Traditions page allows you to search for festivals by either town or date. In Italian, English, German, French and Spanish.

TourinUmbria (www.tourinumbria.org) A complete listing of accommodation, restaurants and itineraries accessible to travellers with physical disabilities, in Italian and English.

Umbria2000 (www.umbria2000.it) The official Umbrian tourist website, in Italian, English and German.

Umbria Online (www.umbriaonline.com) Details on accommodation, events and itineraries for all major and minor tourist towns in Umbria.

hours a day, and they usually stop between about midnight or 1am and 6am or 7am.

Parking fees cost €0.80 to €1.20 per hour, 24 hours a day, in the city centre lots. If you intend to use a car park a lot, buy a tourist *abbonamento* (unlimited parking ticket pass) from the ticket office at the car park. If you're just parking for a while, try the Coop (see p556) by the train station, where you can park free for two hours with any purchase. Also, many of the spaces near the train station charge only from 9am to 1pm and 4pm to 7pm Monday through Friday, including a car park just north of the station.

Call the **information line** (☎ 075 577 53 75) if your car has been towed or for general parking information.

Your best bet is simply to rent a car on your way out of Perugia.

TAXI

Taxi services are available from 6am to 2am (24 hours a day in July and August) – call ☎ 075 500 48 88 to arrange pick-up.

A ride from the city centre to the main train station, Stazione Fontivegge, will cost about €12. Tack on €1 for each suitcase.

TORGIANO

pop 5900

Fans of wine and olive oil will appreciate this town, a true monument to these two most important Umbrian, and indeed Italian, products. Torgiano is famous throughout the world for its fine wines, and the Lungarotti

family, the closest thing Umbria has to a ruling noble family these days, owns many of the local vineyards, the excellent wine museum and the second of Umbria's two five-star hotels.

Sights & Activities

The most important wine museum in Europe, Torgiano's **Museo del Vino** (☎ 075 988 02 00; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 31; adult/concession €4.50/2.50, incl Museo dell'Olio e dell'Olio €7, audioguide €2; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm summer, to 6pm winter) was started in 1974 by the Lungarotti matriarch, Maria Grazie. The 20-room former palace traces the history of the production of wine in the region back to Etruscan times. Displays of utensils, graphic art, wine containers and production techniques sit alongside a personal collection of photos from the 1950s.

With support from research institutes in Italy and abroad, the Lungarotti family helped organise the **Museo dell'Olio e dell'Olio** (☎ 075 988 03 00; Via Garibaldi 10; adult/concession €4.50/2.50; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-7pm summer, to 6pm winter), which opened in 2000. Contained in a series of medieval houses, the museum traces the production cycle of the olive, displays olive oil accoutrements and documents the culture and use of olives and how they relate to the economy, the landscape, religion, medicine, diet, sport, crafts and traditions.

Festivals & Events

In the second half of November, the **Banco d'Assaggio dei Vini** – a dedicated wine-tasting demonstration – is an important event on the international calendar.

Sleeping & Eating

Al Grappolo d'Oro (☎ 075 98 22 53; www.algrappolo-doro.net; Via Principe Umberto 22/24; s incl breakfast €50, d incl breakfast €90-105; P ☎) One of the best hotel deals in Umbria, it is worth a stay just for the vineyard view from the pool. Smartly furnished 19th-century rooms have been upgraded with DSL, satellite TV, DVD, hairdryers and towel warmers.

The old school eatery **Ristorante Siro** (☎ 075 98 20 10; Via Giordano Bruno 16; meals €24.50) is one of those spots where waiters and customers all know each other by name. The *antipastone al tagliere* (large plate of mixed antipasti is €15 for two) starter would feed a hungry family and *gnocchetti al rubesco e radicchio* (small gnocchi with red wine and radicchio) takes

advantage of the local wine. The homemade tiramisu is to die for.

Getting There & Away

APM Perugia (☎ 800 51 21 41; www.appperugia.it) buses head to Perugia (€1.60, 25 minutes, nine daily) by *extraurbano* bus, or take city bus 5A.

DERUTA

pop 8700

South of Perugia is an ancient 'company' town known for one thing: majolica ceramics. The Etruscans and Romans worked the clay around Deruta but it was not until the blue and yellow metallic-oxide majolica glazing technique was imported from Majorca in the 15th century that the ceramics industry took off.

Contact the **tourist office** (☎ 075 971 00 43; Piazza dei Consoli; ☎ 9am-noon & 2.30-5pm Tue-noon Mon) for accommodation or information.

Prices for majolica ceramics in Deruta can be lower or higher than towns like Gubbio or Assisi, but know what you're getting (ie either quality handmade items at boutique outlets or mass-produced factory knockoffs). Many of the larger operations are mass-produced in a factory. The prices will be lower, but so will the quality. For the best quality, head to a smaller shop that follows the centuries-old Deruta traditions.

Try **Maioliche Nulli** (☎/fax 075 97 23 84; Via Tiberina 142; ☎ daily), where Rolando Nulli creates each item by hand, while his brother Goffredo, wife Tiziana or son Luca finishes them with intricate paintings, specialising in classic medieval designs. If they're not busy and you ask nicely in Italian, they might even bring you downstairs and teach you to throw a bowl on the wheel. Maioliche Nulli packages and ships anywhere in the world. Parking is available and it's open Sunday.

You can get a taste of the genuine article at the **Museo Regionale della Ceramica** (☎/fax 075 971 10 00; Largo San Francesco; adult/concession/child under 6 €3/2/free; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm or 7pm daily, only Wed-Mon in winter), in the former Franciscan convent. The history of the production of pottery in Deruta from the 14th century until the beginning of the 20th century is presented here, along with an explanation of the development of the special glaze, including some splendid examples.

APM buses connect the town with Perugia (€2.60, 25 minutes, 13 daily).

LAGO TRASIMENO

It would have been easy for drop-dead gorgeous Lago Trasimeno to become a holiday haven for busloads of Northern European sun-seekers, à la the coast of Le Marche. Granted, you'll find plenty of such folks during the summer months, but the majority of the area – outside Passignano and a strip leaving San Feliciano – has thankfully eschewed the Stalinist high-rise monoarchitecture of such Adriatic holiday villages. *Agriturismo* cover the hills like the omnipresent sunflower, historic Castiglione del Lago folds travellers in gently to allow room for all, and everyone respects the delicate ecology of the precious lake.

Outside of overcrowded August, relaxed visitors enjoy the water sports, local cuisine, never-ending walking trails and Umbria's best hostel, located on its own practically private island.

Orientation

Two major highways skirt the lake, the SS71 heads from Chiusi to Arezzo on the west side (in Tuscany) and SS75bis crosses the north end of the lake, heading from the A1 in Tuscany to Perugia. Public transport users can arrive easily by train into Magione, Torricella and Castiglione del Lago, and by bus from Perugia.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 075 965 2484; www.castiglionedelago.it; Piazza Mazzini 10, Castiglione del Lago; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) advises on *agriturismi*, as well as walking and biking trails and water sports.

Sights & Activities

Popular activities at the lake include trekking, wine tasting, camping, water sports and *dolce far niente* (the sweet enjoyment of doing nothing). Many also go for the culinary delights. The locals are very proud of their excellent produce, most notably their high-quality DOC wines (see p76) and DOP (Denominazione d'Origine Protetta; Protected Denomination of Origin) olive oils. If you are interested in following the Strade del Vino (Wine Route) of the Colli del Trasimeno (Trasimeno Hill district), the **Associazione Strada del Vino Colli del Trasimeno** (☎ 075 58 29 41; www.montitrasimeno.umbria.it in Italian; Comunità Montana, Via S Bonaventura 10, Perugia) produces a brochure with suggested itineraries.

ies. You can also pick up this brochure at the tourist office in Castiglione del Lago.

On Wednesday morning, enjoy a pleasant wander through the lake's best **market** in Castiglione del Lago.

Castiglione del Lago's attractions include the **Palazzo della Corgna** (☎ 075 965 82 10; Piazza Gramsci; admission incl Rocca del Leone adult/concession €3/2; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-7.30pm summer, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat & Sun winter), an ancient ducal palace. A covered passageway connects the palace with the 13th-century **Rocca del Leone**, an excellent example of medieval military architecture.

The lake's main inhabited island – **Isola Maggiore**, near Passignano – was reputedly a favourite with St Francis. The hill-top **Chiesa di San Michele Arcangelo** contains a Crucifixion painted by Bartolomeo Caporali dating from around 1460. You can also visit the mostly uninhabited island and environmental lab at **Isola Polvese** (see Fattoria Il Poggio, below) for a day trip.

Ask at any of the tourist offices around the lake or in Perugia for a booklet of walking and horse-riding tracks. Horse-riding centres include the **Poggio del Belvedere** (☎ 075 82 90 76; www.poggiodelbelvedere.it; Via San Donato 65, Loc Campori di Sopra in Passignano), which also offers archery courses.

Sleeping

For a full list of hundreds of places to stay, check out www.umbria2000.it, www.bellaumbria.net or in any of the tourist offices around the lake or in Perugia.

Camping Badiaccia (☎ 075 965 90 97; www.badiaccia.com; Via Trasimeno 191, Bivia Borghetto; per person €5.50-7, tent €5.50-6.50, car €2-2.50, dog €2, 3-/6-person bungalows €35-93; (P) (Q) (R)) Practise your Dutch while playing tennis, table tennis or *botce*, eating at the surprisingly good *ristorante/pizzeria*, or swimming in one of three pools (one hydromassage and just for adults). The camp site is paradise for families, but the childless will equally enjoy renting a kayak, bicycle or paddleboat, working out at the fitness room, using the laundry facilities and the beachfront location. For a small fee, the owners will pick you up at the Terontola train station; the camp site is located just south of the SS75 on the SS71.

our pick **Fattoria Il Poggio** (☎ 075 965 95 50; www.fattoriaisolapolvese.com; Isola Polvese; dm/f incl breakfast €15/17; ☎ 1 Mar-30 Oct, reception closed 3-7pm; (Q) (R) Besides being impeccably run, you would hardly

ever know you're staying in an HI youth hostel. Dorm, doubles and family rooms all have views of the surrounding lake. It takes some preplanning, but those who don't mind catching a ferry back by 7pm will be rewarded handsomely with a family-style meal (full meals €10) in an environmentally equipped former barn on their own private island. After dinner, enjoy a drink with new international friends over the sunset or a game of table tennis. Kayaks, private beaches, games, TV with DVDs, laundry room, 14th-century ruins and a nearby environmental lab are just a part of the offerings. Groups can book in the low season by appointment only.

La Casa sul Lago (☎ 075 840 00 42; Via del Lavoro, Torricella; dm€18, s €25-30, d €50-60, incl breakfast; 📺) La Casa is comfortable enough for you to want to spend a few nights, or a few weeks. The private rooms could be in a three-star hotel, and all rooms have access to every amenity known to hostelkind: laundry, bicycle rental, wi-fi, internet access, home-cooked meals, bar and private garden... all within 50m of the lake. A short walk from the Torricella train station but not near much else.

Il Torrione (☎ 075 95 32 36; www.trasinet.com/iltorrione; Via delle Mura 4, Castiglione del Lago; r incl breakfast €65-70; 📺 1 Mar-10 Nov) Romance abounds at this artistically minded tranquil retreat. Each room is decorated with artwork painted by the owner and a private flower-filled garden overlooks the lake. Rent the tower room (up a flight of pirate-ship stairs) for a romantic private apartment, complete with kitchenette and view.

La Torre (☎ 075 95 16 66; www.trasinet.com/latorre; Via Vittoria Emanuele 50, Castiglione del Lago; s €50, d €60-80, 📺) The price is right at this central three-star hotel, a renovated palace. The rooms are a tad sterile but fully outfitted with TV, mini-bar and telephone, and the owners run the yummy bakery below.

Eating

The main specialities of the Trasimeno area are *fagiolina* (little white beans), olive oil and wine. In addition, you'll find many fish dishes such as *carp in porchetta* (cooked in a wood oven with garlic, fennel and herbs) and *tegamaccio*, a kind of soupy stew of the best varieties of local fish, cooked in olive oil, white wine and herbs.

La Cantina (☎ 075 965 24 32; Via Vittoria Emanuele 93, Castiglione del Lago; mains €6.60-13.20; 📺 Tue-Sun)

Not only is the well-priced restaurant fabulous – a stately interior with a lovely outdoor terrace for summer dining – but there's also an adjacent *magazzino* (shop) where you can sample and buy the area's best wine, olive oil and treats. Try the delicious trout with local *fagiolina* (€8.20).

L'Acquario (☎ 075 965 24 32; Via Vittoria Emanuele 69, Castiglione del Lago; set menu €25; 📺 Thu-Tue) This rather refined restaurant is a great place to try out the local *carp in porchetta* fresh from the lake or have an appetiser of eel in *tegamaccio*.

Da Settimio (☎ 075 847 60 00; Via Lungolago Alicata, San Feliciano; mains €6-21.50; 📺 Fri-Wed Jan-Oct; 📺) If you stay on Isola Polvese, you'll most likely pass by this restaurant near the ferry terminal in San Feliciano. It doesn't look like much, but locals know it as the best fish restaurant in the area, handed down from father to son for four generations. Try the *risotto alla pescatora* (fisherman's risotto) or the appetiser of 'fried little fishies'.

Getting There & Around

APM buses connect Perugia with Passignano (€3, one hour and 10 minutes, nine daily) and Castiglione del Lago (€4.60, 1¼ hours, nine daily). Trains head from Perugia around hourly to Torricella (€1.80, 25 minutes), Passignano (€2.30, 30 minutes) and Castiglione del Lago (€3.30, one hour, nine daily).

APM (☎ 800 51 21 41) also operates ferry services. The company has offices on the waterfront at each town, where you can pick up a timetable. From approximately Easter until the end of September, hourly ferries head from Passignano to Castiglione del Lago (€4, 40 minutes), San Feliciano to Isola Polvese (€3.10, 10 minutes) and Castiglione del Lago to Isola Maggiore (€3.70, 30 minutes). Ferries stop running at 7pm.

You can hire bicycles at most camp sites, Fattoria Il Poggio or La Casa sul Lago (p561). Also recommended:

Cidi Valentini (☎ /fax 075 95 16 63; Via Firenze 68b, Castiglione del Lago)

Marinelli Ferrettini Fabio (☎ /fax 075 95 31 26; Via B. Buozzi 26, Castiglione del Lago)

TODI

pop 17,100

Todi embodies all that is good about a central Italian hill town. Ancient structures line even more ancient roads, and the pace of life

inches along, keeping time with the fields of wildflowers that languidly grow with the seasons. Foreign artists share Todi's cobblestone streets with local families who have lived amid Todi's enclosed Roman and Etruscan walls for generations.

Like rings around a tree, Todi's history can be read in layers: the interior walls show Todi's Etruscan and even Umbrian influence, the middle walls are an enduring example of Roman know-how, and the 'new' medieval walls boast of Todi's economic stability and prominence during the Middle Ages.

Information

Biblioteca Comunale Lorenzo Leonj (☎ 075 895 67 10; ☎ 8.30am-2pm Mon-Fri, 3-6pm Tue & Thu) Two free high-speed internet terminals. Requires passport for first-time registration.

Post office (☎ 075 894 24 26; Piazza Garibaldi; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12.30pm Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 075 894 54 18; Piazza del Popolo 37; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun & holidays winter, 9.30am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun & holidays summer)

Sights

Just try to walk through the **Piazza del Popolo** (Piazza of the People) without feeling compelled to sit on medieval building steps and write a postcard home. The lugubrious 13th-century **Palazzo del Capitano** links to the Palazzo del Popolo to create what is now the **Museo Pinacoteca di Todi** (☎ 075 895 62 16; Piazza del Popolo; admission €3.10; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 3-6pm Mar-Oct, 10.30am-1pm & 2.30-5pm Tue-Sun Nov-Feb) features an elegant triple window and houses the city's recently restored *pinacoteca* (art gallery) and archaeological museum.

Check out the **Cisterne Romane** (Roman Cisterns; ☎ 075 894 41 48; adult/concession €2/1.50; ☎ 10.30am-1pm & 2.30-5pm daily Mar-Oct, Sat, Sun & holidays only Nov-Mar), a Roman architectural feat that would impress the most demanding modern engineer (or any other history nerds). Not only did the two systems in 12 rooms serve as the water supply for Todi until medieval times, it was built in the tiny valley that was the Piazza del Popolo and still stands as the support structure for the square.

The **cathedral** (☎ 075 894 30 41; Piazza del Popolo; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm), at the northwestern end of the square, has a magnificent rose window and intricately decorated doorway. You can skip the cathedral for two of Um-

bria's most impressive churches, including the lofty **Tempio di San Fortunato** (Piazza Umberto 1; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mar-Oct, 10am-1pm & 2.30-5pm Wed-Mon Nov-Mar), with frescoes by Masolino da Panicale, and the tomb of Beato Jacopone, Todi's beloved patron saint.

The postcard home you've just written from the Piazza del Popolo? Most likely it's of Todi's famed church, the late-Renaissance masterpiece **Chiesa di Santa Maria della Consolazione** (Via della Consolazione at Via della Circumvallazione; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mar-Oct, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-5pm Wed-Mon Nov-Mar), considered a veritable modern feat in architecture. Inside, fans can admire its geometrically perfect Greek cross design and outside, its soaring cupola-topped dome from 10km away.

Festivals & Events

The **Todi Festival**, held for 10 days each July/August, is a mixture of classical and jazz concerts, theatre, ballet and cinema. Ask at the tourist office for details.

Sleeping

Pensionato SS Annunziata (☎ 075 894 22 68; www.monastero.sr.it; Via San Biagio 2; s/d/tr incl breakfast €35/70/105) Get away to this tranquil retreat within the city walls. Set around a lovely garden, all rooms come with private bathroom and bed linens, and some with furnishings from the 1400s. Try to catch a meal with your hosts, nurs from the Mary's Servant of Repair order.

San Lorenzo Tre (☎ 075 894 45 55; www.sanlorenzo3.it; Via San Lorenzo 3; s/d incl breakfast €73/110, s/d incl breakfast without bath €68/78; ☎ Mar-Dec) Five generations of the same family have lived at this proper historic residence, and the current owner, Marzia, keeps the B&B's décor as honest a representation as you'll find anywhere in Umbria. Awaiting guests are filling, home-cooked breakfasts, a stunning rooftop view and rooms so atmospherically romantic, they were once used as the backdrop of a period drama.

Crispolti Holiday House (☎ 075 894 48 27; www.crispoltiholidayhouse.com; Via S Prassede 36; s incl breakfast €50, d €80-90, tr €90-120, q €120-160) What a coat of paint will do to turn an institutionally functional religious hotel into a 'holiday house' for tourists. Although it still retains that 'Little Orphan Annie' vibe from its first incarnations as a convent and orphanage, the stunning view from the terrace and period details throughout bump up its modern comfort.

ST FRANCIS THE REVOLUTIONARY

Born the wealthy son of a cloth merchant in 1182, Francis (Francesco in Italian) filled his younger years with wild parties and daydreams about becoming a great knight. In his mid-20s he did head off into battle against Perugia, but a gradual religious awakening was to steer him to a different noble calling.

At the ancient church of San Damiano, he heard the voice of Jesus on the crucifix: 'Francis, repair my church'. He took cloth from his father's shop to sell for the repairs. When his father dragged him in front of the bishop for punishment, Francis stripped off his clothes and renounced his former life.

He walked the countryside, wearing simple robes and preaching the virtues of poverty and equal respect for popes and lepers alike. He had a special affinity with animals and it's said he once preached to a flock of birds who stayed completely still until he said they could fly off. Many people were attracted to Francis' lifestyle and within a few years, he developed the first order of the Frati Minori (Friars Minor) which, after his death, became known as the Franciscans.

Francis spent his remaining years living out what would become the Franciscan vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. In 1224, at age 43, he received the stigmata, realising a dream to truly feel Jesus' suffering. Two years later, he died lying on the floor of a mud hut among his brothers and sisters of the order and his beloved Lady Poverty.

Eating

Antica Hosteria de la Valle (☎ 075 894 48 48; Via Ciuffelli 17/19/21; meals €23; ☹ Tue-Sun) Most of the time you'll be dining here with the locals. Pasta is homemade and delicious, but the traditional *farrow* (an ancient grain) soup (€7) should not be missed.

Ristorante Umbria (☎ 075 894 27 37; Via Santa Bonaventura 13; mains €29; ☹ Thu-Tue) What's more enjoyable: the food or the outdoor patio with a view back in time? Try the *palombaccio* (a type of pigeon; €13), a risotto dish or their speciality (truffles, of course).

Bar Pianegiani (☎ 075 894 23 76; Corso Cavour 40; ☹ 6am-midnight Tue-Sun) Just like Clark Kent, this nondescript neighbourhood bar puts on an innocent front to conceal the magic that lies beneath, but 50 years of tradition has created the world's most perfect gelato. Try the black cherry or hazelnut.

Getting There & Away

The **APM** (☎ 800 51 21 41) bus line leaves for Todi from Perugia's Piazza Partigiani (€5.20, one hour) every hour or so, but only four reach Piazza Jacapone in the city centre. The rest stop at Piazza Consolazione, from where it's possible to take city bus A or B or walk uphill 2km. Heading back to Perugia from Piazza Jacapone are five buses a day (from Monday to Saturday) at 6.35am, 12.40pm, 1.30pm, 3.38pm and 4.58pm. There is one daily service to Spoleto (€5.20, 1½ hours, 6.50am).

Todi is on the **FCU** (☎ 075 57 54 01; www.fcu.it in Italian) train line, which runs through Deruta to Perugia (€2.55, 50 minutes, 18 daily). Although the train station is 3km away, city bus C (€0.90, eight minutes) coincides with arriving trains, and on every other hour on Sundays. By road, Todi is easily reached on the SS3B-E45, which runs between Perugia and Terni, or take the Orvieto turn-off from A1 (the Milan-Rome-Naples route).

ASSISI

pop 26,500

The spiritual capital of Umbria is Assisi, a town more tied to its most famous son than anywhere else on earth. St Francis of Assisi was born here in 1182 and preached his message throughout Umbria until his death in 1226.

To visit Assisi now is to see it almost as Francis himself saw it. Except, of course, for the millions of pilgrims and tourists now attempting to share in the same tranquillity as you.

Orientation

Piazza del Comune is the centre of Assisi. At the northwestern edge of this square, Via San Paolo and Via Portica both eventually lead to the Basilica di San Francesco. Via Portica also leads to the Porta San Pietro and the Piazza Unita d'Italia, where most intercity buses stop, although APM buses from smaller towns in the area terminate at Piazza Matteotti. Train

riders arrive at Piazza Matteotti by shuttle bus (€1) from Santa Maria degli Angeli.

Information

Acquazura (☎ 075 804 09 27; Via San Bernardino Siena 6, Santa Maria degli Angeli) A self-service laundromat between the train station and basilica in Santa Maria degli Angeli.

Bar Sabatini Sandro (☎ 075 81 62 46; Via Portica 29b; per 30 min €3; ☎ 8am-8pm) Internet facilities.

Ospedale di Assisi (☎ 075 81 39 1) Hospital about 1km southeast of Porta Nuova in Fuori Porta.

Police station (☎ 075 81 28 20; Piazza del Comune)

Post office Porta Nuova (☎ 8am-1.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12.30pm Sat); Porta San Pietro (☎ 8.10am-6.25pm Mon-Fri, 8.10am-1pm Sat & Sun)

Tourist office (☎ 075 81 25 34; info@iat.assisi.pg.it; Piazza del Comune 22; ☎ 8am-2pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Sun summer, 9am-1pm Sun winter) Also a branch office outside Porta Nuova from Easter through October.

Sights

BASILICA DI SAN FRANCESCO

The **Basilica di San Francesco** (☎ 075 81 90 01; Piazza di San Francesco) has a separate **information office** (☎ 075 819 00 84; www.sanfrancescoassisi.org; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Sat) opposite the entrance to the lower church.

The basilica saw heavy damage and four deaths during a series of earthquakes on 26 September 1997. Years of painstaking restoration – including piecing together frescoes from crumbled bits, some not much larger than a grain of sand – will probably go on until at least 2010.

The basilica was built on a hill known as Colle d'Inferno (Hell Hill). People were executed at the gallows here until the 13th century. St Francis asked his followers to bury him here in keeping with Jesus, who had died on the cross among criminals and outcasts. The area is now known as Paradise Hill.

The **upper church** (☎ 8.30am-6.50pm Easter-Nov, to 6pm Nov-Easter, to 7.15pm holidays) was built just after the lower church, between 1230 and 1253, and the change in style and grandiosity is readily apparent. One of the most famous pieces of art in the world is the 28-part fresco circling the walls. The fresco has been attributed to Giotto and his pupils for hundreds of years, but the question of who produced it is now under debate within the art-historian community. The fresco starts just to the right of the altar and continues clockwise around the church.

Above each image is a biblical fresco with 28 corresponding images from the Old and New Testaments (possibly painted by Giotto, or Pietro Cavallini, who might or might not have painted the fresco cycle). The frescoes in the basilica literally revolutionised art in the Western world. All the gold leaf and flat iconic images of the Byzantine and Romanesque periods were eschewed for natural backgrounds, people of all classes, and a human, suffering Jesus. This was in keeping with Francis' idea that the human body was 'brother' and the earth around him mother and sister.

These fresco painters were the storytellers of their day, turning biblical passages into *Bibliae Pauperum*: open public Bibles for the poor, who were mostly illiterate. The scenes in St Francis' life were tied to the scenes as a way to translate the Bible through images. For instance, the fifth fresco shows St Francis renouncing his father, while the corresponding biblical fresco shows the disobedient Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

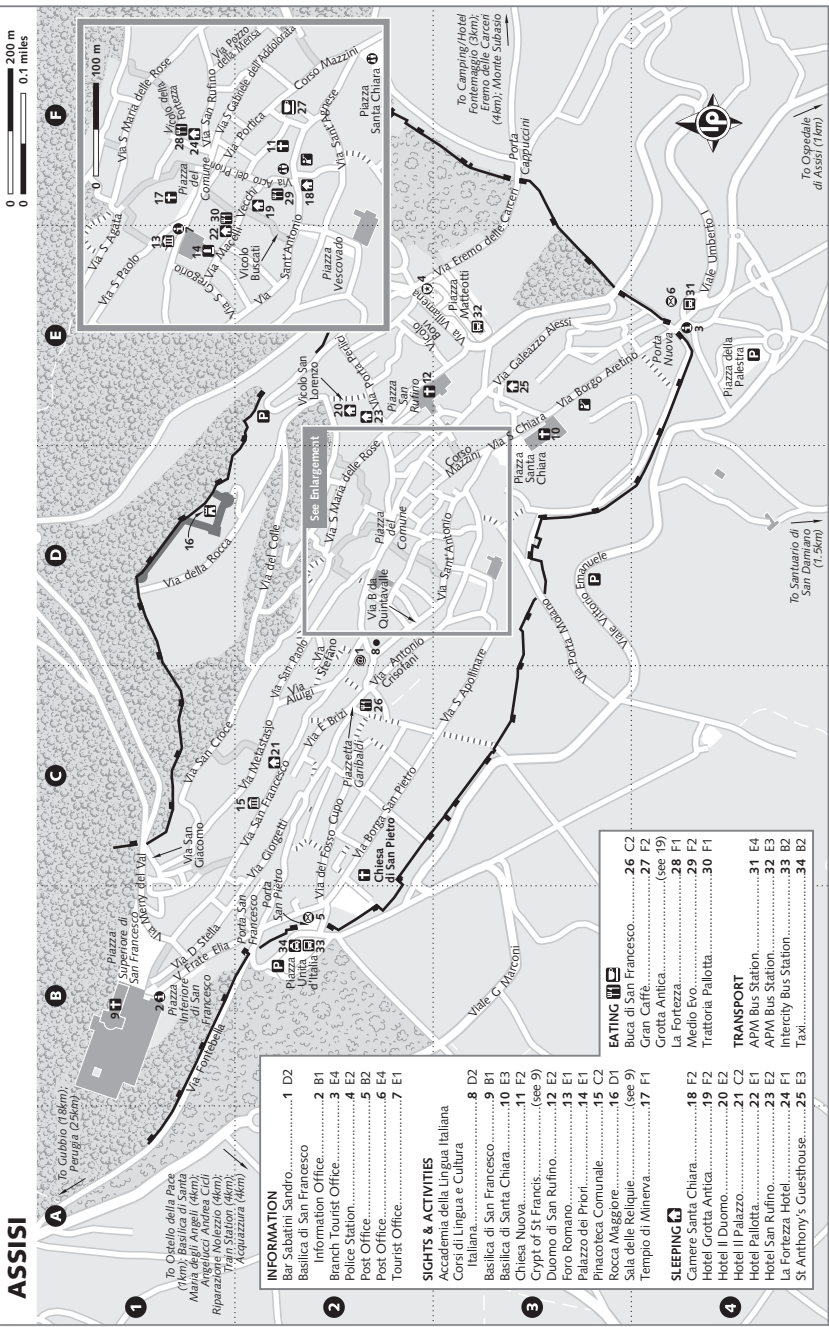
The **lower church** (☎ 6.30am-6.50pm Easter-Nov, to 6pm Nov-Easter, to 7.15pm holidays) was built between 1228 and 1230. The stained-glass windows are the work of master craftsmen brought in from Germany, England and Flanders during the 13th century, and were quite an architectural feat at that time.

In the centre of the lower church, above the main altar, are four frescoes attributed to Maestro delle Vele, a pupil of Giotto, that represent what St Francis called 'the four greatest allegories'. The first was the victory of Francis over evil, and the other three were the precepts his order was based on: poverty, obedience and chastity.

Lorenzetti's triptych in the left transept ends with his most famous and controversial, *Madonna Who Celebrates Francis*. Mary is seen holding the baby Jesus and indicating with her thumb towards St Francis. On the other side of Mary is the apostle John, whom we're assuming is being unfavourably compared with Francis. In 1234 Pope Gregory IX decided that the image was not heretical because John had written the gospel, but Francis had lived it.

Cimabue was the most historically important painter who worked in this church because he was the only artist to get a first-hand account from St Francis' two nephews, who had personally known the saint. In the *Madonna in Majesty*, in the right transept,

ASSISI



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much has been tampered with, but Cimabue's intact depiction of St Francis is considered the most accurate. Francis appears peaceful and calm in this painting. The first biographer of St Francis, Thomas of Celano, wrote in the middle of the 13th century that Francis was an eloquent man, of cheerful countenance and of a kindly aspect.

One of the most moving locations in the basilica complex is downstairs from the lower church: the **crypt of St Francis**, where the saint's body has been laid to rest. Bench seating around the tomb allows time for quiet reflection.

The basilica's **Sala delle Reliquie** (Relics Hall; ☎ 075 81 90 01; 🕒 9am-6pm daily, 1-4.30pm holidays) contains items from St Francis' life, including his simple tunic and sandals and fragments of his celebrated *Canticle of the Creatures*. The most important relic here is the Franciscan Rule parchment, the *Book of Life* composed by Francis.

CHURCHES & MUSEUMS

Basilica di Santa Chiara (☎ 075 81 22 82; Piazza Santa Chiara; 🕒 6am-noon & 2-7pm summer, to 6pm winter) is 13th-century Romanesque, with steep ram-parts and a striking façade. The white and pink stone that makes up the exterior here (the same stone that makes many buildings in Assisi look like they glow in the sunlight) came from nearby Subasio. The daughter of an Assisian nobleman, St Clare was a spiritual contemporary of St Francis and founded the *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara* (Order of the Poor Ladies), now known as the Poor Clares. She is buried in the church's crypt. The Byzantine cross that is said to have spoken to St Francis is also housed here.

From the basilica, take Via San Francesco back to Piazza del Comune, which once was the site of a partially excavated **Foro Romano** (Roman Forum; ☎ 075 81 30 53; Via Portica; adult/child incl Pinacoteca €3/2; 🕒 10.30am-1.30pm & 2-6pm summer, to 5pm winter). Some of the shops on the piazza open their basements to reveal Roman ruins. The **Chiesa Nuova** (☎ 075 81 23 39; Piazza Chiesa Nuova; 🕒 6.30am-noon & 2.30-6pm summer, 6.30am-noon & 2-6pm winter) was built by King Philip III of Spain in the 1600s on the spot reputed to be the house of St Francis' family. Mass is said daily at 7am, with an extra service on holidays at 10am.

The **Tempio di Minerva**, facing Piazza del Comune and Palazzo dei Priori, is now a

church but retains its impressive pillared façade. Wander into some of the shops on the piazza, which open their basements to reveal Roman ruins. The city's **Pinacoteca Comunale** (☎ 075 81 20 33; Palazzo Vallemani, Via San Francesco 10; adult/child incl Foro Romano €3/2; 🕒 10am-1pm & 3-6pm 16 Mar-15 Oct, 10am-1pm & 3-5pm 16 Oct-15 Mar) displays Umbrian Renaissance art and frescoes from Giotto's school.

Dominating the city is the massive 14th-century **Rocca Maggiore** (☎ 075 81 52 92; Via della Rocca; admission €2; 🕒 10am-sunset), an oft-expanded, pillaged and rebuilt hill-fortress offering 360-degree views of Perugia.

The 13th-century Romanesque **Duomo di San Rufino** (☎ 075 81 60 16; Piazza San Rufino; 🕒 7am-noon & 2.30-7pm, to 6pm in winter), remodelled by Galeazzo Alessi in the 16th century, contains the fountain where St Francis and St Clare were baptised. The façade is festooned with grotesque figures and fantastic animals.

FRANCISCAN SITES

Around 1.5km south of the Porta Nuova, the **Santuario di San Damiano** (☎ 075 81 22 73; admission free; 🕒 10am-noon & 2-6pm summer, 10am-noon & 2-4.30pm winter, vespers 7pm summer, 5pm winter) was built on the spot where St Francis first heard the voice of Jesus and where he wrote his *Canticle of the Creatures*. You can visit the original convent (which was founded here by St Clare in 1212), as well as its cloisters and refectory.

About 4km east of the city is **Eremo delle Carceri** (☎ 075 81 23 01; admission free; 🕒 6.30am-7.15pm Easter-Nov, to sunset Nov-Easter), the hermitage that St Francis retreated to after hearing the word of God. The *carceri* (prisons) are the caves that functioned as hermits' retreats for St Francis and his followers. Apart from a few fences and tourist paths, everything remains as it was in St Francis' time. Eremo delle Carceri is a great jumping-off point for walks through Monte Subasio or picnics under the oaks.

A quick walk from the train station is the imposing **Basilica di Santa Maria degli Angeli** (☎ 075 8 05 11; Santa Maria degli Angeli; 🕒 6.45am-1pm & 2.30-8pm summer, 6.15am-1pm & 2.30-7.30pm winter), built between 1565 and 1685 around the first Franciscan monastery and tiny Porziuncola Chapel. Perugino fans will appreciate his intact Crucifixion, painted on the rear wall. St Francis died at the site of the **Cappella del Transito** on 3 October 1226.

Activities

St Francis buffs and nature buffs will appreciate the plethora of strolls, day hikes and overnight pilgrimage-walks leading into and out of Assisi. Many make the trek to Eremo delle Carceri or Santuario di San Damiano on foot. The tourist office has several maps for those on such a peregrination, including a route that follows in St Francis' footsteps to Gubbio (18km).

A popular spot for hikers is nearby **Monte Subasio**. Local bookstores sell all sorts of walking and mountain-biking guides and maps for the area and the tourist office can help with brochures and maps as well.

Bicycle rentals are available at **Angelucci Andrea Cici Riparazione Noleggio** (☎ 075 804 25 50; www.angeluccicidi.it; VG Becchetti 31) in Santa Maria degli Angeli and at **Ostello della Pace** (right).

Courses

Accademia della Lingua Italiana Corsi di Lingua e Cultura Italiana (☎ /fax 075 81 52 81; www.aliassisi.it; Via San Paolo 36) runs a variety of courses, including Italian language, culture, singing, painting and cooking. It also offers free preparation for the CILS (Italian teacher abroad) course. There's a maximum of 12 students per class and costs start at about €300 for two weeks of instruction.

Festivals & Events

The **Festa di San Francesco** falls on 3 and 4 October and is the main religious event in the city. **Settimana Santa** (Easter Week) is celebrated with processions and performances. The colourful **Festa di Calendimaggio** celebrates spring in medieval fashion and starts the first Thursday after 1 May. Europe's largest peace march, the **Marcia della Pace**, began in 1961 and attracts more than 150,000 pilgrims the first week in October, who walk the 24km route between Perugia and Assisi.

Sleeping

Assisi has a phenomenal amount of rooms, which ensures the best prices in any Umbrian town popular with tourists. Keep in mind that in peak periods such as Easter, August and September, and during the Festa di San Francesco, you will need to book accommodation well in advance.

The tourist office has a complete list of private rooms, religious institutions (of which there are 17), flats and *agriturismi* options in

and around Assisi and can assist with bookings in a pinch. Otherwise, keep an eye out for *camere* (rooms for rent) signs as you wander the streets.

BUDGET

Camping/Hotel Fontemaggio (☎ 075 81 23 17; www.fontemaggio.it; Via Eremo delle Carceri 8; per person/tent/car €6/5/3, dm/s/d/tr/q €20/35/52/72.50/96, 4- to 6-person bungalow with kitchen €32-110) This is the sort of place St Francis himself probably would have stayed. A full complement of bungalows, camp sites and hotel rooms offer up a bed for just about any taste. On the way to Eremo delle Carceri, it's a beautiful walk into town, but the restaurant might just keep you for the evening.

Ostello della Pace (☎ 075 81 67 67; www.assisihostel.com; Via Valecchie 177; dm incl breakfast €15-17; ☒ Mar 2-Jan 9; ☐ ☑) Assisi's HI youth hostel is lovingly family-run, in a beautiful and quiet location and has great pillows. It's on the shuttle-bus route between Santa Maria degli Angeli and Assisi. There's a laundry room for guests. Full and half-board available. A pack lunch costs €6.50; dinner is €9.50.

Hotel Il Duomo (☎ 075 81 27 42; www.hotelsanrufino.it; Vicolo San Lorenzo; s/d €36/47) Owned by the same folks who run the two-star San Rufino, this is a lovely one-star choice on a quiet alleyway just a stone's throw from the Piazza del Comune. For this price there aren't too many extras, but the nine rooms are understandably popular, so book ahead.

Hotel Grotta Antica (☎ 075 81 34 67; www.bellaumbria.net/hotel-grottaantica; Via Macelli Vecchi 1; s/d €35/50) The price is not a mistake. Perfectly located on a tiny side street less than 30m from the Palazzo del Comune, it's a wonder these rooms are also clean and hospitable. Abele speaks fluent English and Spanish and takes care of the seven simple rooms and the restaurant of the same name (see opposite).

St Anthony's Guesthouse (☎ 075 81 25 42; atoneassisi@tiscali.it; Via Galeazzo Alessi 10; s/d/tr incl breakfast 35/55/75; ☐) Look for the iron statue of St Francis feeding the birds and you've found your Assisian oasis. Rooms are austere but welcoming and six have balconies with take-your-breath-away views. Gardens, ample parking, an 800-year-old breakfast salon and an ancient Door of Death make this a heavenly choice. Like most religious accommodation, it has a two-night minimum stay and an 11pm curfew.

our pick **Camere Santa Chiara** (☎ 075 81 34 67; camere.santachiara@yahoo.it; Vicolo Sant'Antonio 1; s/d/tr/q ind breakfast €35/55/65/75) Depending on which of the eight rooms in this brand-new hotel you choose, you might sleep on top of a glass-covered Roman ruin, watch a TV propped up on a medieval wall or enjoy breakfast on your private patio. Curl up with a book, headphones or DVD in the video library or, if you're feeling social, have a drink at the piano bar. Bring your car here first, and they'll show you where to park nearby for free.

MIDRANGE

Hotel San Rufino (☎ 075 81 28 03; www.hotelsanrufino.it; Via Porta Perlici 7; s €44, d €54-60, tr €68, breakfast €5) A small hotel owned by the same family as Hotel Il Duomo, this is around the corner and just as quiet. Sweetly decorated rooms all come with direct-dial phones and TVs. It also offers cradles for babies.

La Fortezza Hotel (☎ 075 81 24 18; www.lafortezzahotel.com; Vicolo della Fortezza 2b; r with/without breakfast €65/52) Seven simply outfitted rooms offer guests a comfortable respite at this charming and intimate hotel run by the well-known Assisian Chiocchetti family. The stone building is up a quiet stone staircase, quietly tucked above the Piazza del Comune and their extremely popular restaurant (see right).

Hotel Pallotta (☎ 075 81 26 49; www.pallottaassisi.it; Vicolo della Volta Pinta; s/d/tr ind breakfast €40/65/75) Yet another great-value hotel in the heart of Assisi. Rooms are as modern as they are ancient; medieval walls and shuttered windows coexist with tile showers and wall-mounted televisions. Check out the view from the top floor.

Hotel Il Palazzo (☎ 075 81 68 41; www.hotelilpalazzo.it; Via San Francesco 8; s €90-105, d €125-160; ☒ closed Nov, Jan & Feb) The rooms in this lovely 15th-century palazzo, half of which is occupied by the owners (descendants of the original occupants), have been restored in the simple elegance that Italians are famous for: white walls, terracotta floors, a few pieces of fine old furniture in splendidly carved wood, and beautiful carpets. Despite its central position the hotel is also very quiet and filled with light. The only disadvantage is that there are a lot of stairs to negotiate.

Eating

RESTAURANTS

While we normally recommend staying away from hotel restaurants, most of Assisi's better

restaurants (even the more inexpensive ones) are part of hotels.

Trattoria Pallotta (☎ 075 81 26 49; Vicolo della Volta Pinta; meals €23; ☒ Wed-Mon) Head through the Volta Pinta (Painted Vault) off Piazza del Comune, being careful not to bump into someone as you gaze at the 16th-century frescoes above you, into this gorgeous setting of vaulted brick walls and wood-beamed ceilings. They cook all the Umbrian classics here: rabbit, homemade *strangozzi*, even pigeon. See also the hotel, this page.

Grotta Antica (☎ 075 81 34 67; Vicolo Buscatti 6; meals €16) Abele – hotel proprietor, lawyer and chef – is from Liguria, so you can rest assured that although there are only a handful of menu items, you needn't look past the pesto dishes for a cheap and filling main course. His prices on wine can't be beaten anywhere in Assisi.

Buca di San Francesco (☎ 075 81 22 04; Via Brizi 1; meals €29; ☒ Tue-Sun) Sample traditional Umbrian dishes and specialties of the house in a elegant medieval setting. Choose from bruschette, local sausage, *spaghetti alla buca* (the house specialty), gnocchi and homemade desserts, and choose from the extensive wine list with the help of one of Assisi's only sommeliers.

Medio Evo (☎ 075 81 30 68; Via Arco dei Priori 4; meals €28; ☒ Thu-Tue) Traditional Umbrian dishes are served in fabulous vaulted 13th-century surroundings, including rabbit stew (€12) and truffle omelettes (€10). The early 6.45pm opening time is geared for, and highly appreciated by, non-Italian tourists.

La Fortezza (☎ 075 81 24 18; Vicolo della Fortezza 2b; meals €22; ☒ Fri-Wed) This family-run restaurant off Piazza del Comune serves traditional Umbrian dishes and flame-roasted meats, as well as those from Trentino, and a good selection of local wines. Credit cards are accepted.

CAFÉS

Gran Caffè (☎ 075 815 51 44; Corso Mazzini 16; ☒ 8am-midnight) This elegant place has the most fabulous gelati, mouth-watering pastries and cakes, and a great selection of drinks. Try the *tè freddo alla pesca* (iced tea with peach) on a hot day, or choose from a selection of delicious hot chocolates and coffee when the weather is cool. Remember it costs much more to sit.

Shopping

Assisi is a good town for shopping as many shops stay open during siesta. The closer you

get to the Basilica, the tackier the souvenirs – Franciscan friar shot-glasses and nuns playing poker – but meander off the beaten path for leather, ceramics and clothing. Open-air markets take place in Piazza Matteotti on Saturday and Santa Maria degli Angeli on Monday.

Getting There & Away

Assisi is very easy to reach by bus or train. Although the train station is 4km west in Santa Maria degli Angeli, shuttle bus C (€0.80) runs between the train station and the APM bus station on Piazza Matteotti every 30 minutes. Tickets are available in the *tabacchi* at the station and in town. Assisi is on the Foligno–Terontola line with regular services to Perugia (€1.80, 25 minutes, hourly). You can change at Terontola for Florence (€9.40 to €15.20, 1¾ to 2¾ hours, 10 daily) and at Foligno for Rome (€9.40 to €16, two to 2½ hours, hourly).

APM Perugia (☎ 800 51 21 41; www.apmperugia.it) runs to Perugia (€3, 50 minutes, nine daily) and Gubbio (€5.20, one hour and 10 minutes, 11 daily) from Piazza Matteotti. **Sulga** (☎ 800 09 96 61; www.sulga.it) buses leave from Porta San Pietro for Florence (€11, 2½ hours, one daily at 7am) and Rome's Stazione Tiburtina (€16.50, 3¾ hours, three daily).

To reach Assisi from Perugia by road, take the SS75, exit at Ospedaliccchio and follow the signs.

Getting Around

A shuttle bus (€0.80) operates every half-hour between Piazza Matteotti and the train station. Normal traffic is subject to restrictions in the city centre and daytime parking is all but banned. Six car parks dot the city walls (they are connected to the centre by orange shuttle buses), or head for Via della Rocca where, for the price of a short but fairly steep walk, you should be able to find free parking.

For a taxi, dial ☎ 075 81 31 00.

SPELLO

pop 8600

Sometimes it seems like it's just not possible for the next Umbrian town to be any prettier than the last. And then you visit Spello. It's often passed by as tourists head to nearby Assisi or Perugia, but the proliferation of arched stone walkways and hanging flowerpots make it well worth a visit, especially in spring when the whole bloomin' town smells of flowers.

Orientation & Information

Spello is one of Umbria's easiest towns to explore, as the train station is a mere 500m from the centre of town. Just past the Chiesa di Sant' Andrea on the far side of Piazza Matteotti is the local **tourist information office** (Pro Loco; ☎ /fax 0742 30 10 09; prospello@libero.it, Piazza Matteotti 3; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-5.30pm). It can provide you with a list of accommodation and has maps of walks in the surrounding area, including an 8km walk across the hills to Assisi. Purchase a city map here for €0.50. The city website is www.comune.spello.pg.it.

Sights

The town revolves around Piazza Matteotti. Here you'll find the gloomy **Chiesa di Sant'Andrea** (Piazza Matteotti; ☎ 8am-7pm) where you can admire Pinturicchio's *Madonna with Child and Saints*. A few doors down is the 12th-century **Chiesa di Santa Maria Maggiore** (Piazza Matteotti; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-7pm Mar-Oct, to 6pm Nov-Feb) and the town's real treat, Pinturicchio's beautiful frescoes in the **Cappella Baglioni** (in the church). Also of note is the chapel's exquisite floor (from 1566). Head up to the Porta dell'Arco for the sweeping Umbrian view you've been waiting for.

Festivals & Events

The people of Spello celebrate the feast of **Corpus Domini** in June (the date changes each year) by skilfully decorating stretches of the main street with fresh flowers in colourful designs. Come on the Saturday evening before the Sunday procession to see the floral fantasies being laid out (from about 8.30pm) and participate in the festive atmosphere. The Corpus procession begins at 11am Sunday.

Sleeping

Del Prato Paolucci (☎ 0742 30 10 18; Via Brodolini 4; s€35-45, d€50-62; P) The least expensive rooms in town are found just outside the city walls. However, you'll have a perfectly acceptable bathroom, TV and phone, and a few rooms have views. Call ahead and the gregarious owners will pick you up at the train station.

Residence San Jacopo (☎ 0742 30 12 60, 333 223 28 99; www.residencesanjacopo.it in Italian; Via Borgo di Via Giulia 1; apt for 2/3 people €62/93) Seven hundred years of history exude from these seven mini-apartments. With invitingly rustic furniture, and a town centre location, visitors will feel like residents after just a day or two. Great weekly rates.

Trattoria Hotel Il Cacciatore (☎ 0742 65 11 41; www.ilcacciatorehotel.com; Via Giulia 42; s ind breakfast €50-60, d €75-90, tr €95-115) This place has a great restaurant (closed Monday) with a large terrace, perfect for a summer lunch, and rooms furnished in business-casual style. Ask for a room with a view.

Eating & Drinking

Il Giardino di Spello (☎ 0742 30 14 45; Via Centrale Umbra 36; tapas €4.50; ☎ 7am-midnight Tue-Sun) Near the train station and main bus stop, this is a fab place for quick eats. For just a few euros, diners can load up on tapas. Tack on two more euros for Spello's best homemade gelato.

Enoteca Properzio (☎ 0742 30 15 21; www.enoteche.it; Palazzo dei Canonici, Piazza Matteotti 8/10; ☎ 9am-11pm Apr-Oct, 9am-8pm Nov-Mar) Umbrian wineries aren't usually open to the public, so one of the only chances visitors have of tasting several wines at once without breaking the bank (or getting sloshed) is to stop off at an *enoteca* (wine bar) in town. And there's no better place in Umbria to do so than here, where for €30, you can try a half-dozen Umbrian wines while snacking on cheese, prosciutto and bruschetta. For €144, this *enoteca* will ship a dozen bottles abroad.

Getting There & Away

Spello is directly on the train line between Perugia and Foligno, so trains run at least hourly to Perugia (€2.30, 30 minutes) and Assisi (€1.30, 10 minutes). Spello is on the SS75 between Perugia and Foligno. The station is often unstaffed, so buy your tickets at either the self-service ticket machine or at the newsstand **Rivendita Giornali** Piazza della Pace 1.

GUBBIO

pop 32,600

While most of Umbria feels soft and rounded by the millennia, Gubbio is angular, sober and imposing. Perched along the steep slopes of Monte Ingino, the Gothic buildings wind their way up the hill towards Umbria's closest thing to an amusement park ride, its open-air funicular. During Christmas time, the side of the mountain becomes the world's largest Christmas tree.

Gubbio is famous for its Eugubine Tablets, which date from 300 to 100 BC and constitute the best existing example of ancient Umbrian script. An important ally of the Roman Empire and a key stop on the Via Flaminia, the

town declined during the Saracen invasions. In the 14th century it fell into the hands of the Montefeltro family of Urbino (p590) and was later incorporated into the Papal States.

Orientation

The city is small and easy to explore. The immense traffic circle known as Piazza Quaranta Martiri, at the base of the hill, is where buses to the city terminate, and it also has a large car park. The square was named in honour of 40 local people who were killed by the Nazis in 1944 in reprisal for partisan activities. From here it is a short, if somewhat steep, walk up Via della Repubblica to the main square, Piazza Grande, also known as Piazza della Signoria. Or, you can take the lift from the Palazzo del Podestà to the Palazzo Ducale and the cathedral. Corso Garibaldi and Piazza Oderisi are to your right as you head up the hill.

Information

Hospital (☎ 075 923 91; Piazza Quaranta Martiri) Will move in 2009 but the phone number will remain the same.

Internet Point (☎ 075 927 74 30; Via Perugia 32; per hr €3; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 3.30-7.30pm Tue-Sat, 3.30-8pm Sun) Phone also available for €0.15 per minute to US, UK and most of Europe, €0.30 to Australia.

Police station (☎ 075 927 37 70; Via Mazzatinti)

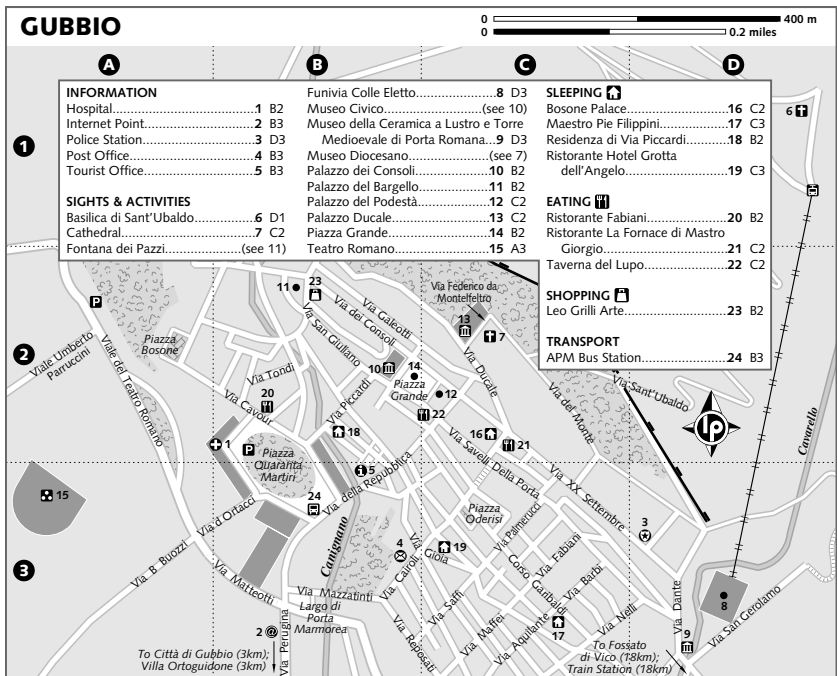
Post office (☎ 075 927 39 25; Via Cairoli 11; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12.30pm Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 075 922 06 93; info@iat.gubbio.pg.it; www.gubbio-altochiascio.umbria2000.it; Via Repubblica 2; ☎ 8am-2pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Sun & holidays)

Sights

FUNIVIA COLLE ELETTO

Although the **Basilica di Sant'Ubaldo** – where you'll find the body of St Ubaldo, the 12th-century bishop of Gubbio – is a perfectly lovely church, the adventure is in the getting there. Take the **Funivia Colle Eletto** (☎ 075 922 11 99; adult/child return €5/4; ☎ 9am-8pm Jul-Aug, 9.30am-10am-1.15pm & 2.30-5.30pm or 7pm Mar-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-1.15pm & 2.30-5pm Nov-Feb, closed Wed winter), where your first rule is to believe the sweaty man when he tells you to stand on the dot. He will then throw you into a moving metal contraption that looks frighteningly like an open-topped human birdcage. You're whisked instantly away on a cable car that looks more like a precarious ski-lift, dangling dozens of metres above a rocky hill (bring a camera, but



hold tight). The ride up is as frightening as it is utterly beautiful. There's a restaurant on top of the hill and the aforementioned church, but the nicest way to spend the day is to bring a picnic and have a wander.

Just below the Funtivia Colle Eletto is the **Museo della Ceramica a Lustro e Torre Medioevale di Porta Romana** (☎ 075 922 11 99; Via Dante 24; admission €2.50; ☎ 10.30am-1pm & 3.30-7pm). The *a lustro* ceramic style has its origins in 11th-century Muslim Spain. On the 2nd floor, ceramics from prehistoric times share space with medieval and Renaissance pieces. There's also a collection of crossbows from the 18th century, some which have a target range as far as 50m. Check out the really unfun-looking chastity belt on the 4th floor and appreciate the fact that you are alive today instead of 300 years ago.

VIA FEDERICO DA MONTEFELTRO

Walk up Via Ducale to a triumvirate of ancientness, the 13th-century pink **cathedral** (Via Federico da Montefeltro; donations welcome; ☎ 10am-5pm), with a fine 12th-century stained-glass window and a fresco attributed to Bernardino Pintu-

ricchio. Opposite, the 15th-century **Palazzo Ducale** (☎ 075 927 58 72; Via Federico da Montefeltro; adult/concession €2/1; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Tue-Fri & Sun, 9am-10.30pm Sat) was built by the Duke of Montefeltro's family as a scaled-down version of their grand *palazzo* in Urbino; its walls hide an impressive Renaissance courtyard. Next door is the **Museo Diocesano** (☎ 075 922 09 04; Via Federico da Montefeltro; ☎ 10am-7pm summer, 10am-6pm Mon-Sat winter, 10am-6pm Sun & holidays all year), a winding homage to Gubbio's medieval history.

Gubbio's most impressive buildings look out over **Piazza Grande**, where the heart of the Corsa dei Ceri event takes place. The piazza is dominated above all by the 14th-century **Palazzo dei Consoli**, attributed to Gattapone. The crenellated façade and tower can be seen from all over the town. The building houses the **Museo Civico** (☎ 075 927 42 98; Piazza Grande; adult/concession incl gallery €4/2.50; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Nov-Mar), which displays the Eugubian Tablets, discovered in 1444. The seven bronze tablets are the main source for research into the ancient Umbrian language. Upstairs is a picture gallery featuring works from the Gubbian school. Across the square

is the **Palazzo del Podestà**, also known as the Palazzo Pretorio, built along similar lines to its grander counterpart. Now the city's active town hall, the impressive vaulted ceilings might be peeked at if you ask nicely.

In the western end of the medieval section is the 13th-century **Palazzo del Bargello**, the city's medieval police station and prison. In front of it is the **Fontana dei Pazzi** (Fountain of Lunatics), so-named because of a belief that if you walk around it three times, you will go mad. On summer weekends the number of tourists actually carrying out this bizarre ritual is indeed cause for concern about their collective sanity.

Southwest of Piazza Quaranta Martiri, off Viale del Teatro Romano, are the overgrown remains of a 1st-century **Teatro Romano** (Roman Theatre; ☎ 075 922 09 22; admission free; 🕒 8.30am-7.30pm Apr-Sep, 8am-1.30pm Oct-Mar). In the summer, check with the tourist office about outdoor concerts held here.

Festivals & Events

The **Corsa dei Ceri** (Candles Race) is a centuries-old event held each year on 15 May to commemorate the city's patron saint, Sant'Ubaldo. It starts at 5.30am and involves three teams, each carrying a *cero* (massive wooden pillars weighing about 400kg, each bearing a statue of a 'rival' saint) and racing through the city's streets. This is one of Italy's liveliest festivals and has put Gubbio on the map.

On the last Sunday in May, there's the annual **Palio della Balestra**, an archery competition involving medieval crossbows, in which Gubbio competes with its neighbour San Sepolcro. The festival carries over all year in tourist shops alive with crossbow paraphernalia.

Sleeping

The tourist office has an extremely thorough list of all accommodation options within the area.

Città di Gubbio & Villa Ortoguidone (☎ 075 927 20 37; www.gubbioacamping.com; Loc Ortoguidone 49; per person €6-9, tent €7-9, car €3, 2-/4-person apt €30-100; 🗓 Easter-Sep; 📍) In addition to the full-service four-star camp site, there are also stunning apartments in an old stone manor house with TVs, beautiful wooden furnishings and private bathrooms. July and August visits require a one-week stay. From the SS298, follow the signs for 3km to 'Agriclub Villa Ortoguidone'.

Maestro Pie Filippini (☎ 075 927 37 68; Corso Garibaldi 100; per person €20) Six basic rooms serve up to 16 guests in this religious accommodation that's more institutional than spiritual, but the price and location can't be beaten. You might share the open reading salon with resident nuns, or retire to your room (singles to quads) for a bath. Two-night minimum, 10.30pm curfew and advance reservations required.

Residenza di Via Piccardi (☎ 075 927 61 08; e.biagiotto@tiscali.it; Via Piccardi 12; s/d/apt incl breakfast €30/55/60; 🗓 closed 2 weeks in Feb) Share a romantic breakfast in the garden or cook up a simple dinner in the mini-apartment's kitchenette. Family-owned, the characteristically medieval stone building has cosy rooms decorated in cheery florals with all the basic comforts. Great value.

Ristorante Hotel Grotta dell'Angelo (☎ 075 927 17 47; www.grottadellangelo.it; Via Gioia 47; s €38-42, d €55-60; 🗓 closed 2-3 weeks in Jan) While it is mostly a popular restaurant with all sorts of truffle dishes and a beautiful garden, the Grotta dell'Angelo also serves up a few basic rooms for rent.

Bosone Palace (☎ 075 922 06 88; www.mencarel.ligroup.com; Via XX Settembre 22; s/d/ff/ste incl breakfast €80-90/110-140/160-190/184-230; 📺 📺) Fancy looking at a fresco during breakfast? How about staying in a room once frequented by Dante Alighieri? The patrician Bosone family enjoyed Dante as a guest several times. The place went through a complete renovation in 2005 to move from three-star to four-star category, deservedly so. All rooms have minibars, satellite TV and phones in the bathroom, and many have gorgeous views of the surrounding valley. For the experience of a lifetime, upgrade to a Renaissance Suite.

Eating

our pick **Ristorante La Fornace di Mastro Giorgio** (☎ 075 922 18 36; Via Mastro Giorgio 2; meals €40; 🗓 Wed-Mon) Named after Gubbio's most famous medieval ceramicist (whose oven still graces one of the restaurant's ancient walls), Mastro Giorgio is our favourite place for a special occasion (not just for the 500-item wine list, either). The seasonal menu includes modern takes on traditional dishes: venison carpaccio wrapped with salt, olive oil and asparagus and the signature dish is a *stinco* (veal shank) stewed to falling-off-the-bone perfection.

Ristorante Fabiani (☎ 075 927 46 39; Piazza Quaranta Martiri 26; meals €27; 🗓 Wed-Mon) This is a fabulous spot to sit on a back patio and enjoy the

garden for a few hours. The selection here is vast, and there is a rotating €15 tourist menu or a €20 *menù gastronomico* of whatever is in season. Stop in on Thursday or Friday for the fish specials.

Taverna del Lupo (☎ 075 927 43 68; Via Ansidei 21; meals €40; 🗓 Tue-Sun) Il Lupo was the wolf that St Francis domesticated, a wolf that supposedly came back to this restaurant to dine. He made an excellent choice. The atmosphere is sophisticated, if a bit stiff, and diners will feel more comfortable smartly dressed. Most meals are locally produced in the surrounding Apennines, including its cheese, truffles and olive oil. Set aside at least two hours for a meal.

Shopping

Leo Grilli Arte (☎ 075 922 22 72; Via dei Consoli 78; 🗓 9.30am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun) In the Middle Ages, ceramics were one of Gubbio's main sources of income and there are some fabulous contemporary samples on sale in this crumbly 15th-century mansion.

Getting There & Around

APM buses run to Perugia (€4.30, one hour 10 minutes, 10 daily), Gualdo Tadino (€2.60, 50 minutes, 10 daily) and Umbertide (€3, 50 minutes, three daily). Buses depart from Piazza Quaranta Martiri.

The closest train station is at Fossato di Vico, about 18km southeast of the city. Hourly APM buses connect the station with Gubbio (€2.60, 30 minutes). From Fossato di Vico, hourly trains take about 30 minutes to Foligno (€2.55), where you can switch for other cities, including Perugia (€4.50, 1½ hours, hourly).

By car or motorcycle, take the SS298 from Perugia or the SS76 from Ancona, and follow the signs. Parking in the large car park in Piazza Quaranta Martiri costs €0.80 per hour.

Walking is the best way to get around, but APM buses connect Piazza Quaranta Martiri with the funicular station and most main sights.

SPOLETO

pop 38,800

One the larger quaint Umbrian hill towns, Spoleto has become markedly popular over the past few decades for one reason: the Festival of Two Worlds. In 1958, opera composer Gian Carlo Menotti (who died in

2007) founded what has become known as the Spoleto Festival. Combining theatre, dance, music, spoken word and other art forms, the festival has gained a reputation as one of the best of its kind in the world and put this town, historically important since Roman times, back on the map.

Orientation

The old part of the city is about 1km south of the main train station; every 20 minutes, an orange shuttle bus (€0.80) marked A, B or C heads to Piazza della Libertà in the centre, where you'll find the tourist office and the Roman-era theatre. Piazza del Mercato, a short walk northeast of Piazza della Libertà, marks the engaging heart of old Spoleto. Between here and Piazza del Duomo you'll find the bulk of the city's monuments and some fine shops.

Information

A Tutta Birra (☎ 348 241 18 40; Via di Fontesecca 7; 🗓 noon-11pm Wed-Mon) Internet facilities; you can also get a connection at Pizzeria Zeppelin (p577).

Ospedale di Madonna di Loreto (Hospital; ☎ 0743 21 01; Via Madonna di Loreto)

Police station (☎ 0743 2 32 41; 191 Via la Marconi)

Post office (☎ 0743 20 15 20; Piazza della Libertà 12; 🗓 8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12.30pm Sat)

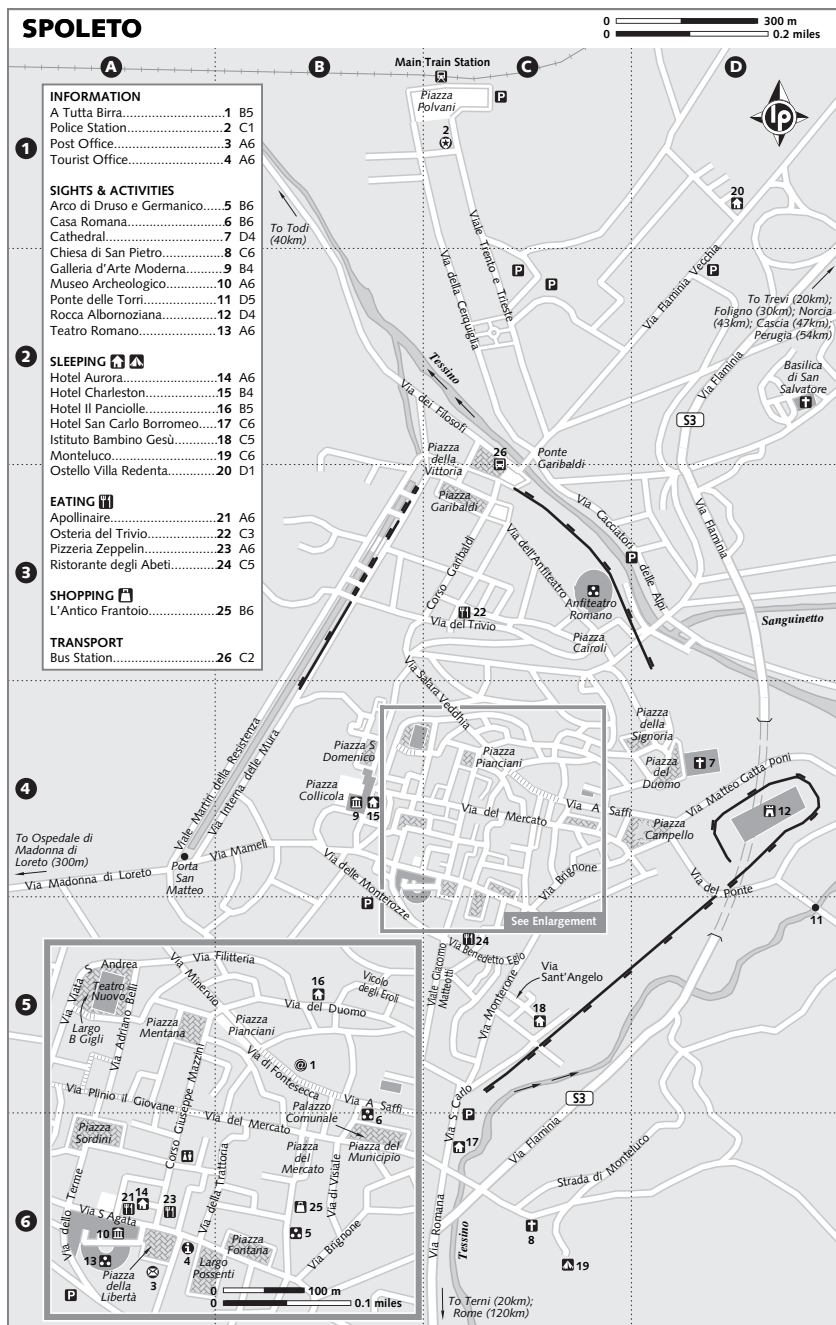
Tourist office (☎ 0743 23 89 20/1; info@iat.spoleto.pg.it; Piazza della Libertà 7; 🗓 9am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Nov-Mar)

Sights

ROMAN SPOLETO

Make your first stop the **Museo Archeologico** (☎ 0743 22 32 77; Via S Agata; adult/concession/child €4/2/free; 🗓 8.30am-7.30pm), located on the western edge of Piazza della Libertà. It holds a well-displayed collection of Roman and Etruscan bits and bobs from the area. Then step outside to view the mostly intact 1st-century **Teatro Romano** (Roman Theatre), which often hosts live performances during the summer. Check with the museum or the tourist office.

East of Piazza della Libertà, around the Piazza Fontana, are more Roman remains, including the **Arco di Druso e Germanico** (Arch of Drusus and Germanicus; sons of the Emperor Tiberius), which marks the entrance to the old forum. The excavated **Casa Romana** (Roman House; ☎ /fax 0743 23 42 50; Via di Visiale; adult/child €2.50/2; 🗓 10am-6pm) isn't Pompeii, but it gives



visitors a peek into what a typical Roman house of the area would have looked like in the 1st century BC.

The stunning **cathedral** (☎ 0743 4 43 07; Piazza Duomo; ☞ 7.30am-12.30pm & 3-6pm summer, 7.30am-12.30pm & 3-5pm winter) was consecrated in 1198 and remodelled in the 17th century. Inside, the first chapel to the right of the nave was decorated by Bernardino Pinturicchio, and Annibale Carracci completed an impressive fresco in the right transept. The frescoes in the domed apse were executed by Filippo Lippi and his assistants. Lippi died before completing the work and Lorenzo de Medici travelled to Spoleto from Florence and ordered Lippi's son, Filippino, to build a mausoleum for the artist. This now stands in the right transept of the cathedral.

The spectacular closing concert of the Spoleto Festival is held on the piazza.

OTHER SIGHTS

The **Rocca Albornoziana** (☎ /fax 0743 22 30 55; Piazza Campello; adult/child incl tour €4/3; ☞ 10am-8pm summer & weekends, 10am-1pm & 3-6pm late Mar-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10-11.45am & 2-4.15pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Feb) dominates the city. It's a former papal fortress that until 1982 was a high-security prison housing such notables as Pope John Paul II's attempted assassin, Mehmet Ali Agca. Reservations for tours are essential as entry is only by guided tour.

An hour-long stroll or an all-day hike can be made along the Via del Ponte to the **Ponte delle Torri**, which was erected in the 14th century on the foundations of a Roman aqueduct. Cross the bridge and follow the lower path, Strada di Monteluco, to reach the **Chiesa di San Pietro** (☎ 0743 4 48 82; Località San Pietro; admission free; ☞ 9.30-11am & 3.30-6.30pm). The 13th-century façade, the main attraction of the church, is liberally bedecked with sculpted animals.

To check out more modern artwork, head towards the **Galleria D'Arte Moderna** (☎ 0743 4 64 34; Palazzo Collicola; adult/child €4/3; ☞ 10.30am-1pm & 3-5.30pm 16 Oct-14 Mar, 10.30am-1pm & 3.30-7pm Wed-Mon 15 Mar-15 Oct) an homage to Spoleto's commitment to its ongoing artistic support. The Italian sculptor Leoncillo has a dedicated room here.

The **Pinacoteca Comunale** is moving locations in 2008. Check with the tourist office or any museum to locate its new spot (possibly in the Rocca Albornoziana).

Festivals & Events

The Italian-American composer Gian Carlo Menotti conceived the **Festival dei Due Mondi** (Festival of Two Worlds) in 1958. Now simply known as the Spoleto Festival, it has given the town a worldwide reputation.

Events at the festival, held over three weeks from late June to mid-July, range from opera and theatre performances to ballet and art exhibitions, in the Rocca Albornoziana, the Teatro Romano at the archaeological museum and the cathedral, among other places. Tickets cost €5 to €200, but most are in the €20 to €30 range.

The most famous performances sell out as early as March or April, but you can still buy tickets during the festival for many shows. There are usually several free concerts in various churches.

For details, phone ☎ 800 56 56 00 or look for further details and book tickets online at www.spoletofestival.it.

Sleeping

The city is well served by cheap hotels, *affittacamere* (rooms for rent), hostels and camp sites. Expect significantly higher prices during the festival.

BUDGET

Monteluco (☎ /fax 0743 22 03 58; www.geocities.com/monteluco2002; Loc San Pietro; per person €5-7, tent €5-7, car €2-7; ☞ Apr-Sep) This leafy, simple camp site is just behind the Chiesa di San Pietro. It's a good 15- to 20-minute walk uphill from the town centre and less than 1km from the aqueduct and several good hiking trails. The restaurant is good enough to bring locals out.

ostello Villa Redenta (☎ 0743 22 49 36; www.villaredenta.com; Via di Villa Redenta 1; dm incl breakfast €18-24, d incl breakfast €42-55; ☐) Pope Leone XII slept here. Literally. The 17th-century home is set within a quiet park just outside the historic centre and comes complete with a bar, breakfast and private bathroom in each room. Reception is open 8am to 1pm and 3.30pm to 8pm.

Istituto Bambino Gesù (☎ 0743 402 32; Via Sant'Angelo 4 off Via Monterone; s/d incl breakfast €18-36/36-70) The combined age of these enterprising nun/B&B proprietors might be older than the 16th-century convent itself. Get in touch with your monastic side in these bare-bones cells, no more than a bed, dresser and post-age-stamp-sized bathroom. But the price is

right, the views are amazing and the dead silent, pitch-black nights will guarantee a good night's sleep.

Hotel Il Panciolle (☎ /fax 0743 4 56 77; Via del Duomo 4; s/d from €30/35) Comfortable enough for those used to nicer hotels and a deserving splurge for hostellers, this Spoleto mainstay is in a good position between the cathedral and the Piazza del Mercato. The rooms facing the street can be a tad loud. There are hairdryers, TVs and comfortable bedding in all rooms.

Hotel San Carlo Borromeo (☎ 0743 22 53 20; www.geocities.com/sancarloborromeo; Via San Carlo; s incl breakfast €25-50, d €30-70, tr €50-100; (P) (♿) (♿)) The least atmospheric of the hotels listed, the convenience, price and free car park make it a safe bet. The back rooms are quieter and have a view of Monteluco, but all are clean, functional and spacious.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Aurora (☎ 0743 22 03 15; www.hotelauroraspoletto.it; Via Apollinare 3; s/d/tr incl breakfast from €40/55/70; (♿)) Just off Piazza della Libertà, the Aurora is very central and is fabulous value. Staff are friendly and will help you plan your Spoleto itinerary. Some rooms have pleasant balconies and breakfast is excellent.

Hotel Charleston (☎ 0743 22 00 52; www.hotelcharleston.it; Piazza Collicola 10; s incl breakfast €40-75, d €52-135, tr €99-160; (P) (♿) (♿)) With a sauna, fireplace and an outdoor terrace, the Charleston is an enticing location in both winter and summer. Named after Charleston, South Carolina (home of a sister Spoleto Festival), the hotel is covered in distinguished modern art and provides wine tastings or apéritifs every evening. The 17th-century building has been thoroughly renovated with double-paned windows and some rooms come with VCRs or bathtubs. Parking costs €10.

Eating

Pizzeria Zeppelin (☎ 0743 4 77 67; Corso Giuseppe Mazzini 81; pizzas & snacks €0.80-3; ☎ 10.30am-9.30pm) A meeting point in town, where you can get a filling slice of pizza for less than €1, plus check your email (one hour costs €3).

Osteria del Trivio (☎ 0743 4 43 49; Via del Trivio 16; meals €25; ☎ Wed-Mon, closed Jan) Strings of garlic and dried peppers grace the walls of this most homey of home-style restaurants. This is a great place to try the *strangozzi alla spoletina* (local pasta in a tangy tomato sauce), and the stuffed artichokes are legendary.

Ristorante degli Abeti (☎ 0743 22 00 25; Via Benedetto Egio 3/5; meals €27; ☎ Wed-Mon) Get your red meat and cream fix here. Not the place for dieters or vegetarians, the menu offers sinfully rich piles of artery-thickeners, such as *pappardelle con cinghiale e tartufo* (pasta with wild boar and truffles) and *prosciutto di cinghiale* (ham with wild boar).

Apollinaire (☎ 0743 22 32 56; Via S Agata 14; tasting menus incl veg €30-48; ☎ Wed-Sun) California cuisine meets Umbrian tradition: somehow this restaurant manages to figure out that squid-ink pasta does go with pesto and crayfish, and rabbit feels quite at home in a black olive sauce. No matter what, save room for dessert. The menu changes seasonally but you are constantly enveloped in low wood-beamed ceilings and candlelight flickering against brick.

Shopping

L'Antico Frantoio (☎ 0743 4 98 93; Via Arco di Druso 8) Sandra has been cooking up her own sauces for several decades now. She sells them at this gourmet store, along with cheeses, salami, pasta, *lenticchie* (lentils) and all sorts of Umbrian goodies. A conveniently placed grocer is just next door, selling fresh olive bread and drinks with which to plan your Spoleto picnic.

Getting There & Around

From the train station, take city buses A, B or C for €0.80 (make sure the bus reads 'Centro'). The local **Società Spoletina di Imprese Trasporti** (SSIT; ☎ 0743 21 22 09; www.spoletina.com) buses depart from the near the train station. Long-distance buses are rare as the train is so convenient, but you'll need a bus to get to Norcia and the Valnerina (€4.80, one hour, six daily) or Cascia (€4.80, one hour 10 minutes, six daily). Buses to Monteluco run in summer only (€0.80, 15 minutes, hourly).

Trains from the main station connect with Rome (€7.10 to €11.60, 1½ hours, hourly), Perugia (€3.70, one hour, nine daily – take care not to land on one of the €9.10 Eurostars).

NORCIA, THE VALNERINA & MONTI SIBILLINI

Rafting, climbing, dining, hang-gliding and pork – this area has practically everything you could ever want in an active Umbrian holiday. Many consider this the most beautiful area in the region, and we heartily agree. It's near impossible to reach using public transport,

but those with a car could easily fill an entire week here. Norcia produces the country's best salami – the word 'Norcineria' is synonymous with 'butcher' throughout all of Italy. This is also a stronghold of the elusive black truffle.

For tourist information, visit the **Casa del Parco** (☎ 0743 81 70 90; Via Solferino 22, Norcia; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Sat & Sun) for tourist information about the area, including Monti Sibillini.

Festivals & Events

Truffle lovers, foodies and moochers should head to Norcia the last weekend in February and the first weekend in March for the **Mostra Mercato del Tartufo Nero**, where dozens of Italian merchants sell (and offer samples of) the best that Italian food has to offer. Which is a lot.

Activities

The tiny hill-top village of **Castelluccio** is the only town on the Umbrian side of the **Parco Nazionale dei Monti Sibillini**. The town is famous for its *lenticchie*, and *pecorino* and *ricotta* cheeses, but it's the location of the gods that brings in visitors. The town is surrounded by the **Piano Grande**, a wide open expanse that blooms with billions of wildflowers every spring and fills with snow each winter. The Casa del Parco in Norcia has information on walking and other activities in the surrounding area.

To learn hang-gliding, contact **Pro Delta** (☎ 0743 82 11 56; www.prodelta.it/eng/main.htm; Via delle Fate 3) in Castelluccio; it opens in summer only. Readers have heartily recommended the courses. Another school is **Fly Castelluccio** (☎ 0736 25 56 30; Via Iannella 32, Ascoli Piceno, Le Marche). A beginners course of five days will cost about €400 at both organisations.

Sleeping & Eating

Norcia is lined with shops selling local products, cheeses and every conceivable piece of pig in every conceivable form of pork product. Be careful, though: you can't ship meat to most countries.

Ostello Norcia (☎ 349 300 20 91; www.montepatino.com; Via Ufente 1/b, Norcia; dm incl breakfast €15) The walls of this former hospital for the poor are covered with everything you'll need to know for your trip into the Valnerina and Monti Sibillini; that is, if you haven't booked an excursion through them yet. Fifty-two tidy rooms come with two to 10 beds, but the hostel often fills up with school or tour groups, so

call ahead. It's brought to you in conjunction with the Casa del Parco folks,

Hotel Grotta Azzura (☎ 0743 81 65 13; www.bianconi.com; Via Alfieri 12, Norcia; s €37-88, d €44-125; ☎) This 18th-century *palazzo* with suits of armour in the reception can be a fabulous deal during the week and in low season. It is steeped in the area's history. Cross-vaulted rooms are stately if a bit dark, complete with carved ceilings and recently upgraded bathrooms. Its Ristorante Granaro del Monte has been open daily for 150 years running. It is a tad touristy, but the food is still excellent and comes in great piles of *porcini* mushrooms, sausages and prosciutto, truffles and *cinghiale*. In the winter, sit inside next to the grand fireplace.

The sole hotel in Castelluccio is **Albergo Sibilla** (☎ /fax 0743 82 11 13; Via Pian Grande 2, Castelluccio; s/d €36/55), with 11 rooms, some with a view to die for, and a good restaurant downstairs. Since the nightlife consists mostly of chasing goats around dilapidated stone buildings, a good night's sleep is practically guaranteed.

ORVIETO

pop 21,000

Orvieto is placed precariously on a cliff made of tufaceous stone, a craggy porous limestone that seems imminently ready to crumble under the weight of the magnificent Gothic cathedral (or at least under all the people who come to see it). Just off a main autostrada, Orvieto can get a bit crowded with summer bus tours, but they're all here for good reason.

Orientation

Trains pull in at Orvieto Scalo and from here you can catch bus 1 up to the old town or board the funicular to take you up the steep hill to Piazza Cahen.

Those with cars should head to the free parking behind the train station (at the roundabout in front of the station head in the direction of 'Arezzo' and turn left into the large parking lot). There's plenty of parking space in Piazza Cahen and in several designated areas outside the old city walls. The Orvieto Unica Card (opposite) will buy you five hours of free parking at the former Campo della Fiera and take you on an *ascensore* into the city centre.

Information

Avis (☎ 0763 39 00 30, 389 567 89 10; orvieto.pk1@avis-autonoleggio.it; Via I Maggio 57; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Car rental 100m from train station.

Caffè Montanucci (☎ 0763 34 12 61; Corso Cavour 21; per 30 min €3.10; ☎ 6.30am-midnight Mon-Fri, until 1am Sat & Sun) Pick up a supply of chocolate or a *panini* at this café (see p582), while you surf the internet.

Farmacia del Moro (☎ 0763 34 41 00; Corso Cavour 89; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4.30-7.45pm Mon-Sat) Posts 24-hour pharmacy information.

Hospital (☎ 0763 30 71) In the Ciconia area, east of the train station.

Information office (☎ 0763 30 23 78; bottom of funicular; ☎ 9am-4pm) Buy funicular, bus and Carta Unica tickets here.

Leo Pretelli (☎ 335 155 89 49; leopretelli@mac.com; full-day tour up to 4 people from €240) English-speaking chauffeur, tour guide and concierge with an infectious *joie de vivre*. Leo is like your long-lost Umbrian uncle who knows every tiny off-the-beaten-path restaurant and viewpoint. Perfect for a designated driver at Umbria's 40-plus wineries.

Libreria dei Sette (☎ 0763 34 44 36; Corso Cavour 85; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat & Sun) Stock up on a collection of maps, English-language books or Lonely Planet guides.

Police station (☎ 0763 39 21 1; Piazza Cahen)

Post office (☎ 0763 3 98 31; Via Largo M Ravelli; ☎ 8.10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.10am-12.30pm Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 0763 34 17 72; info@iat.orvieto.tr.it; Piazza Duomo 24; ☎ 8.15am-1.50pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Sat, Sun & holidays)

Sights

Pick up an **Orvieto Unico Card** (adult/concession valid 1 yr €18/15). It entitles its owner to entrance to the nine main attractions (including the Cappella di San Brizio in the cathedral, Museo Claudio Faina e Civico, Orvieto Underground, Torre del Moro, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo and the Crocifisso del Tufo necropolis) and either five hours' free car parking at the Campo della Fiera car park next to the funicular, or a round trip on the funicular and city buses. It can be purchased at the Campo della Fiera car park, many of the attractions, the tourist office or the funicular car park.

CATHEDRAL

Little can prepare you for the visual feast that is the **cathedral** (☎ 0763 34 11 67; Piazza Duomo; ☎ 7.30am-12.45pm year-round, 2.30-7.15pm Apr-Sep, 2.30-6.15pm Mar & Oct, 2.30-5.15pm Nov-Feb). Started in 1290, this remarkable edifice was originally planned in the Romanesque style but, as work proceeded and architects changed, Gothic features were incorporated into the structure. The black-and-white marble band-

ing of the main body of the church is overshadowed by the rich rainbow colours of the façade. A harmonious blend of mosaic and sculpture, plain stone and dazzling colour, it has been likened to a giant outdoor altar screen.

Pope Urban IV ordered that the cathedral be built following the Miracle of Bolsena in 1263, when a priest who was passing through the town of Bolsena (near Orvieto) had his doubts about transubstantiation dispelled when blood began to drip from the Host onto the altar linen while he celebrated mass. The linen was presented to Pope Urban IV in Orvieto. He also declared the new feast day of Corpus Domini.

The building took 30 years to plan and three centuries to complete. It was probably started by Fra Bevignate and later additions were made by Lorenzo Maitani (responsible for Florence's cathedral), Andrea Pisano and his son Nino Pisano, Andrea Orcagna and Michele Sanicheli. The great bronze doors, the work of Emilio Greco, were added in the 1960s.

Inside, Luca Signorelli's fresco cycle *The Last Judgement* shimmers with life. Look for it to the right of the altar in the **Cappella di San Brizio** (combined admission €5; ☎ closed during Mass). Signorelli began work on the series in 1499, and Michelangelo is said to have taken inspiration from it. Indeed, to some, Michelangelo's masterpiece runs a close second to Signorelli's work. The **Cappella del Corporale** (admission free; ☎ 7.30am-12.45pm & 2.30-7.15pm summer, hours vary winter, closed during Mass) houses the blood-stained altar linen of the miracle, preserved in a silver reliquary decorated by artists of the Siene school. The walls feature frescoes depicting the miracle, painted by Ugolino di Prete Ilario.

AROUND THE CATHEDRAL

Next to the cathedral is the **Museo dell'Opera del Duomo** (☎ 0763 34 24 77; Palazzo Soliano, Piazza Duomo; adult/concession €5/4; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-6pm Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar, closed Tue in winter), which houses a clutter of religious relics from the cathedral, as well as Etruscan antiquities and works by artists such as Simone Martini and the three Pisanos: Andrea, Nino and Giovanni.

Around the corner in the **Palazzo Papale** you can view Etruscan antiquities in the **Museo Archeologico Nazionale** (☎ /fax 0763 34 10 39; Palazzo

Papale, Piazza Duomo; adult/concession €3/1.50; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm). The much more interesting **Museo Claudio Faina e Civico** (☎ 0763 34 15 11; www.museofaina.it; Piazza Duomo 29; adult/concession €4.50/3; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar), opposite the cathedral, houses one of Italy's most important collection of Etruscan archaeological artefacts, as well as some significant Greek ceramic works, mostly found near Piazza Cahen in tombs dating back to the 6th century BC. There are guided tours at 11am and 4pm (3pm October to March) and an interactive trip for kids.

OTHER SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Head northwest along Via del Duomo to Corso Cavour and the **Torre del Moro** (Moor's Tower; ☎ 0763 34 45 67; Corso Cavour 87; adult/concession €2.80/2; ☎ 10am-8pm May-Aug, 10am-7pm Mar, Apr, Sep & Oct, 10.30am-1pm & 2.30-5pm Nov-Feb). Climb all 250 steps for sweeping views of the city. Back on ground level, continue west to Piazza della Repubblica and to the 12th-century **Chiesa di Sant'Andrea** (Piazza della Repubblica; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-7.30pm) and its curious decagonal bell tower. The piazza, once Orvieto's Roman

forum, is at the heart of what remains of the medieval city.

North of Corso Cavour, the 12th-century Romanesque-Gothic **Palazzo del Popolo** presides over the piazza of the same name. At the northwestern end of town is the **Chiesa di San Giovenale** (Piazza Giovenale; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 3.30-6pm), a church constructed in the year 1000. Its Romanesque-Gothic art and later frescoes from the medieval Orvieto school are an astounding contrast.

The **Teatro Mancinelli** (☎ 0763 34 04 22; Corso Cavour 122; adult/concession €2/1, with guide €5/4; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm) plays host to Umbria Jazz in winter but offers ballet, concerts and tours all year in a stunning 19th-century theatre lined with elegant boxed seats and frescoes.

The coolest place in Orvieto – literally – is the **Orvieto Underground** (☎ 0763 34 06 88, 339 733 27 64; Parco delle Grotte; adult/concession €5.50/3.30; ☎ tours 11am, 12.15pm, 4pm & 5.15pm daily Mar-Jan, Sat & Sun Feb), a series of 440 caves used for millennia by locals for various purposes. The tours (with English- or German-speaking guides) take you through several that were used back through the centuries as WWII bomb shelters,

ORVIETO

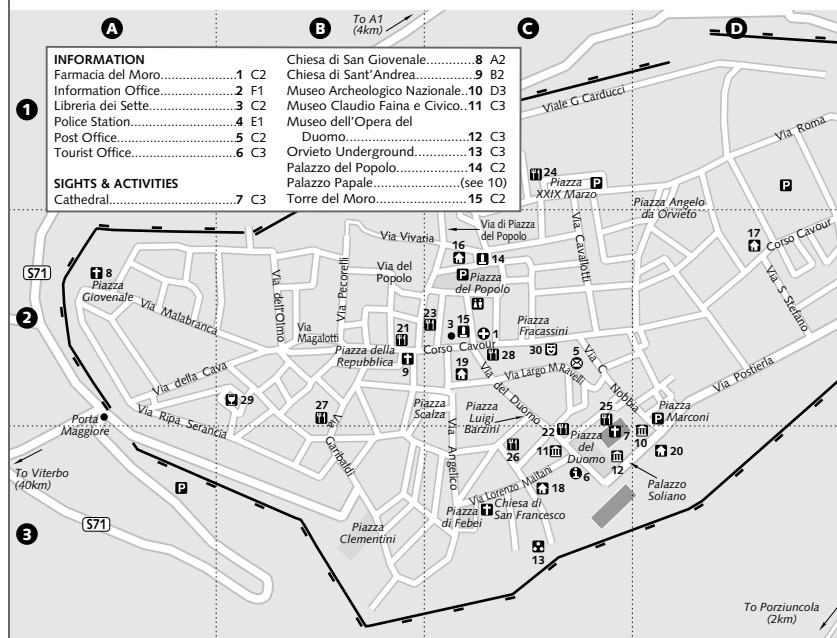
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Palazzo Papale.....	(see 10)	
Torre del Moro.....	15	C2



refrigerators, wells and, during many a pesky Roman or barbarian siege, as dovescotes to trap the usual one-course dinner: pigeon (still seen on local restaurant menus as *palombo*). Tours leave from in front of the tourist office. Hint: during the summer, take the 12.15pm tour. You'll enjoy the year-round temperature of 12°C to 15°C, while most museums and shops are closed.

Festivals & Events

Umbria Jazz Winter takes place from the end of December to early January, with a great feast and party on New Year's Eve. Ask at the tourist office for a programme of events. See p554 for details of the summer jazz festival.

Orvieto's most famous festival is the **Palombella**, held every year on Pentecost Sunday. Unusually, it is world-famous for its highlight event rather than the parades and crafts fairs. For traditionalists, the sacred rite has been celebrating the Holy Spirit and good luck since 1404. For animal rights activists, the main event celebrates nothing more than scaring the living crap out of a bewildered dove.

For six centuries, the ritual has gone like this: take one dove, cage it, surround the cage with a wheel of exploding fireworks, and hurtle the cage 300m down a wire towards the cathedral steps. If the dove lives (which it usually does), the couple most recently married in the cathedral become its caretakers (and, presumed, the ones who pay for post-traumatic dove-stress-disorder counselling). It's not likely you'll see a fake dove in the cage, but if so, you'll know who has won.

Sleeping

Orvieto does not lack for hotels, and visitors will benefit from the highly competitive pricing. It's always a good idea to book ahead in summer or at the weekend or if you're planning to come over New Year when the Umbria Jazz Winter festival is in full swing.

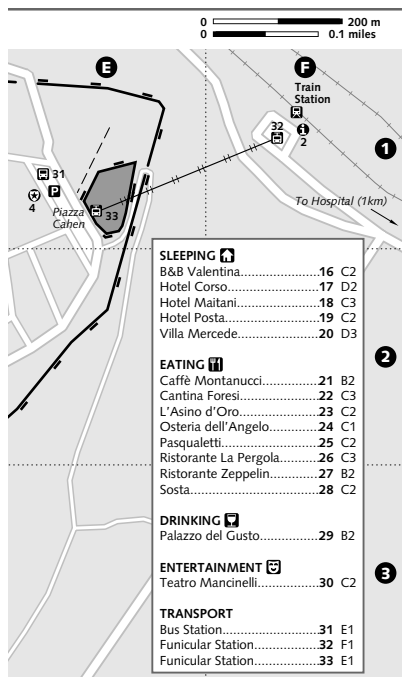
BUDGET

Porziuncola (☎ 0763 34 13 87; Loc Cappuccini 8; dm €10-15; P) With only eight beds in two separate single-sex rooms, you'd do best to call ahead. Take bus 5 from Piazza Cahen to the Cappuccini neighbourhood, just a couple of kilometres away.

Villa Mercedes (☎ 0763 34 17 66; www.argoweb.it/casareligiosa_villamercede; Via Soliana 2; s/d/tr incl breakfast €50/60/70; P) Heavenly close to the cathedral and with 76 rooms, there's space for a gaggle of pilgrims. The building dates back to the 1500s, so the requisite frescoes adorn several rooms. High ceilings, a quiet garden and free parking seal the deal. Vacate rooms each morning by 9.30am or you'll earn the housekeepers' wrath.

Hotel Posta (☎ 0763 34 19 09; www.orvietohotels.it; Via Luca Signorelli 18; s/d €31/43, with bathroom €37/56) Sometimes 'palatial' isn't an adjective one might use to describe a palace. Although the building was a bit musty and ramshackle, the hotel was undergoing a full renovation in 2007 that included new mattresses and some much needed TLC, so expect the quality (and prices) to increase. Breakfast costs €6.

B&B Valentina (☎ 393 970 58 68; valentina.z@tiscali.net.it; Via Vivaria 7; s/d/tr incl breakfast €50/70/90, apt €160) As if being set back on a quiet street wasn't enough, the rooms are also soundproof, casually elegant and spacious. Valentina lives downstairs with her friendly dog. All rooms have private bathrooms, TVs and hairdryers, and laundry service is available.



MIDRANGE

Hotel Corso (☎ /fax 0763 34 20 20; www.hotelcorso.net; Corso Cavour 343; s/d/tr from €50/80/100; ♿ ♿) Set a bit further away from the cathedral than most other hotels, this is nevertheless an excellent choice. Several rooms are enveloped with wood-beamed ceilings, terracotta bricks or antique cherry furniture, allowing one to describe them as snug rather than tiny. The breakfast buffet is an extra €6.50 but it's worth it to sit on the outdoor terrace. There's a 10% discount for stays of more than two nights.

Hotel Maitani (☎ 0763 34 20 11; www.hotelmaitani.com; Via Lorenzo Maitani 5; s/d/ste €77/126/170; ♿) Every detail is covered, from a travel-sized toothbrush and toothpaste in each room to chocolates (Perugino, of course) on your pillow. Several rooms have cathedral or countryside views. Rooms are pin-drop quiet, as they come with not one but two double-paned windows. Breakfast costs €10.

Eating**RESTAURANTS**

Sosta (☎ 0763 34 30 25; Corso Cavour 100a; mains €5) This extremely simple self-service restaurant actually serves up some very good pizza and pasta. It's cafeteria style so you order as much or as little as you like, including meat and vegetable dishes. Students get a discount.

Ristorante La Pergola (☎ 0763 34 30 65; Via dei Magoni 9b; meals €26; ♿ Thu-Tue) The food at this restaurant is typically Umbrian – good and filling – but the real draw here is dining in the flower-filled garden in the back.

L'Asino d'Oro (☎ 0763 34 44 06; Vicolo del Popolo 9; meals €28; ♿ Tue-Sun) The 'Golden Ass' has gained fame as one of Umbria's best simple trattorias. And for good reason. The menu changes daily, but a dedicated chef cooks inventive dishes such as a smoked streaky bacon with radicchio appetiser and golden raisins (€9), or *cinghiale* in *agrodolce* (sweet and sour) sauce sprinkled with cocoa (€14).

Ristorante Zeppelin (☎ 0763 34 14 47; Via Garibaldi 28; meals €32; ♿ Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) This natty place has a cool 1920s atmosphere, jazz on the stereo and a long wooden bar where Ingrid Bergman would have felt right at home. It serves creative Umbrian food, including well-priced tasting menus for vegetarians (€25), children (€20), truffle-lovers (€40) and traditionalists (€25). Ask about its day-long cooking courses.

Osteria dell'Angelo (☎ 0763 34 18 05; Piazza XXIX Marzo 8a; mains €22; ♿ Tue-Sun) Judged by local food writers to be one of the best restaurants in Umbria, this is certainly an elegant place. Your meal is being cooked by the winner of the 2000 'Chef to Watch' competition. The banana soufflé with a rum-and-cream sauce is recommended and the wine list is extensive.

CAFÉS

Caffè Montanucci (☎ 0763 34 12 61; Corso Cavour 21; ♿ 6.30am-midnight Mon-Fri, 7am-midnight Sat & Sun) An affable one-stop shop for cocktails, espresso, gelato, *panini*, internet access (per 30 minutes €3.10) and the best part: the wall o' chocolate. Hundreds of bars from all over the world congregate around a few tables, causing plenty of passing mouths to water.

Cantina Foresi (☎ /fax 0763 34 16 11; Piazza Duomo 2; snacks from €4.50; ♿ 9.30am-7.30pm) A family-run *enoteca* and café serving up *panini* and sausages, washed down with dozens of local wines from the ancient cellar.

GELATERIE

Pasqualetti (☎ 0763 34 10 34; Piazza Duomo 14) This gelateria serves mouth-watering gelato, plus there are plenty of tables on the piazza for you to gaze at the magnificence of the cathedral while you gobble.

Drinking

Palazzo del Gusto (☎ 0763 39 35 29; www.orvietowine.info; Via Ripa Serancia 1 16; wine tastings €5-11; ♿ 11am-1pm & 3-5pm winter, 11am-1pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri summer) This Etruscan subterranean wine-cellar is as infused with atmosphere as it is with yeast. Several tunnels have been redecorated for wine tastings and parties. Peek behind the glass doors for a look at ancient Etruscan tunnels. Check with the tourist office if one of the cellar's many weekend events are open to the public.

Getting There & Away

Orvieto is on the main Rome to Florence line, so is ridiculously easy to reach. Main connections include Rome (€7.10, 1¼ hours, hourly), Florence (€10.40 to €18.50, 1½ to 2½ hours, hourly), Perugia (€6.10 to €6.80, 1¼ hours, at least every other hour). Buses depart from the station on Piazza Cahen, stopping at the train station. **Bargagli** (☎ 057 778 62 23) runs a daily bus service to Rome (€8, one hour 20 minutes, 8.10am and 7.10pm). The city is on

the A1, and the SS71 heads north to Lago Trasimeno.

Getting Around

A century-old cable car connects Piazza Cahen with the train station, with carriages leaving every 10 minutes from 7.20am to 8.30pm Monday to Friday and every 15 minutes from 8am to 8pm Saturday and Sunday (€1.80 round trip, including the bus from Piazza Cahen to Piazza Duomo). Bus 1 also runs up to the old town from the train station (€0.90). Once in Orvieto, the easiest way to see the city is on foot, although ATC bus A connects Piazza Cahen with Piazza Duomo and bus B runs to Piazza della Repubblica.

For a taxi, dial ☎ 0763 30 19 03 for the train station or ☎ 0763 34 26 13 for Piazza della Repubblica.

LE MARCHE

Le Marche is Italy in microcosm. From the beachside resorts along the Adriatic through sloped hill-towns in the centre, it arrives at the jagged mountain range of Monti Sibillini. You'll want to pick and choose carefully, however. While Monte Cònero offers an unhurried coastal holiday and Pesaro teems with history (and, from June to September, holiday-makers), much of Le Marche's coast is lined with rows of rather depressing high-rise hotels and apartment buildings.

But further inland is where Le Marche really shines. Urbino, perhaps Le Marche's most famous town to outsiders and chock-full of university students, boasts an impressive display of Renaissance art and history up and down its vertical streets. Ascoli Piceno is filled with a history rivalling any Italian city but remains undiscovered. Equally walkable is the quaint Macerata, with a world-famous open-air opera theatre and festival. The gritty capital, Ancona, has been a bustling port city for 3000 years.

History

Not much is known about the first inhabitants of Le Marche, who lived along the coast as far back as 23,000 years ago. The first archaeological evidence is from the Piceni tribe, whose 3000-year-old artefacts can be seen in the Museo Archeologico (p598) in Ascoli Piceno. The Romans invaded the region early

in the 3rd century BC, and dominated the area for almost 700 years. At the fall of the Roman Empire, Le Marche was sacked by the Goths, Vandals, Ostrogoths and, finally, the Lombards.

In the middle of the 8th century AD, Pope Stephen II decided to call upon foreigners to oust the ungodly Lombards. The first to lead the charge of the Frankish army was Pepin the Short, but it was his rather tall son Charlemagne who finally took back control from the Lombards for good. On Christmas Day 800 AD, Pope Leo III crowned him emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. However, he was never recognised as such by the Eastern Byzantine church, which had control of much of Le Marche's Adriatic coast at the time.

After Charlemagne's death, Le Marche entered into centuries of war, anarchy and general Dark Ages mayhem. In central Italy, two factions developed, that of the Guelphs – who backed papal rule – and the Ghibellines – who backed rule by the emperor. The Guelph faction eventually won out and Le Marche became part of the Papal States, held under close watch by a succession of popes, while much of Europe was busy enjoying the Renaissance. It stayed that way until Italian unification in 1861.

National Parks & Reserves

In the 1980s and 1990s mass tourism, almost all concentrated on the coast, threatened to encroach on several natural areas. In response, Le Marche developed no less than 10 national and regional parks or protected areas, including the stunning Monti Sibillini in the far west Apennines and the coastal beauty of the Parco Naturale del Monte Cònero near Ancona.

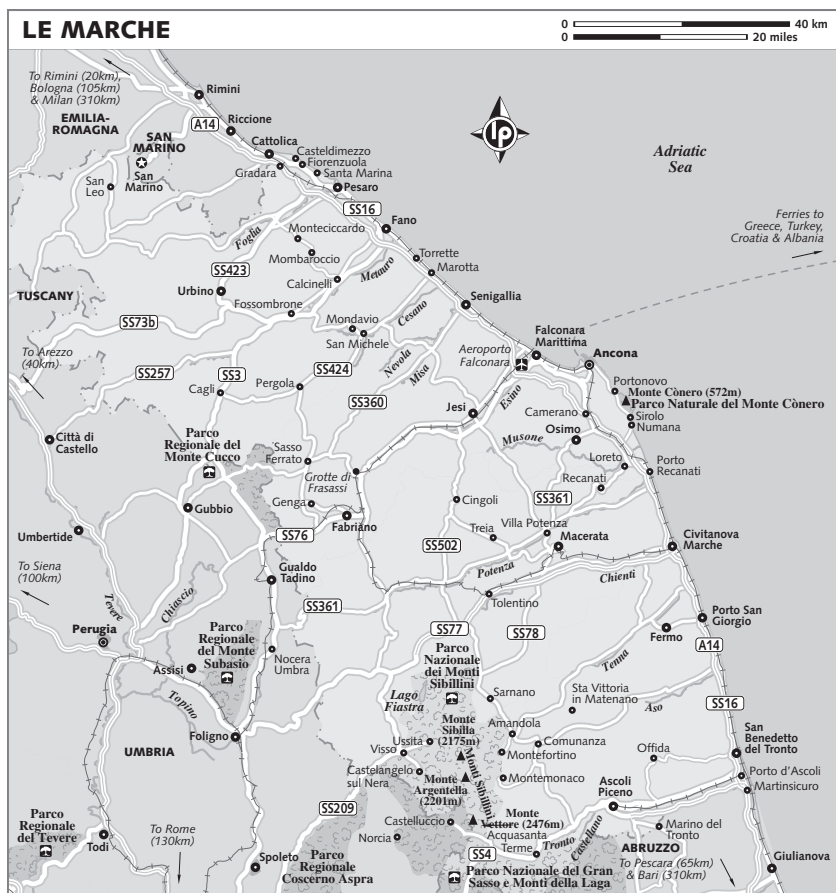
Getting There & Around

Drivers have two options on the coastline: the A14 autostrada (main highway) or the SS16 *strada statale* (state highway). Inland roads are either secondary or tertiary and much slower. Regular trains ply the coast on the Bologna–Lecce line and spurs head to Macerata and Ascoli Piceno, but it requires some forethought and help from the tourist board to travel between inland towns.

ANCONA

pop 101,900

A port town through and through, Ancona's main tourist draw is to be leaving Ancona.



Embarrassingly lacking in good accommodation, Italy's largest mid-Adriatic ferry port is trying to develop a tourist infrastructure. Although fairly grimy and tattered, the town does have a fascinating history, a handful of sights to warrant an extra day or two, and the downtown is very pedestrian friendly.

Orientation

There are two distinct parts to Ancona: the modern sprawl around the train station and the old centre further up the hill. All trains arrive at the main station on Piazza Nello e Carlo Rosselli, and a few continue into the ferry terminal: Ancona Marittima. Most hotels cluster around the main train station, a grimy area but busy enough to be safe during the day.

When you exit the station, buses 1 and 1/4 will take you to the port and the centre of town. Cross past the first bus lane to the covered bus stop with a sign that reads Porto/Centro. Tickets are available at all *tabacchi* for €1.

MAPS

You will find plenty of maps of Ancona and the surrounding area at the excellent newsstand at the main train station or at bookshops, hotels and newsstands around town.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Feltrinelli ☎ 071 207 39 43; Corso Giuseppe Garibaldi 35; 🕒 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 5-8pm

Sat & Sun) Carries maps and books in English, French and Spanish.

EMERGENCY

Police station (☎ 071 2 28 81; Via Giovanni Gervasoni 19) South of the city centre.

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet Point/Phone Centre (☎ 071 5 42 23; Piazza Roma 26-27; internet 15min/1 hr €1/2, to call US & UK €0.10, to call Australia €0.15; ☎ 9am-11.30pm)

World Wide Media Centre (Piazza Roselli 5a; per hr €3; ☎ 8.30am-10pm) Across from the train station.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Regione Le Marche (www.le-marche.com) The official tourist-office website; also has useful information on Ancona, including accommodation and sights.

LAUNDRY

Laundrette (Corso Carlo Alberto 76; wash €3, dry €3; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat)

LEFT LUGGAGE

Ferry terminal (1st 2 days free) For ferry passengers.

Train station (per bag 1st 12hr €3, next 12hr €2; ☎ 24hr) Self-service lockers.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Farmacia Centrale (Corso Mazzini 1)

Ospedale Umberto I (☎ 071 59 61; Piazza Capelli 1) Hospital.

POST

Main post office (Largo XXIV Maggio; ☎ 8.15am-6pm Mon-Sat) There's also branch at the ferry terminal, which opens 8.10am to 5.30pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 12.30pm Saturday.

TOILETS

Ferry terminal (admission free)

Train station (admission €0.52, shower incl towel & soap €5.16; ☎ 24hr)

TOURIST INFORMATION

InfoPoint (☎ 320 019 63 21; Piazza Roma; ☎ summer only)

Tourist office (www.comune.ancona.it) At the time of writing, the tourist office was about to move to a new location. Check the website for contact details.

Sights

The elegant Piazza del Plebiscito has been Ancona's meeting spot since medieval times. The piazza is flanked by the baroque **Chiesa di**

San Domenico (Piazza del Plebiscito; ☎ 7.15am-12.30pm & 4-7pm), containing the superb *Crucifixion* by Titian and *Annunciation* by Guercino. That gigantic statue in front is Pope Clement XII, who was honoured by the town for giving it free port status. The fountain in front is from the 19th century, but head instead along Corso Mazzini, where you will see the 16th-century **Fontana del Calamo**, 13 masked spouts supposedly representing effigies of those who had been beheaded.

The ornate **Teatro delle Muse** (☎ 071 5 25 25; www.teatrodellermuse.org; Via della Loggia), built in 1826, has a neoclassical façade of six Ionic columns which meld with Greek friezes portraying Apollo and the Muses.

A bit further north along Via Ciriaco Pizzecoli and off to the right is **Chiesa di San Francesco delle Scale**, noteworthy for its 15th-century Venetian-Gothic doorway by Orsini. Check out the ancient waterway below or ascend the many steps to the bell tower. Beyond the church is Vanvitelli's **Chiesa del Gesù** (Church of Jesus), which is closed to visitors. Nearby, in the **Palazzo degli Anziani**, is the economics faculty of the city's 13th-century university.

The **Museo Archeologico Nazionale delle Marche** (☎ 071 20 26 02; Via Ferretti 6; adult/concession/child €4/2/free; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun, closed Mon except holidays) is in the 16th-century Palazzo Ferretti, where the ceilings are covered with original frescoes and bas-reliefs. Although not the most thoughtfully laid-out display, artefacts range from Greek and Etruscan back to the Bronze and Neolithic Ages. You'll have the open Roman ruins across the way to yourself most days.

Museo Tattile Statile Omero (☎ 071 281 19 35; www.museoomero.it; Via Tiziano 50; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sat) is the only museum of its kind in all of Europe; this is one museum where you're supposed to touch the art. All of its sculptures have been created for the blind in order to feel the representations of Roman statues, the Parthenon and St Peter's, as well as Michelangelo's David. Children will also enjoy the interactive quality and adults will enjoy the festive wine tastings (check the website). What's more, the website has been translated into Esperanto.

CATTEDRALE DI SAN CIRIACO

Via Giovanni XXIII leads up Monte Guasco and Piazzale del Duomo, where there are sweeping views of the city and the port. Here,

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Chiesa del Gesù.....	13 C1	Ostello della Gioventù.....	25 A4	Maggiore.....	38 B4
Chiesa di San Domenico.....	14 B2	Residence Vanvitelli.....	26 A1	Taxi Stand.....	39 B3

temporary art held in November and December. The festival of the city's patron saint, San Ciriaco, takes place in May. Check with the tourist office for details.

Sleeping

Ostello della Gioventù (☎ /fax 071 4 22 57; Via Lamatici 7; dm €16; 🕒 6.30am-11am & 4pm-midnight) Ancona's HI-youth hostel is divided into a male and female floor with spotless four- to six-person bedrooms and separate bathrooms.

Hotel Gino (☎ /fax 071 4 21 79; hotel.gino@tiscalinet.it; Via Flaminia 4; s/d incl breakfast €30-35/40-50/50-60; 🍷 🍴) The cheapest of the grotty and interchangeable train station hotels with a slightly shady 'hourly' sort of feel, especially with the handful of slot machines on the ground floor (a lift carries you away quickly, though). Thirty minutes' free internet access and hairdryers kick it up one (small) notch. The breakfast is tiny.

Hotel Dorico (☎ 071 4 30 09; www.paginegialle.it/htldorico; Via Flaminia 8; s/d/tr incl breakfast €35/45/55) At this station-front hotel you'll hear the first train at 5.20am, so maybe stay elsewhere.

Hotel della Rosa (☎ 071 4 13 88, 071 4 26 51; www.hoteldellarosait in Italian; Piazza Roselli 3; s/d/tr incl breakfast €55/80/90; 🍷 🍴) This comfortable hotel has been recently refurbished in 'business bland' with direct-dial phones and satellite TV (with CNN). Most rooms have the oddest-placed toilets, so tall people are cautioned.

Residence Vanvitelli (☎ 071 20 60 23, 338 897 47 05; www.residencevanvitelli.it; Piazza Saffi; studio/1-/2-room apt per night €60/75/90, per week €350/450/550; 🍷 🍴) Tucked away in a tiny piazza no more than a 10-minute walk from most of Ancona's sights is this comfortable, quiet and modern rental. All flats include kitchenettes, Sky TV, and the bed linens are changed every other day.

Hotel Fortuna (☎ 071 4 26 63; www.hotelfortuna.it; Piazza Rosselli 15; s/d/tr/ste or q incl breakfast from €56/72/94/126; 🍷 🍴 🍷) The nicest of the train station area hotels is outfitted with simple furnishings in sparkling clean surroundings and deliciously plush towels. The breakfast buffet is enormous for Italian standards, complete with fruit, eggs and homemade torte. Wi-fi under construction in 2007.

Grand Hotel Passetto (☎ 071 3 13 07; www.hotelpassetto.it; Via Thaon de Revel 1; s/d/f/ste incl breakfast €115/185/195/215; 🍷 🍴 🍷) Perfectly located along a private beach. The rooms all come with sea view, terrace, Jacuzzi, four-poster iron bed or some combination of the four. Stroll to the *ascensore* to get to the beach or cross the road to the restaurant (p588), reputedly the best in town. Substantial discounts can be had on weekends and around holidays.

Eating

Cremeria Rosa (☎ 071 20 34 08; Corso Mazzini 61) A cafeteria, bar and gelateria all in one, it's also on the main drag, perfect for people-watching while eating a sundae as big as your whole head.

Mercato delle Erbe (Corso Giuseppe Mazzini 130; 🕒 7am-8pm Mon-Sat) This is a picnickers' mecca. Dozens of booths line this green metal-and-glass-enclosed bazaar. Freshly baked pastries and bread, locally produced cheese and meat, and everything else you would need for a picnic (including plastic cups) are sold here.

Osteria del Pozzo (☎ 071 207 39 96; Via Bonda 2; meals €23; 🍷 Mon-Sat) The black-ink squid risotto alone deserves a trip to this Ancona favourite. Most locals go for the seafood prix fixe dish, €16 worth of the freshest fish of the day, or try the more inventive turkey with artichoke sauce or risotto with crayfish and ginger.

La Cantineta (☎ 071 20 11 07; Via Gramsci 1/c; meals €26) This upstairs restaurant off Piazza del Plebiscito offers checked tablecloths, a constantly going TV and cheap and filling meals. It specialises in seafood, including local salted fish, which is best sampled over pasta as *tagliatelle allo stoccafisso* (€6.50).

La Moretta 1897 (☎ 071 20 23 17; Piazza del Plebiscito 52; meals €28; ☎ Mon-Sat) Run by the same family since the year, not surprisingly, 1897, the restaurant features not just Marchigiani cuisine, but dishes specifically native to Ancona. Try the *tagliatelle al sugo di ostriche* (pasta with oyster sauce) or *brodetto all'anconetana* (Ancona-style bouillabaisse).

Passetto (☎ 071 3 32 14; Piazza 1V Novembre 1; meals €33; ☎ Tue-Sun, dinner only Sun & Aug) Run by the same owners as the Grand Hotel Passetto, this is well-known as Ancona's best restaurant. It's quite apt that it specialises in seafood, as it is well placed overlooking the sea.

Sot'Ajarchi (☎ 071 20 24 41; Via Guglielmo Marconi 93; meals €44; ☎ Mon-Sat) This small restaurant under the *portici* (arcade) in front of the port specialises in fish. For your *primo piatto* (first course) try the *pasta alla marinara* or the *minestra di seppie* (cuttlefish soup) and finish off with a simple homemade dessert such as *zuppa inglese* (liquor-soaked sponge with custard) and some *biscottini* dipped into *vin santo* (little biscuits in wine).

Drinking

Liberty Cocktail Lounge (☎ 071 20 34 84; Via Traffico 7-10; ☎ 11am-2am Thu-Tue) The hot spot in town, this Art Deco inspired café would have made Picasso feel right at home. Asian-influenced artwork, Tiffany glass lamps and a classy bohemian crowd will make you want to paint the scene and sell it as a framed poster. It's off Piazza Kennedy.

Solo Doc: Sapordivini (☎ 339 241 34 16; Corso Giuseppe Mazzini 106; ☎ 7am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm & 4pm-2am Sat) While away the hours on a warm day outside at this café and bar under the Italian version of a tented harem. Bar tables and plush, low couches seat the young hip crowd as well as visitors. Or just stroll by and enjoy the piped-in jazz, dance or world music.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Falconara airport (Raffaello Sanzio Airport; A0I; www.ancona-airport.it in Italian; ☎ 071 2 82 71) has been recently expanded (although without many

services, such as restaurants), and now takes flights from Munich, Paris, London, Barcelona, Milan, Rome, Florence and Timisoara. Many major airlines now fly into Ancona, including Lufthansa, Air France, United, Delta, KLM and Alitalia. See p868 for more information on low-cost carriers such as Ryanair.

BUS

Most buses originate at Piazza Cavour except for a few to Falconara and the Portonovo bus, which originate at the train station. See the table for destinations.

Destination	Cost (€)	Duration	Frequency
Falconara airport	1.40	40 min	every 45 min
Jesi	2.50	45 min	hourly
Loreto	1.85	40 min	hourly
Macerata	2.75	1½hr	6 daily
Numana	1.95	40 min	hourly
Portonovo	1.00	30 min	6 daily Jun-Aug
Recanati	2.25	1hr	hourly
Senigallia	1.50	45 min	hourly

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Ancona is on the A14, which links Bologna with Bari. The SS16 coastal road runs parallel to the autostrada and is a more pleasant toll-free alternative if you're not looking to get anywhere fast. The SS76 connects Ancona with Perugia and Rome.

FERRY

Ferry operators have booths at the ferry terminal or check with any of a dozen agencies in town. Ferries operate to Greece, Croatia, Albania and Turkey.

TRAIN

Ancona is on the Bologna-Lecce line, so note whether you're taking a Eurostar or not, as there can be a substantial supplement. For more info, call ☎ 848 88 80 88 (not available from mobile phones) between 7am and 9pm. See the table below for train destinations.

Destination	Cost (€)	Duration	Frequency
Bari	35.50	4hr	8 daily
Bologna	10.50-24	1¼-3hr	hourly
Florence	25.50-34	3-4hr	every 2hr
Milan	30.50-37	3-4hr	hourly
Pesaro	3.25-6.50	30-50 min	hourly
Rome	13.80-23	2¼hr	every 2hr

GETTING TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Conero Bus service J runs roughly every hour from the train station to the airport, from 6.05am to 10.30pm or 11pm Monday to Saturday and seven times a day on Sunday (€1.60, 25 to 45 minutes). The bus labelled 'Ancona-Aeroporto' does the trip during August and on Sunday and public holidays. The airport **taxi consortium** (☎ 334 154 88 99) arranges taxis from central Ancona (€30 to €38), Monte Cònero (€50 to €55) and even Macerata (€75) or Pesaro (€85 to €88).

Getting Around

There are about six Conero Bus services, including bus 1/4 which connects the main train station with the ferry terminal and Piazza Cavour (€1); look for the bus stop with the big signpost displaying Centro and Porto.

For a taxi, telephone ☎ 071 4 33 21.

You'll find **Europcar** (☎ 071 20 31 00) across from the train station and **Maggiore** (☎ 071 4 26 24) 40m to the left as you walk out. At the airport, there are **Avis** (☎ 071 5 22 22; www.avis.com) and **Hertz** (☎ 071 207 37 98; www.hertz.com) desks.

PARCO NATURALE DEL MONTE CÒNERO

Minutes from Ancona but a world unto itself, one of the only sections of the unspoilt Adriatic coastline in Marche, Monte Cònero is tiny but visually stunning. This park extends 58 sq km from Portonovo (9.5km south of Ancona), Sirolo (22km from Ancona) and Numana (a further 2km southeast), which borders the tackiness of Porto Recanati further south.

Tiny Portonovo is its own miniretreat, with one of Italy's most stunning hotels. Sirolo is more upscale, surrounded by town walls with gorgeous ocean views but not directly on the water. Numana starts off well on the northern end but slips into the tacky waterfront that the rest of Le Marche seems to favour.

Information

Tourist Information Centre (☎ 071 933 06 11; www.sirolo.marche.it; Piazza Vittorio Veneto 6, Sirolo; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4.30-9pm Jun-Sep, 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Oct-May) Information about Sirolo and all of Monte Cònero, plus free internet access.

Visitors centre (☎ /fax 071 933 18 79; www.parcocoonero.it or www.parcodelconero.eu; Via Peschiera 30a, Sirolo; ☎ 9am-1pm) For information on the park itself or to arrange guided tours. Or, check the websites.

Sleeping

Camping Internazionale (☎ 071 933 08 84; www.campinginternazionale.com; Via San Michele 10, Sirolo; per person €5-10, tent €9-15, car €3-6, bungalows & chalets €42-122; ☎ May-Sep; ☎ ☎) Shaded in the trees just a few metres from the scenic beaches below Sirolo is this full-service camp site, replete with hot showers, caravan hookups and a children's playground.

Rocco Locanda & Ristorante (☎ 071 933 05 58; www.locandarocco.it; Via Torrione 1, Sirolo; d incl breakfast €120-195, tr €180-240; ☎ ☎) In town rather than on the beach, the elegant seven-room hotel above the eponymous restaurant feels more intimate than stuffy. Feather-soft sheets and period details like wrought-iron beds and stone walls make this a romantic town hideaway.

Hotel Fortino Napoleonico (☎ 071 80 14 50; www.hotelfortino.it; Via Poggio 166, Portonovo; d €160-240, ste €230-320, royal ste €305-390 all incl breakfast; ☎ ☎ ☎) One of Le Marche's most stunning beach-front hotels is this former Napoleonic fort shaped somewhat like Mickey Mouse's head. It practically begs for a romantic tryst. Its stone-built walls, antique furnishings and plush sitting rooms might be enough to bring you inside from the ocean-fronted terrace, and the gilded restaurant (open lunch and dinner daily; meals €39) specialising in local dishes and fresh fish might make you linger even longer.

Eating

Some of Le Marche's best restaurants are in Parco Naturale del Monte Cònero.

PORTONOVO

Susci Bar al Clandestino (☎ 071 80 14 22; Via Portonovo, Loc Poggio; meals €33; ☎ mid-May-mid-Sep) Beyond cool, the Caribbean blue-coloured Susci Bar Al Clandestino serves food that is highly recommended by Italy's food critics. There's no formality here and after a swim in the beautiful Baia di Portonovo, you can drop in for a taste of its Mediterranean sushi or some tapas.

Giacchetti (☎ 071 80 13 84; Via Portonovo 171; meals €33; ☎ Tue-Sun Apr-Oct) This waterfront mainstay has been serving local *litterati* since 1959. Fronted by its own minibeach and surrounded by floor-to-ceiling windows, diners in suits sup on seafood soup or spaghetti with Cònero mussels, and watch wind surfers and sunbathers.

SIROLO

Rocco (☎ /fax 071 933 05 58; Via Torrione 1; meals €35; ☎ Wed-Mon Easter to mid-Oct) A Slow Food restaurant run by passionate young cooks who base their excellent dishes on the freshest ingredients. A leafy outdoor veranda serves up, not surprisingly, many fish and shellfish meals.

NUMANA

Il Saraghino (☎ /fax 071 739 15 96; Via Litoranea 209, Loc Martelli; meals €55; ☎ Tue-Sun Mar-mid-Dec) Never mind the plastic 'Baby Farm' playland next door, as it'll be closed by the time you're dining on one of this restaurant's famed *nouvelle* dishes—artichokes with gorgonzola or *tagliatelle con scampetti* (pasta with lobster). The restaurant and its chef have been bathed in awards and accolades for years, but it's the beachfront location that impresses most visitors.

La Torre (☎ 071 933 07 47; Via la Torre 1; meals €38) Leave behind quaint stone walls and wood-beamed ceilings for open duct-work and metal furnishings. Stylish wood tables look out over a giant oceanfront window. Fish is the big draw here, but the homemade desserts shouldn't be missed.

Getting There & Away

Buses from Ancona run sporadically throughout the year, peaking in July and August. See the table on p588 for more information.

LORETO

Thousands of Catholic pilgrims travel here every year because of the belief that angels transferred the house of the Virgin Mary from Palestine to this spot towards the end of the 13th century. The basilica that was built over the site was begun in 1468, on Gothic lines, and later expanded by some Renaissance luminaries, including Bramante, to become today's **Santuario della Santa Casa** (☎ 071 97 01 04, 071 97 68 37; Piazza della Madonna; ☎ 6.15am-12.30pm & 2.30-8pm Apr-Sep, 6.45am-12.30pm & 2.30-7pm Oct-Mar).

On 7 September, Loreto turns out for the **Corsa del Drappo**, now a race between the various Loreto quarters, but the festive event started out as a cattle and horse market.

Loreto lies about 28km south of Ancona and can be reached easily by bus. Loreto train station (on the Bologna-Lecce line) is a few kilometres away, but shuttle buses connect it with the town centre.

URBINO

pop 15,400

Urbino is most people's first stop on a trip to Le Marche, and it's not hard to understand why. The patriarch of the Montefeltro family, Duca Federico da Montefeltro, created the hippest art scene in the 15th century. The famed art patron gathered together all the great artists, architects and scholars of his day to create a sort of Renaissance think-tank. The university here still dominates any social scene. The town's splendour was made official by Unesco, which deemed the entire city centre a World Heritage Site.

History

By the mid-16th century, central Italy was ruled by the pope; only the duchy of Urbino remained autonomous. The city and its territories were reigned over by the Della Rovere family, since the Montefeltro family had been left without heirs. The Della Rovere family was, however, linked to the papacy. Two of its members were elected popes (Sisto IV and Giulio II), and Francesco Maria I Della Rovere became commander of the pontifical army.

Orientation

Urbino is outlandishly difficult to navigate in a car, by public transport or on foot. Buses arrive at Borgo del Mercatale, at the western edge of the city. The city's main car park is located here, but there are several others around the city (shown on the map). To get to the city centre, hike up Via Mazzini or take the €0.50 *ascensore* to Teatro Sanzio. Take care not to park at Piazzale Roma overnight on Friday as there is a market Saturday morning and your car will be towed away.

You can buy the useful *Urbino Mini-guide con Pianta* (in English) for €2 from the Piazza Mercatale information point, or from various newspaper and magazine shops in the old town. The main tourist map, *Urbino: Piantina della Città*, available from the tourist office and at many hotels and sights, is more than sufficient for most travellers.

Information

Assessorato Cultura e Turismo (www.urbinocultura.turismo.it in Italian) Provided for tourists in association with the city of Urbino and Unesco. It's in Italian, but contains listings for all accommodation (including B&Bs and *agriturismi*) and popular historic, cultural and artistic sights.

UNDER THE LE MARCHE SUN *Duncan Campbell*

The first lesson of Italian farmhouse renovation is to slow down. Time here in Le Marche, central Italy, is an optimistic approximation at best – ‘nine’ means ‘no earlier than ten’, ‘Tuesday’ means ‘not before Wednesday’, and so the estimated three to four months for our renovations will end up taking more than six. However, it’s not because the work was underestimated, it’s simply because it’s taken so long for everyone just to show up. Oh well. At least those brick-and-stone arches were worth the wait.

Rural Italy is also full of tradition, where old habits die hard. Introduce an idea that deviates from the age-old norms, and the builder brushes off your suggestion with a brusque ‘bruto!’ (‘ugly!’). Sometimes only persistence gets you what you want. More progressive attitudes are leaking in, but it takes legwork to find practitioners of ‘alternative’ concepts such as non-gas heating and non-tile flooring.

With the influx of English buyers and their powerful pounds, it’s a costlier dream today than a few years ago – €150,000 is not unheard of for a pile of stones, and renovation costs start at €800 per square metre.

But it’s worth it. Bring patience, humour, and five willing senses, and all frustrations give way to simpler, more vital things. Like spinach and tomatoes so fresh they’re dripping with earth... alluring aromas from chalkboard *ristoranti* where you’re greeted like a friend... neighbours who kiss you on the cheek and treat you like family... verdant waves of rolling hills stretching into forever...

Getting back in touch with life’s essential pleasures at a pace that most of us forgot long ago – it’s why Frances Mayes bought *Bramasole*, and why we bought our little taste of *la dolce vita*. And, of course, being able to wake up of a morning and say: ‘I think I’ll go to Florence today.’

Duncan Campbell is a freelance writer who heralds from South Africa, and now lives in rural Le Marche with his German wife and American-born son. He chronicles their adventures on his blog at www.duncanc.blogspot.com.

Netgate (☎ 0722 24 62; Via G Mazzini 17; 📶 10am–11pm Mon–Fri, noon–11pm Sat, noon–10pm Sun; per 30 min/1hr €2.50/4) Internet facilities.

Ospedale Civile (☎ 0722 30 11; Via Bonconte da Montefeltro) Hospital located about 1.5km north of the city centre.

Police station (☎ 0722 3 51 81; Piazza Mercatale)

Post office (☎ 0722 3 77 91; Via Bramante 28; 📶 8.30am–6.30pm Mon–Fri, 8.30am–12.30pm Sat)

Tourist information point (Piazza Mercatale;

📶 6.30am–8.30pm) At the entrance of the lift into town.

Tourist office (☎ 0722 26 13; fax 0722 24 41; Via Puccinotti 3; 📶 9am–1pm Mon–Sat, 3–6pm Tue–Fri) Visitors have 10 minutes of free internet access.

Sights

PALAZZO DUCALE

A microcosm of Renaissance architecture, art and history, the **Palazzo Ducale** (☎ 0722 2 76 01; Piazza Duca Federico; adult/concession €8/4; 📶 8.30am–7.15pm Tue–Sun, 8.30am–2pm Mon) houses the **Galleria Nazionale delle Marche**, **Museo Archeologico** and **Museo della Ceramica**. The museum triptych is housed within Federico da Montefeltro’s Renaissance palace, a work of art in itself, as

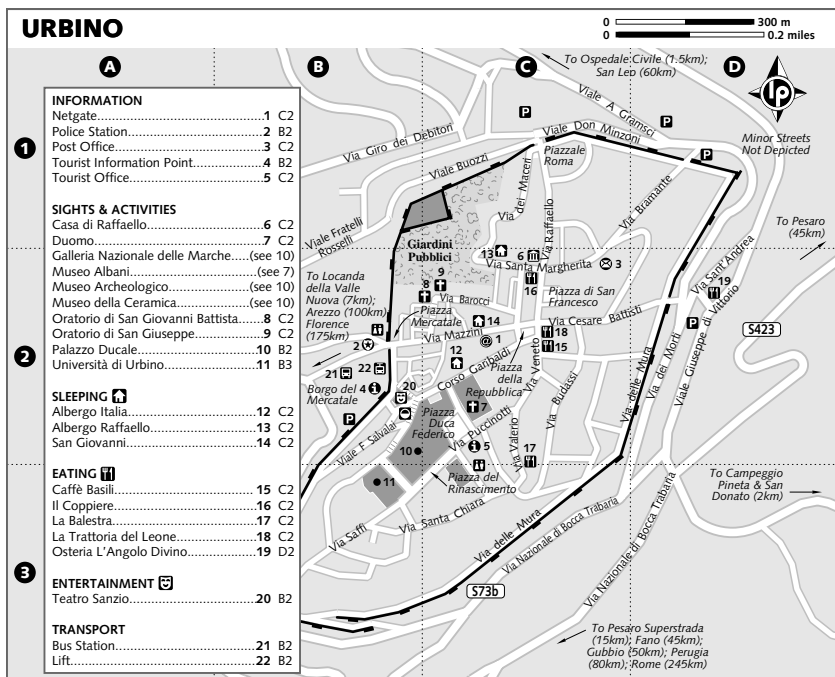
the duke employed some of the greatest artists and architects of the Renaissance to create what was then a modern masterpiece.

A monumental staircase, one of Italy’s first, leads to the *piano nobile* (literally ‘noble floor’) and the Ducal Apartments. Piero della Francesca was one of the artists employed by the duke, and his work, *The Flagellation*, adorns the duke’s library. The collection also includes a large number of drawings by Federico Barocci, as well as works by Raphael, Titian and Signorelli.

From Corso Garibaldi you get the best view of the complex with its unusual Facciata dei Torricini, a three-storey loggia in the form of a triumphal arch, flanked by circular towers.

CHURCHES

Rebuilt in the early 19th century in neoclassical style, the interior of Urbino’s **Duomo** (Piazza Duca Federico; 📶 7.30am–1pm & 2–7pm) commands much greater interest than its austere façade. Particularly memorable is Federico Barocci’s *Last Supper*. The basilica’s **Museo Albani** (☎ 0722 65 00 24; admission €3; 📶 9.30am–1pm & 2.30–6.30pm) contains



religious artefacts, vestments and more paintings, including Andrea da Bologna's *Madonna del Latte* (Madonna Breastfeeding) and one by Giovanni Santi (Raphael's father).

The 14th-century **Oratorio di San Giovanni Battista** (☎ 347 671 11 81; Via Barocci; admission €2; 🕒 10am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-12.30pm Sun) features brightly coloured frescoes by Lorenzo and Giacomo Salimbeni. A few steps away, the **Oratorio di San Giuseppe** (☎ 0347 671 11 81; Via Barocci; admission €2; 🕒 10am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-12.30pm Sun) boasts a stucco *Nativity* by Federico Brandani.

CASA DI RAFFAELLO

North of the Piazza della Repubblica you'll find the 15th-century **Casa di Raffaello** (☎ 0722 32 01 05; Via Raffaello 57; adult/student €2/1; 🕒 9am-1pm & 3-6pm daily Mar-Oct, 9am-2pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Nov-Feb), the house where Raphael spent his first 16 years. On the 1st floor is possibly one of Raphael's first frescoes, a Madonna with child.

Courses

Università di Urbino (☎ 800 46 24 46; www.uniurb.it; Via Saffi 2) offers an intensive one-month course

in language and culture for foreign students during August for €500. The school can also arrange accommodation in apartments, *agriturismi* or private homes starting at €200.

Festivals & Events

In May Urbino decks itself out in flowers for the **Urbino Città Fiorita** festival. The **Urbino Jazz Festival** takes place in June, while in July the **International Festival of Ancient Music** occurs. The **Festa dell' Duca** takes place on the second Sunday in August, when the town's streets become the setting for a costume procession and the re-enactment of a tournament on horseback. Europe's only kite-flying competition is held here on the first Sunday in September. Check with the tourist office for up-to-date details.

Sleeping

The tourist office can provide a full list of private rooms and other accommodation options.

Campeggio Pineta (☎ 0722 47 10; campeggiopinetaurbino@email.it; Via Ca' Mignone 5, San Donato; per person/tent €7/12; 🕒 Easter-Sep) Only 2km from the

city centre is this camp site, located amid a luscious surrounding of trees. Hot showers, a bar and market await campers. Take the shuttle bus into town.

San Giovanni (☎ 0722 28 72, fax 0722 32 90 55; Via Barocci 13; s/d/tr €38/58/69, s/d without bathroom €26/40; ☒ closed 10-30 Jul & 20 Dec-10 Jan) Fittingly for a university town, these dormitory-looking rooms are good value for the price. Despite the slightly musty smell, beds are comfy enough and the shared bathrooms are clean.

Albergo Italia (☎ 0722 27 01; www.albitalia.it; Corso Garibaldi 32; s €45-65, d €65-115 all incl breakfast, ☒ ☑) Set behind the Palazzo Ducale, the Italia could not be better positioned. Modern but well designed, the multistorey building is restfully quiet while offering all the amenities of a business hotel.

Albergo Raffaello (☎ 0722 47 84; www.albergoraffaello.com; Via Santa Margherita 40; s €45-65, d €70-115 all incl breakfast, ☒) The imposing marbled entrance of this former seminary makes way for plain but comfortable rooms outfitted with TVs, minibars and radios. Some rooms have fantastic views of the palace. The proprietors will transport guests to and from any of the car parks or bus stations in town.

ourpick Locanda della Valle Nuova (☎ /fax 0722 33 03 03; www.vallenuova.it; La Cappella 14, Sagrata di Fermignano; per person incl breakfast €48; ☒ mid-Jun–mid-Nov; ☑ ☑) Ecology and comfort coexist in perfect balance at this six-room working *agriturismo*. Also an organic restaurant, Locanda della Valle Nuova grows an incredible array of fruit, vegetables, grains and wine grapes plus raises naturally fed cattle and hens. Enjoy a horse ride or a homegrown truffle. It is about 20 minutes from Urbino, but the English-speaking owners will assist you with transport and visiting the local towns. There's a minimum three-night stay; no credit cards.

Eating

Don't miss Italy's only homicidal pasta – *strozzapreti* (priest-stranglers) – available in most restaurants. One legend has it that the shredded pasta was designed to choke priests who would eat for free at local restaurants. Another says it was the priests' gluttonous overeating that led to their demise. Either way, if you happen to wear the collar, be careful.

La Trattoria del Leone (☎ 0722 32 98 94; Via Cesare Battisti 5; meals €24; ☒ dinner nightly, lunch Sat & Sun) One of Urbino's only new restaurants, this city centre trattoria specialises in inventive

Marchigiani cuisine such as ravioli with the local Casciotta d'Urbino cheese.

Osteria L'Angolo Divino (☎ 0722 32 75 59; Via Sant'Andrea 14; meals €32; ☒ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat & lunch Sun Jun–mid-Dec) This subterranean *enoteca* just oozes atmosphere. Arched brick alcoves overflow with wine bottles, available for tastings. Even teetotallers will enjoy this place, as the menu boasts simple but perfectly flavoured pasta specialities, including the much better tasting than it sounds *pasta nel sacco* (pasta in a sack), which is fresh pasta coated with eggs and breadcrumbs.

La Balestra (☎ 0722 29 42; Via Valerio 16; meals €20; ☒ dinner-midnight) Urbino's literati and university students congregate amid a vaulted brick ceiling and ancient artefacts adorning the walls. The food goes back in time, as well, with medieval recipes a big hit. Try the speciality, *pappardelle del duca* (thick ribbon pasta) or the famous *strozzapreti*.

Il Coppiere (☎ 0722 32 23 26; Via Santa Margherita 1; meals €23) Unassumingly simple with fantastic prices, it specialises in typical local dishes such as black truffle ravioli (€8), tagliatelle with radicchio (€7) or grilled lamb (€8).

Caffè Basili (☎ 0722 24 48; Piazza della Repubblica; ☒ 6.30am-2am daily) Urbino students and professionals know it as 'Bar Centrale', the best of the piazza cafés. Its outdoor tables get a relaxing dose of afternoon sun. Pastries, sandwiches and gelato are served any time of day, and *aperitivi* accompany late-afternoon drinks.

Entertainment

The arts come alive in Urbino during the summer season.

The grand old 19th-century **Teatro Sanzio** (☎ 0722 22 81; Corso Garibaldi) hosts plays and concerts, particularly from July to September. Pick up a brochure at the main tourist office.

Getting There & Around

The Pesaro-based company **Adriabus** (☎ 0722 37 67 11) runs up to 15 services daily between Urbino and Pesaro (€2.75 to €3, 55 minutes).

Take the bus to Pesaro to pick up trains (see p595).

An autostrada and the S423 connect Urbino with Pesaro, while the S73B connects the town with the SS3 heading for Rome. Most motor vehicles are banned from the walled city. **Taxis** (☎ 0722 25 50) and shuttle buses operate from Piazza della Repubblica and Piazza Mercatale.

There are car parks outside the city gates. Note that there is no parking on Piazzale Roma on Saturday morning as it's market day.

PESARO

pop 92,000

Geographically, the town of Pesaro is practically perfect. Its beachfront locale adds to the beauty of its winding, ancient pedestrian zone (flat, even!) and backdrop of undulating hills. Too bad tens of thousands of Speedo-clad northern Europeans come here for five months out of the year to do a sardine impression on the beach, which is backed by a Soviet-looking strip of high-rise concrete hotels. However, the historic centre deserves an entire day to wander. The composer Gioachino Rossini loved his home town so much he willed Pesaro all of his possessions when he died (be sure to check out Casa Rossini while you're here).

Orientation & Information

The train station is on the far western edge of downtown, about 2km from the beach. From the train station, walk along Viale del Risorgimento, through the Piazza Lazzarini, where the name switches to Via Branca, Via Rossini and finally Viale della Repubblica. It ends at the waterfront and the tourist office in Piazza della Libertà.

Pesaro Urbino Tourism (www.turismo.pesarourbino.it) Has excellent information in English, with maps, hotels and sights.

Tourist office (☎ 0721 6 93 41; www.comune.pesaro.ps.it in Italian; Piazzale della Libertà 11; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun summer, 9am-1pm Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat, 3-6pm Tue & Thu winter) Pick up its free *Handy Guide*, in English.

Sights & Activities

In 1792 the famed composer Rossini was born in a typical Pesaro house that is now known as the **Casa Rossini** (☎ 0721 38 73 57; Via Rossini 34; adult/under 25 €4/3, incl entry to Musei Civici €7/4; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm Tue-Sun, 4-7pm Thu-Sun Sep-Jun, closes 10.30pm Tue & Thu Jul-Aug). Follow the history of Rossini and opera through the early 19th century via a series of prints, personal effects and portraits.

Opened in 1860 just after Italian reunification, the town's original art gallery is now the **Musei Civici** (☎ 0721 38 75 41; Piazza Toschi Mosca 29; adult/under 25 €4/2, incl entry to Casa Rossini €7/4; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm Tue-Sun, 4-7pm Thu-Sun Sep-Jun,

4-7pm Wed & Fri-Sun, 4-10.30pm Tue & Thu Jul & Aug), which also displays Pesaro's 700-year-old ceramic tradition with one of Italy's best collections of majolica ceramics. The Pinacoteca houses Giovanni Bellini's magnificent altarpiece depicting the coronation of the Virgin.

Pesaro has four major beach areas – **Levante**, **Ponente**, **Baia Flaminia** and the **free beach**. Levante and Ponente are the jam-packed hotel-fronted beaches on either side of the tourist office, so for elbow room, head to the free (open) beach to the south of the city, under Monte Ardizio.

Festivals & Events

In honour of its most famous son, the town hosts the **Rossini Opera Festival** (☎ 0721 380 02 94; www.rossinoperafestival.it; Via Rossini 24; ☎ box office 10am-1pm & 3-5pm Mon-Fri) around town each summer. Tickets run anywhere from €10 to €125 with substantial student or last-minute discounts.

Sleeping & Eating

The majority of hotels close down from October until around Easter. Most places are square concrete blocks from the 1960s, uninspiring but close to or on the beach. For a room, contact the **Associazione Pesarese di Albergatori** (☎ 0721 6 79 59; www.apahotel.it in Italian, English, French & German; Viale Marconi 57) or try the tourist office.

Marinella (☎ 0721 5 57 95; www.campingmarinella.it; SS Adriatica km 244, Loc Fossejore; per person/tent/car from €5/5/3, bungalows d/tr/q €60/70/103; ☎ Easter-Sep) Drift off to the sound of waves breaking on the beach in your seaside tent. A casual restaurant is on site, as well as a market, beach volleyball, washing machines, showers and lots of child-friendly activities.

Felici e Contenti (☎ 0721 3 20 60; Via Cattaneo 37; meals €26; ☎ Tue-Sat, dinner Sun) When a restaurant names itself 'Happily Ever After', you can bet you'll retire for the evening both happy and content. Its speciality is fish, but pasta also makes a memorable entrance on the menu. The atmosphere is more sophisticatedly urban than many other Pesaro restaurants and it's located on a quiet side street in the medieval centre.

C'Era Una Volta (☎ 0721 3 09 11; Via Cattaneo 26; pizzas from €3.50; ☎ Tue-Sun) The raucous atmosphere is almost as fun as the pizzas, topped with peas, artichokes, *speck*, pancetta or even *patate fritti* (chips). No glass of wine is more than €2.80

and an enormous array of pasta dishes can be had for under €7.50.

Entertainment

The 400-year-old **Teatro Rossini** (☎ 0721 3 24 82; www.enteconcerti.it; Via Rossini) was renamed in the composer's honour, and its grand ceiling and ornate box seats make it a take-your-breath-away spot to catch a concert, especially during the Rossini Opera Festival.

Getting There & Around

The main bus station is on Piazza Matteotti. **Bucci** (☎ 0721 3 24 01) operates a service to Ancona (€3.10, one hour 20 minutes, four daily) and Rome (€19.80, four hours 40 minutes). **Adriabus** (☎ 0722 37 67 11) runs up to 10 buses daily to Urbino (€2.75 to €3, 55 minutes).

Pesaro is on the Bologna–Lecce train line and you can reach Rome (€16.10 to €26.15, four hours, nine daily) by changing trains at Falconara Marittima, just before Ancona. There are hourly services to Ancona (€3.25, 45 minutes), Rimini (€2.60 to €6, 20 to 40 minutes) and Bologna (€7.70 to €15, two hours). By car, Pesaro is on the A14 and the SS16.

GROTTE DI FRASASSI

In September 1971 a team of climbers stumbled across a hole in the hill country around Genga, which turned out to be the biggest known cave in Europe, containing a spectacle of stalactites and stalagmites, some of them 1.4 million years old.

The **grotte** (☎ 0732 9 00 80; www.frasassi.com; adult/concession/child under 6 & disabled persons €12/11/free; ☎ entrance at 9.30am, 11am, 12.30pm, 3pm, 4.30pm & 6pm Sep-Jul, 8am–6.30pm Aug, closed 10-30 Jan) now has a 1.5km-long trail laid through five chambers where professional guides take you on a 70-minute tour.

Ancona Abyss, the first chamber, is almost 200m high, 180m wide and 120m long. The ticket area and car park are just outside San Vittore Terme, and the entrance to the caves is 600m further west. The whole area deserves an entire day, as you can also check out a Romanesque temple and enjoy one of many beautiful hiking trails.

For €26 to €36 you can have a more challenging experience that lasts for three hours and involves passing across 30m chasms and crawling on your hands and knees along narrow passages and tunnels. Book in advance.

To reach the caves from Ancona, take the SS76 off the A14. The closest train station is in Genga, 61km from Ancona or Gubbio and about 2km from the caves' ticket area; a shuttle bus runs from the train station in summer.

MACERATA

pop 42,700

Macerata is well off the tourist radar, but offers charming hill town scenery, great accommodation, one of Italy's most famous opera festivals and several days' worth of sights. While the Picena tribe settled the area as a trading centre 3000 years ago, its largest draw these days is the Arena Sferisterio, which holds the opera festival in July and August.

Orientation

Piazza della Libertà is the focal point of the medieval city, contained within the 14th-century walls above the sprawl of the more modern development. Intercity buses arrive at the huge Giardini Diaz below. An underground pass leads to a lift that takes you to the bottom of Via XX Settembre in the old town. Follow this road through Piazza Oberdan and along Via Gramsci to reach Piazza della Libertà and the tourist office. If you arrive by train, bus 6 links the train station, which is south of the city centre, to Piazza della Libertà. Other buses climb up Viale Leopardi.

There is parking virtually right around the city walls and if you're lucky you may even find a space on one of the main squares inside the old city.

Information

Assessorato al Turismo (www.comune.macerata.it)

Town website.

Internet centre (☎ 0733 26 44 04; Piazza Mazzini 52; per hr €4; ☎ 9am–1pm & 4–8pm Mon–Sat)

Macerata Incoming – Tourist Information Centre

(☎ 0733 23 43 33; www.macerataincoming.it; Porta Picena 1; ☎ 10am–1pm & 3–6pm winter, 4–7pm Tue–Sun summer) Information on visiting the Sferisterio and private tourist help centre.

Marche Voyager (www.le-marche.com/Marche/html/macerata.htm) Tourist website from the Le Marche Region Tourism Department.

Post office (☎ 0733 27 30 53; Via Gramsci 44; ☎ 8am–6.30pm Mon–Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 0733 23 48 07; iat.macerata@regione.marche.it; Piazza della Libertà 9; ☎ 9am–1pm & 3–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm Sat, 9am–6pm Mon–Sat Jul & Aug)

Sights & Activities

One of Europe's most stunning outdoor theatres is the **Arena Sferisterio** (☎ 0733 23 07 35; www.sferisterio.it; Piazza Mazzini 10; admission €2, shows €15-150; 🗓️ tours 9.30am-1pm & 4-8pm summer, 10.30am-1pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat winter), which resembles an ancient Roman arena but was built between 1819 and 1829. Between 15 July and 15 August every year it is a venue for the Stagione Lirica, one of Italy's most prestigious musical events, which attracts big operatic names. Enquire at the tourist office for programme details.

The city centre starts at the Loggia dei Mercanti, next to the tourist office in the Piazza della Libertà. Built in the 16th century, the open-air building housed travelling merchants selling their wares to the area's villagers. Across the square is the **Teatro Lauro Rossi** (☎ 0733 25 63 06; fax 0733 23 52 72; Piazza della Libertà 21; admission from €19; 🗓️ tours 9am-1pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri), an elegant theatre built in 1774 for the musical enjoyment of the nobility which now allows well-dressed riffraff to attend.

In Piazza Vittorio Veneto, at the end of the main boulevard Corso della Repubblica, you will find a museum triumvirate in the Palazzo Ricci: the **Museo Civico**, the **Museo delle Carrozze** and the **Pinacoteca** (☎ 0733 25 63 61; Piazza Vittorio Veneto 2; admission free; 🗓️ 9am-1pm & 4-7.30pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun). The latter has a good collection of early Renaissance works, including a 15th-century Madonna by Carlo Crivelli. The Museo delle Carozze (carriage museum) houses an extensive collection of 18th- to 20th-century coaches. The Museo Civico contains Roman and Piceni archaeological remains. As if this wasn't enough, there's also the Municipal Library, which boasts 300,000 texts, many ancient maps and medieval manuscripts.

The 16th-century **Museo Palazzo Ricci** (☎ 0733 26 14 87; Via Ricci 1; admission free; 🗓️ 10-1pm & 4-8pm Sat, Sun & holidays Mar-Dec, daily Jul-Aug) houses a collection of 20th-century Italian pop art and futurists such as Giorgio De Chirico, Giacomo Balla and Renato Guttuso, alongside an impressive display of 18th-century noble furnishings.

Festivals & Events

During the week leading up to the first Sunday in August, in nearby Treia, you can witness the annual **Disfida del Bracciale**, a festival that revives the tradition and folklore surrounding the 19th-century game. *Bracciale* involves

players hitting leather balls with spiked wooden hand-guards that look like a cross between a torture device and a pine cone.

See left for details on the Arena Sferisterio's opera season.

Sleeping

Ostello Asilo Ricci (☎ /fax 0733 23 25 15; ostelloasilo.ricci@virgilio.it; Via dell'Asilo 36; dm/s/d/tr incl breakfast €15/23/40/55; 📶) Housed in a restored school a stone's throw from the town centre, this quiet hostel has spacious rooms painted in a vibrant orange Venetian plaster and is so tidy that the sheets are even ironed. Bathing is accomplished by using showerheads installed above private toilets.

Albergo Arena (☎ 0733 23 09 31; www.albergoarena.com; Vicolo Sferisterio 16; s incl breakfast €40-55, d €65-85; 📶) One of the best breakfasts of any two-star hotel around, Arena has a beautiful display of fresh fruit, juice and pastries. Other than a rather stunning commitment to an orange and yellow design scheme, the rooms are comfortable. Plus, bathrooms come with hairdryer and a towel warmer.

Hotel Arcadia (☎ 0733 23 59 61; www.harcadia.it; Via Matteo Ricci 134; s/d/tr from €45/65/75; 📶) This pleasant little hotel in a quiet street not far from the cathedral gives three-star, business-bland comfort at very reasonable prices. All come with 'frigobar', and a few have minibar-conies over the cobblestone streets below.

Eating

Istanbul Kebab (☎ 0733 23 81 60; Viale Trieste 6; mains €3-5; 🗓️ 8am-2am, to midnight Sun) A tiny takeaway serving practically 24 hours a day. It's the best kebab stand we've found in Italy (and a welcome respite from Italian food).

Trattoria Il Cortile (☎ 0733 23 50 51; Via T Lauri 15; meals €19; 🗓️ daily Jun-Sep, Tue-Sun Oct-May) Home-cooked meals are lovingly prepared by the nonna of a boisterous family. Top off a healthy meal of bitter greens with their homemade gelato or delectable cakes.

Da Secondo (☎ 0733 26 09 12; Via Pescheria Vecchia 26/28; meals €30; 🗓️ Tue-Sun) The place in Macerata to try the local cuisine. Follow the town's history through photos covering the walls as well as in the regional ingredients: *pecorino* (sheep's-milk cheese), *tartufo* (truffles) and *osso buco* with *porcini* mushrooms. In summer, dine on the romantic outdoor terrace. Its famed warm chocolate torte caps off a perfect meal.

Getting There & Around

Macerata is off the main railway line, which ensures its tranquillity but requires at least one change, either in Civitanova Marche for most easterly routes (including Ancona and some trains from Rome) or the more time-consuming Fabriano to the west (including Umbria, Tuscany and most trains from Rome). The **train station** (☎ 0733 24 03 54) is located at Piazza XXV Aprile 8/10. Good connections include Ancona (€4.20, one hour 20 minutes, hourly) and Rome (€13.80 to €21.85, four to 5½ hours, nine daily). To reach Ascoli Piceno (€5.60, two hours, 11 daily) change trains in San Benedetto del Tronto or Porto d'Ascoli and Civitanova Marche.

Buses head to Rome (€15.40 to €20, four hours, six daily) and Civitanova Marche (€3.20, 25 minutes, three daily). Ask at the tourist office for timetables, which are also available at the bus terminal behind **Giardini Diaz** (☎ 0733 23 09 06).

The local orange APM buses 6A, 6B, 7, 8 or 11 will take you between town and the train station. They start at either Rampa Zara or Piazza della Libertà.

You'll find **taxis** (☎ 0733 23 35 70) for hire at Piazza della Libertà, at the **train station** (☎ 0733 24 03 53), as well as at **Giardini Diaz** (☎ 0733 23 13 39).

The SS77 connects the city with the A14 to the east and roads for Rome in the west.

ASCOLI PICENO

pop 51,800

Older than Rome, some Piceni like to say. Although not technically true, Ascoli – as it's known – has been home to inhabitants since the Sabine tribe settled the area in the 9th century BC. These days, Ascoli is a charming mid-size Marchigiani town, its lack of hills presenting an easily walkable visit. It's not heavily touristed, but those willing to make the trek will discover historical riches, an excellent *pinacoteca*, one of Italy's unsung perfect piazzas and a veal-stuffed fried olive treat (*olive all'ascolana*) good enough to plan your heart attack around.

Orientation

The old town lies at the convergence of the Tronto river and Castellano *torrente* (small river). The train and most buses stop in the modern extension, just east of the rivers. From the station on foot, turn right onto

Viale Indipendenza, which turns into Corso Emanuele. From here, you'll run into Piazza Arringo, the tourist office, the cathedral and most museums. The walk takes around 15 minutes, and the entire town is flat enough to rollerblade around.

Information

City of Ascoli Piceno (www.comune.ascoli-piceno.it) A consortium interested in promoting the area. Has information on events and festivals.

Hospital (☎ 0736 35 81; Monticelli) Located 4km east of town.

Phone Point (☎ /fax 0736 25 23 70; Piazza Bonfine 6; per hr €2.50; ☎ 9am-12.45pm & 4-9pm Mon-Sat, 5-9pm Sun, closed Tue morning) Has internet and does phone calls to the UK, US and Australia for €0.15 per minute.

Police station (☎ 0736 35 51 11; Viale della Repubblica 8)

Post office (☎ 0736 24 22 85; Via Crispi; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12.30pm Sat)

Rinascita Libreria (☎ 0736 25 96 53; www.rinascita.it) in Italian; Piazza Roma 7; ☎ 9am-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-1pm & 4-8pm Sun, 4-8pm Mon) English-language books, a whole Lonely Planet section (in Italian), wi-fi, lots of maps and a lovely café to while away an afternoon.

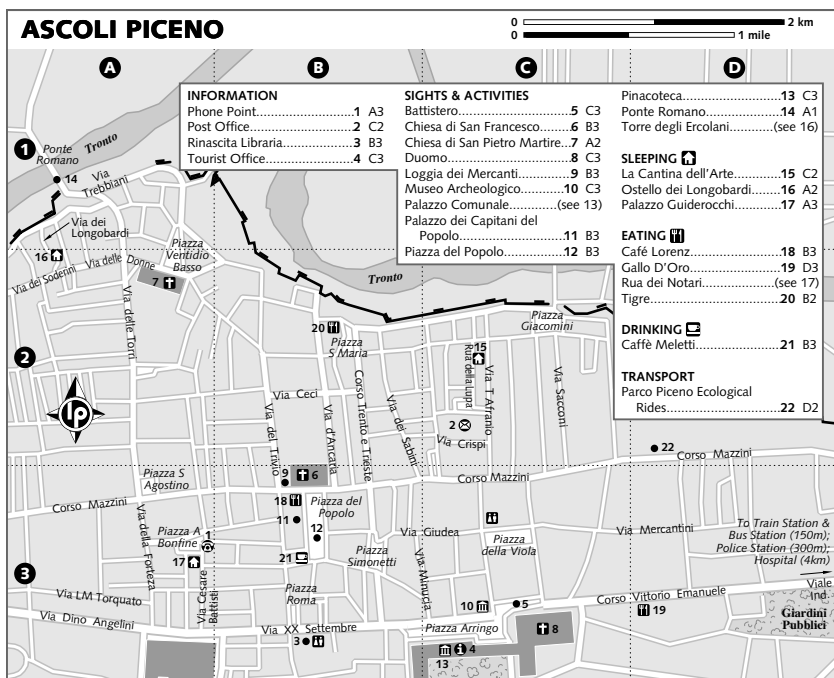
Tourist office (☎ 0736 29 82 04; iat.ascolipiceno@regione.marche.it; Piazza Arringo 7; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 3-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Sat & Sun)

Sights

PIAZZA DEL POPOLO

The imposing Piazza del Popolo has since Roman times been Ascoli's *salotto* (sitting room). The square, which is rectangular, is flanked on the west by the 13th-century **Palazzo dei Capitani del Popolo**. Built in the same famed travertine stone used throughout the region for centuries, the 'Captain's Palace' was the headquarters for the leaders of Ascoli. The statue of Pope Paul III above the main entrance was erected in recognition of his efforts to bring peace to the town.

The beautiful **Chiesa di San Francesco** (☎ 0736 25 94 46; Piazza del Popolo; ☎ 7am-12.30pm & 3.30-8pm) was started back in 1262 as a homage to a visit from St Francis himself. In the left nave is a 15th-century wooden cross that miraculously made it through a 1535 fire at the Palazzo dei Capitani, and has since reputedly spilled blood twice. Virtually annexed to the church is **Loggia dei Mercanti**, built in the 16th century by the powerful guild of wool merchants, to hide their rough-and-tumble artisan shops.



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PIAZZA ARRINGO

The second-largest art gallery in Le Marche is inside the 17th-century **Palazzo Comunale**. The **Pinacoteca** (☎ 0736 29 82 13, 0736 29 82 04; Piazza Arringo; adult/concession €5/3; 🕒 9am-1pm & 3-7pm) boasts an outstanding display of art, sculpture and religious artefacts, 400 works total, including paintings by Van Dyck, Titian and Rembrandt, and a stunning embroidered 13th-century papal cape worn by Ascoli-born Pope Nicholas IV. The gallery was founded in 1861 with works taken from churches and religious orders that were suppressed in the wake of Italian unification. The **Museo Archeologico** (☎ 0736 25 35 62; Piazza Arringo; adult/concession €2/1; 🕒 8.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun) holds a small collection of tribal artefacts from Piceni and other European people back to the first centuries AD.

On the eastern flank of Piazza Arringo, Ascoli's **Duomo** (☎ 0736 25 97 74; Piazza Arringo; 🕒 7am-12.30pm & 4-8pm) was built in the 15th century over a medieval building and dedicated to St Emidio, patron saint of the city. In the **Cappella del Sacramento** is what is considered by critics to be Carlo Crivelli's best work, the **Polittico**, a polyptych executed in 1473. The **crypt of Sant**

Emidio has a set of mosaics any ceramicist will appreciate, but be sure to look through the locked gates at the ancient tunnels.

The **battistero** (baptistry) – next to the cathedral and something of a traffic barrier today – has remained unchanged since it was constructed in the 11th century.

VECCHIO QUARTIERE

The town's Vecchio Quartiere (Old Quarter) stretches from Corso Mazzini (the main thoroughfare of the Roman-era settlement) to the Castellano river. Its main street is the picturesque Via delle Torri, which eventually becomes Via Solesta; it's a perfect spot to wander. On Via delle Donne (Street of Women) is the 14th-century **Chiesa di San Pietro Martire** (☎ 0736 25 52 14; Piazza Ventidio Basso; 🕒 7.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-7pm), dedicated to the saint who founded the Dominican community at Ascoli. The chunky Gothic structure houses the **Reliquario della Santa Spina**, containing what is said to be a thorn from Christ's crown.

The 40m-high **Torre degli Ercolani** located on Via dei Soderini, west of the Chiesa di San Pietro Martire, is the tallest of the town's

medieval towers. **Palazzetto Longobardo**, a 12th-century Lombard-Romanesque defensive position and now the Ostello dei Longobardi (below), a youth hostel, abuts the tower. Just to the north is the well-preserved **Ponte Romano**, a single-arched Roman bridge.

Festivals & Events

With all the medieval festivals in Italy, when one of them receives an accolade for best historical re-enactment, there's probably a pretty good reason. Ascoli's **Quintana**, held the second Saturday in July and the first Sunday in August, brings out thousands and thousands of locals dressed in the typical costume of the 12th and 13th centuries: knights in suits of armour, ladies in velvet and lace. Processions and flag-waving contests take place throughout July and August, but the big draw is the Quintana day's joust, when the town's six *sestiers* (quarters) face each other in a joust.

Sleeping

For a town with not many hotels, Ascoli has a good range of accommodation. Tourist offices have lists of other accommodation options, including rooms and apartments, *agriturismi* and B&B options in outlying districts.

Ostello dei Longobardi (☎ 0736 26 18 62; fax 0736 25 91 91; longobardoascoli@libero.it; Via dei Soderini 26; dm €16, in winter €18) Oozing atmosphere aside, remember that comfort and warmth were invented after the Middle Ages, so when staying at an 11th-century stone palace-turned-youth hostel, don't expect much from the plumbing, and ask for an extra blanket in the winter. Two single-sex rooms sleep just eight each.

La Cantina dell'Arte (☎ 0736 25 56 20; fax 0736 25 91 91; www.cantinadellarte.it Rua della Lupa 8; s/d/tr/q/apt €30/45/60/65/50) The simple rooms come with a bathroom and the quad has a tiny balcony. Two apartments boast a kitchenette. Even though it's tucked onto a side street, bring earplugs, as soundproofing hasn't improved much since the building's inception in 1748.

B&B Rainbow (☎ 0736 25 11 76, 320 808 27 05; incontrididanza@libero.it; Via Salvadori 2; s €25-30, d €45-50, incl breakfast) He teaches theatre and mime, she teaches yoga and dance, and together the English-speaking couple runs a B&B that's as warm and inviting as it is casual. Instead of Botticellis or bad landscapes gracing the walls, you'll find their sons' artistic creations. Be sure to carry on the LP tradition of crosscultural conversations over home-cooked breakfasts;

Mariangela reports Lonely Planet readers are her favourite guests!

Palazzo Guiderocchi (☎ 0736 24 40 11; www.palazzo guiderocchi.com; Via Cesare Battisti 3; r incl breakfast €159-299, ste incl breakfast €219-399; (P) ♻) Not many places offer the history, atmosphere and comfort of this 12th-century palace. Fully restored, it maintains the romance of 6m vaulted ceilings on the 1st floor, low wood-beamed ceilings on the 2nd, and frescoes and several original doors throughout. Best of all, the price can drop by over half in the low season, on a Sunday or when rooms are empty.

Eating

Café Lorenz (☎ 0736 25 99 59; Piazza del Popolo 5; snacks & gelati €2-6; ☎ 10am-2pm) Head upstairs for a convivial drink (drinks and wine €2 to €5) or a light dinner. But the main reason to come here again and again: Lorenz sells takeaway *olive all'ascolana* (olives from Ascoli) for €3.

Gallo D'Oro (☎ 0736 25 35 20; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 54; meals €26; ☎ Mon-Sat) A bit outside the tourist area and popular with long-time Ascoli residents, this business-casual restaurant has been serving up local fare for decades. Try the appetiser selection of fried goodies.

Rua dei Notari (☎ 0736 26 36 30; Via Cesare Battisti 3; meals €30) Perfect for a special meal, this elegant restaurant possesses old-world charm in an elegant modern setting. Dishes present as artfully as the modern paintings covering the walls. There are meat and pasta dishes as well as starters, including fried goodies from Ascoli and *pecorino* with local honey (€8).

Tigre (☎ 0763 34 10 00; Viale Indipendenza; ☎ 8.45am-12.45pm & 4-8pm, closed Sun & mornings Mon) The most central of Ascoli's supermarkets, this location has a deli and a good wine selection.

Drinking

Caffè Meletti (☎ 0736 25 96 26; Piazza delle Popolo; ☎ 8am-7pm) From the shade of the ancient portico you can sip a coffee or the famous anisette as you gaze onto the perfect Italian piazza. Or sit inside to enjoy the statuesque carved wood stairway and bar. It was once a popular spot for the likes of Ernest Hemingway and Jean-Paul Sartre. The café, founded in 1907, fell into disrepair but has since been completely restored to its former glory.

Getting There & Away

Buses leave from Piazzale della Stazione, in front of the train station in the new part of

town, east of the Castellano river. **Start** (☎ 800 44 30 40) runs buses to Rome (€14.50, three hours, four daily) and Civitanova Marche (€4.95, two hours, 12 daily). In Rome, Start buses leave from Viale Castro Pretorio 84, near Stazione Termini. **Mazzuca** (☎ 0736 40 22 67) leave from Piazza Simonetti (buy tickets on board) and serves Montemonaco (€3.75, 1½ hours, four daily), Amandola (€3.25, one hour 10 minutes, six daily) and other towns near the Monti Sibillini range. At 6.30am daily, **Amadio** (☎ 0736 34 23 40) runs a service to Perugia (€17, arrives 11am) and on to Siena (€25, arrives 12.30pm) from in front of the train station. A second bus leaves Sundays and holidays at 6.30pm.

Ascoli Piceno is on its own spur line from San Benedetto del Tronto, which is easily reached on the main Bologna to Lecce line along the Adriatic coast. There are good connections to Ancona (€4.20, one hour 10 minutes), but Macerata requires one or two changes (€5.60, two hours, hourly).

From the A14 motorway, exit at San Benedetto del Tronto and follow the *superstrada* (expressway) for Ascoli Piceno. From Rome, take the Antique Salaria or A2 motorway L'Aquila-Teramo. Follow the state road Piceno–Aprutina for Ascoli Piceno.

Getting Around

Most of the tranquil historic centre of Ascoli Piceno is closed to motor traffic. Locals walk or cycle and visitors can have free use of a bicycle for the duration of their stay if they present ID to **Parco Piceno Ecological Rides** (☎ 0736 26 32 61; Corso Mazzini 224).

MONTI SIBILLINI

It's not easy to reach and all but impossible by public transport, but **Parco Nazionale dei Monti Sibillini** is filled with mystical valleys, ancient hamlets, infinite expanses of wildflowers and soaring peaks (10 are more than 2000m high).

Monti Sibillini straddles the Le Marche/Umbria border. For tourist purposes, the region is divided into four slopes for all tastes: flowering, magic, sacred, historical.

The area is paradise for anyone interested in outdoor activities and wildlife. Walking trails crisscross the area. *Rifugi* (mountain huts) welcome hikers every few kilometres with a restaurant and a warm bed (most open summer only; maps are available at local tourist offices).

There's a good driving-circle around the mountains, which visitors can easily reach from Norcia (in Umbria) or Ascoli Piceno, Macerata or Ancona. From the southwest, start in Norcia, heading to Castelluccio. Follow signs to Montemonaco, Montefortino and Amandola. Although not technically in the Monti Sibillini national park, the largest and prettiest town is Sarnano, on the SS78, which leads to Sasso Tetto; the main ski area in Monti Sibillini. From the main ski area, the road drops down to Lago Fiastra. To continue on an equally stunning drive, circle around to the SS209 through the Valnerina (see p577) in Umbria.

Information

There are 15 'Casa del Parco' visitors information centres, several of which are open daily, including **Amàndola** (☎ /fax 0736 84 85 98; Via Indipendenza 73; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 4-6pm Easter-Sep). Each tourist office carries a plethora of books, maps, brochures and guides to satisfy every cultural or natural interest, from monasteries to mountain-biking trails.

Check out www.sibillini.net, the area's official website, which is mostly translated into English and has loads of information on camping and hotels, hikes, outdoor activities and services.

Sleeping & Eating

Rifugio Casali (☎ 0737 9 95 90; Ussita; dm incl breakfast €35; (P)) One of a dozen *rifugi* in the Monti Sibillini national park, this one has three dorm-style bedrooms, each with a bathroom and hot shower. Like most of the *rifugi*, it's only open July and August, and around the Christmas and New Year period; the rest of the year it is open by appointment.

Montespino (☎ /fax 0736 85 92 38; Montefortino Cerrantana; person/tent €4.15/6.20, 2-/4-/6-bed bungalow €26/39/47; ☎ Jun-Sep, weekends only mid-Sep-Dec; (P) (E)) With a view of Monte Cònero and surrounded by a forest full of trees, this camp site seems like it's in the middle of nowhere but it's just a few kilometres off the SS78 between Macerata and Ascoli Piceno. Full service with a restaurant, bar, market, *bocce* court, swimming pool and children's games.

Ristorante/B&B Osteria del Lago (☎ 0737 5 26 69; Via San Lorenzo al Lago 19; rooms €30-75; meals €21) During the shoulder seasons, have a mountain lake all to yourself while eating the best *cinghiale* in Le Marche. A few homey rooms grace the top floor of the simple family-owned trattoria.

MAGIC MOUNTAINS

Sibylline: the very word has become synonymous with occult and mysterious things, and for centuries the rugged, wild world of the Monti Sibillini has stirred the imagination of writers. In the Middle Ages, this mountain range of 20 summits was known as a realm of demons, necromancers and fairies. The name derives from the famous legend of Sibyl, thought to be able to foresee the future and reputed to live in a cave below Mt Sibylla, one of the three highest peaks of the range.

Whether or not you believe these ancient stories, you can't help but be entranced by the magic of these mountains that straddle Umbria and Le Marche. As you climb, the vegetation changes, from oaks, European hops and flowering ashes to beechwoods higher up. Higher still you find rough grazing land and rare, precious species of flowers like Apennine edelweiss. In the summer, the northernmost part of the park is filled with blooming orchids, liliaceae, narcissuses and alpine aster. The creatures that live in the mountains are just as wild. There are wolves, wild cats, roe deer and porcupines, while golden eagles, goshawks, sparrowhawks and peregrine falcons soar overhead.

The 700 sq km set aside in 1993 as a national park also contain other evocative reminders of an ancient world. There are abbeys and medieval towns nestling at the bottom of the mountains, and churches with late-Gothic frescoes, castles and lookout towers erected by valley dwellers to defend themselves against Saracen raids. In the valley of Lago Fiastra is the Grotta dei Fratti (The Friars' Cave), an impressive ravine hollowed out by water that served as a refuge in the 11th century for the Clarenos monks. Norcia is the birthplace of St Benedict, the patron saint of Europe. It's the starting point for many excursions including to the Abbey of Sant Eutizio, in the *comune* of Preci, founded at the end of the 5th century and famous for the skills the monks developed in healing the sick with medicinal herbs from the Sibillini Mountains.

Near dozens of walking trails throughout the Lago Fiastra area.

Getting There & Away

Monti Sibillini is best reached by bus from Ascoli Piceno or Macerata. The services are heaviest when school is in session, so can be spotty for tourists. It's best to check with Ascoli or Macerata's tourist offices (p597 and p595) or with the bus companies themselves, including **Contram** (☎ 800 44 30 40) in Ascoli Piceno or **START** (☎ 800 03 77 37) in Macerata. There is no train service in the mountains; the closest stops are in Ascoli Piceno to the south and Tolentino to the north.

SARNANO

Though not technically in Monti Sibillini, Sarnano is the largest town near the range, and the most hospitable. Its red-brick façade charms all who visit.

The **Sarnano tourist office** (☎ 0733 65 71 44; iat.sarnano@regione.marche.it; Largo Ricciardi 1; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Sat, 3-6pm Tue-Fri) has walking and climbing information and details of accommodation in the park.

Fabulously located just outside of Sarnano, the family-friendly camp site **Quattro Stagioni**

(☎ 0733 65 11 47; www.camping4stagioni.it; Loc Brillì; 2 people & caravan or tent €16-23, extra person €4-5, child €3-4, 4-person bungalows €40-80; ☎ ☎) has two separate pools for adults and children, table tennis, a discotheque and courts for just about everything: *bocce*, tennis and soccer. It's open all year and has a restaurant, market and pizzeria. During high season they offer instruction in swimming, horse riding and even aerobics classes. Bungalows come with kitchenettes and have full bathroom.

On the Sassotetto road lies the sparkingly modern **Hotel Eden** (☎ 0733 65 71 97; www.hotel.edensarnano.com; Via DeGasperi 26; r from €75; ☎ ☎ ☎) serving weary skiers, view seekers and spa aficionados. Although the long corridors feel a bit spooky, rooms are comfortably designed for those visiting the next-door spa, with soft sheets, plush bathrobes and a full cadre of toiletries.

The stone staircase leading to the cavernous interior of **Ristorante Il Vicolo** (☎ 0733 65 85 65; Vicolo Brunforte 191a; meals €23; ☎ Thu-Tue) is a hint as to the history found in the restaurant's dishes – hare, wild boar, grilled pork. The house antipasto '*della nonna*' is a mix of Marchigiani specialities and international flavours, such as chickpeas with curry.

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