

Southern Umbria



While Northern Umbria is easily categorised as a 'slow' destination, Southern Umbria is slower still. The landscape is at once languid and striking, mystical and unmanicured. Sunbeams twist through ancient glass windows, mothers in sensible shoes urge their grown sons to 'Eat! Eat!' and stray cats curl up in front of old barns, content to let the world be.

Like its northern counterpart, Southern Umbria closes shop for three to four hours in the middle of each day to take *pranzo* (lunch) and visitors will undoubtedly adapt quickly. One of Italy's most famous restaurants Vissani, on the bank of Lago di Corbara, is packed with visitors from around the world, but even its website is closed on Wednesdays.

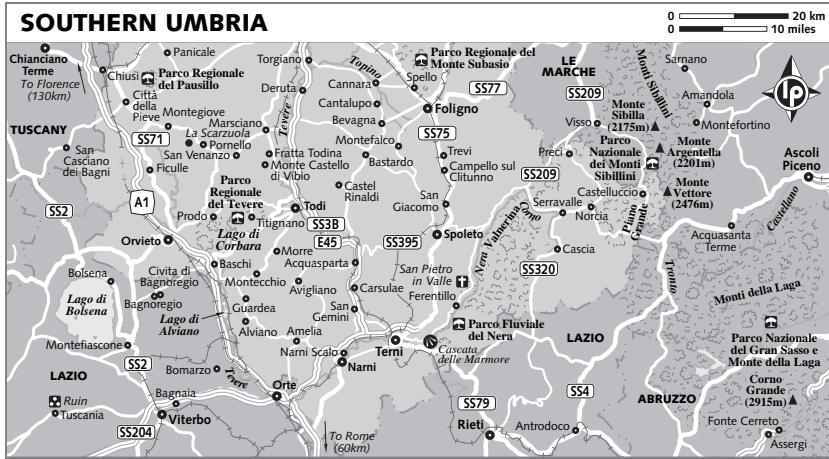
Towns here feel like home after just a few days. Todi has been described as one of the world's most perfect small towns. In Narni, you can visit lions, saints and castles, usually unencumbered by other tourists. Orvieto's magnificent cathedral, built by generations of artists, lures visitors like a gilded gem. Spoleto offers enough sights and activities to keep visitors occupied for a week, but all you'd probably want to do is wander up and down the ancient cobbled streets. You'll just want to give the entire town of Amelia one big hug.

Embrace your inner adrenaline junkie in Southern Umbria. Outdoor enthusiasts can indulge in just about any sport they desire. Fancy hang-gliding? Try Castelluccio, near the Piano Grande. Rafting? Several places along the Nera and Corno Rivers offer white-water rafting, kayaking and canoeing. You can rent bikes outside of Orvieto, rock climb in Ferentillo or go spelunking (caving) in the Valnerina.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Picnic in fields of blooming lentil flowers flanked by snow-capped peaks in the **Piano Grande** (p386)
- After walking through two thousand years of history in the **Museo Claudio Faina e Civico**, step into the Piazza Duomo at sunset to watch the sun reflect off the exterior mosaic of Orvieto's **cathedral** (p366)
- Take in a concert or performance at the **Spoleto Festival** (p381)
- Road trip through the **Valnerina** (p387) to raft, rock climb, dine in an ancient abbey, walk under a Roman-engineered waterfall or to see desiccated corpses
- In Narni, savour the view from the top of the fortress **La Rocca Alborno** (p391) or below at the inquisition prison **Narni Sotteranea** (p391) or on stage at the Narni Opera's **Open Air Theatre** (p394)





ORVIETO

pop 20,909

The entire town is placed precariously on a cliff made of the area's tufaceous stone, a craggy porous limestone that seems imminently ready to crumble under the weight of Orvieto's magnificent Gothic cathedral (or, at least under all the tourists who are now drawn 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.

History

Orvieto has held a lofty position as one of Umbria's most influential towns for almost 3000 years running. The Etruscan settlement started as far back as the 8th or 9th century BC, and thrived as a centre for bronze and ceramics. The ancient evidence is still on display at several of Orvieto's museums, including the Museo Claudio Faina e Civico and the Museo Archeologico Nazionale. The second zenith in Orvieto's history was the late Middle Ages when it reigned as a leader in the papal states, a position that led to the construction of the stunning cathedral and the stately civic and religious buildings that now create a leisurely way to stroll back in time.

Orientation

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

Those with cars should head to a free car park 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 will buy you five hours of free parking at the former Campo della Fiera and a ride on the *ascensore* (lift) into the city centre.

Information
BOOKSHOPS

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

CAR RENTAL

Avis (% 0763 39 00 30, 389 567 89 10; orvieto.pk1@avisa.uto.noleggio.it; Via I Maggio 57; h 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Located 100m from the train station.

EMERGENCY

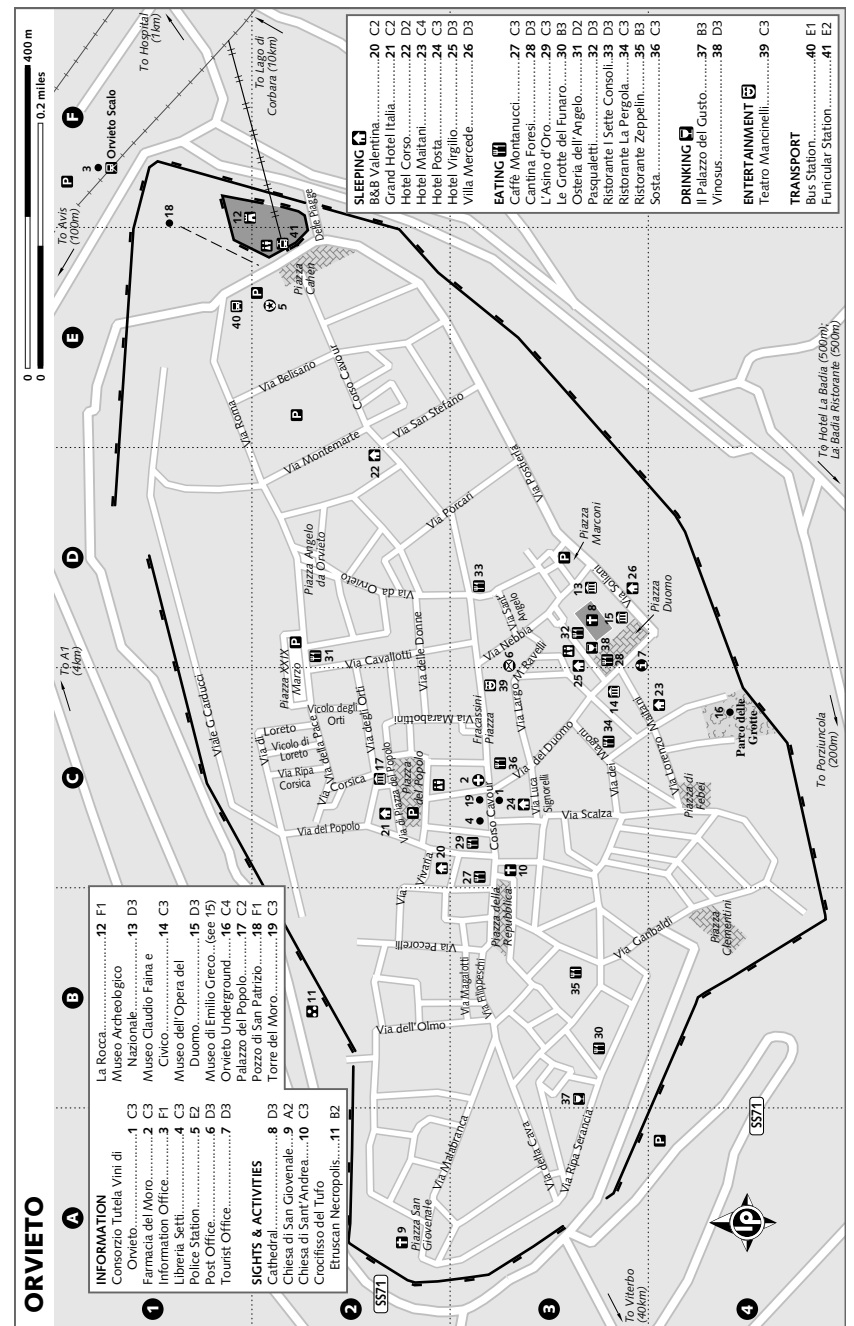
Police station (% 0763 3 92 11; Piazza Cahen)

INTERNET ACCESS

Caffè Montanucci (% 0763 34 12 61; Corso Cavour 21; j per 30min €3.10; h 6.30am-midnight Mon-Fri, until 1am Sat & Sun) Pick up a supply of chocolate or a *panini* (sandwich) at this café (see p370), while you surf the internet.

MEDICAL SERVICES

After-hours doctor (% 0763 30 18 84) Call here for the hospital at night and on the weekend.



SOUTHERN UMBRIA

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Farmacia del Moro (Pharmacy; ☎ 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 railway station.

POST

Post office (☎ 0763 39 83 1; Via Largo M Ravelli; 8.10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.10am-12.30pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

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

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)

TOURS

Leo Pretelli (Chauffeur, Tour Guide, Concierge; ☎ 335 155 89 49; leopretelli@mac.com; full-day tours of up to four people from €240) An English-speaking local expert who has an infectious *joie de vivre*. Leo is like your long-lost Umbrian uncle who knows every tiny off-the-beaten-path restaurant and viewpoint. Leo is a perfect choice for a designated driver at Umbria's 40-plus wineries.

Sights

For one-stop visitor shopping, 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 Etruscan 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, the attractions listed earlier, 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), often called the 'golden lily' of cathedrals. Originating 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 banding of the

main body of the church, reminiscent of other great churches you may already have seen in Tuscan cities such as Siena and Pisa, 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 so-called Miracle of Bolsena in 1263. A Bohemian 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 at the time, who declared the event a miracle and set the wheels in motion for the construction of the cathedral. He also declared the new feast day of Corpus Domini. The reliquary holding the blood-stained altar cloth now leads the Corpus Domini procession, held in June.

The building took 30 years to plan and three centuries to complete. It was probably started by Fra Beviniate 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 façade appears almost unrelated to the main body of the church and has greatly benefited from meticulous restoration, completed in 1995. The three huge doorways are separated by fluted columns and the gables are decorated with mosaics that, although mostly reproductions, seem to come to life in the light of the setting sun and in the evening under spotlights. The areas between the doorways feature 14th-century bas-reliefs of scriptural scenes by Maitani and his pupils, while the rose window is by Andrea Orcagna. The great bronze doors, the work of Emilio Greco, were added in the 1960s.

Reopened in late 1996 after years of painstaking restoration, 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** (admission €3; 10am-12.45pm & 2.30-7.15pm Apr-Sep, to 6.15pm Mar & Oct, to 5.15pm Mon-Sat, to 5.45pm public holidays Nov-Feb). Signorelli began work on the series in 1499, and Michelangelo is said to have taken inspiration from it when he began the Sistine Chapel fresco of the same subject 40 years later. Indeed, to some,

Michelangelo's masterpiece runs a close second to Signorelli's work. Not to be ignored in the chapel are ceiling frescoes by Fra Angelico. The chapel is closed during Mass.

The **Cappella del Corporale** (admission free; 7.30am-12.45pm & 2.30-7.15pm summer, varies 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. Mass is celebrated here daily at 9am (in Italian). Tickets for the Cappella di San Brizio are available from the tourist office; both capella are closed during Mass.

MUSEO CLAUDIO FAINA E CIVICO

An absolutely fantastic museum for ancient history is the **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. Much of the display here comes from the Etruscan Necropolis found on the outskirts of town. There are examples of Gorgons, an incredibly thorough collection of numismatics (coins, many with the likeness of famous Roman emperors) and bronze figures from the 2nd and 3rd centuries BC. Kids will enjoy following the questions (in Italian and English) for developing little historians to ponder along the way. There are guided tours at 11am and 4pm (3pm October to March).

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, 10-6pm 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). It doesn't have information in English, so visit the Museo Claudio Faina e Civico first to get your bearings.

Museo di Emilio Greco (☎ 0763 34 46 05; Palazzo Soliano, Piazza del Duomo; adult/concession €2.50/1.50; 10.30am-1pm & 2.30-6pm Apr-Sep, 10.30am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar) displays a collection

of modern pieces donated by the creator of the cathedral's bronze doors. You can get a combined ticket (adult/child €5.50/4) which will give you admission to the Pozzo di San Patrizio.

NORTH OF THE CATHEDRAL

Near the end of the main drag is 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 (or take an elevator part of the way) for a sweeping pigeon's-eye views of the entire city.

To see a bit of striated history, head to the 12th-century **Chiesa di Sant'Andrea** (Piazza della Repubblica; 8.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-7.30pm), where its curious decagonal bell tower is a good choice. As with many Italian churches, it was built over a Roman structure, which itself incorporated an earlier Etruscan building. You can see the ancient foundations in the crypt. 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 northwest end of town is the 11th-century **Chiesa di San Giovenale** (Piazza Giovenale; 8am-12.30pm & 3.30-6pm), a church constructed in the year 1000, its interior brightened by 13th- and 14th-century frescoes. Its Romanesque-Gothic art from the medieval Orvieto school is an astounding contrast.

ORVIETO UNDERGROUND

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; 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 caves were initially used as wells by the Etruscans, who needed water but with the Romans about couldn't risk leaving the hill. During the Middle Ages, locals experiencing a high volume of sieges used the caves for protected sustenance, this time they trapped pigeons in doves for food (pigeon is still found on Umbrian menus to this day – look for *palomba* or *piccione*). During WWII, the caves were turned into bomb shelters, but luckily they never had to be used, as the tuffaceous volcanic rock that makes up the hill crumbles easily. Tours leave from in front of the tourist office.

Hint: during summer, take the 12.15pm tour, as you'll enjoy the year-round temperature of around 15°C while most sights and shops are closed.

EAST OF PIAZZA DEL DUOMO

Standing watch at the town's eastern most tip is the 14th-century **La Rocca**, part of which is now a public garden. To the north of the fortress, the **Pozzo di San Patrizio** (St Patrick's Well; % 0763 34 37 68; Viale Sangallo; adult/concession €4.50/3.50; h 10am-6.45pm Apr-Sep, to 5.45pm Oct-Mar) is a testament to the hardy disposition of the townsfolk. More than 60m deep, it is lined by two staircases for water-bearing mules and a Latin inscription reading: 'What nature denied for defence, in this case water, was added by the work of man'. It was sunk in 1527 on the orders of Pope Clement VII. If you're planning on visiting the Museo di Emilio Greco, buy a combined ticket.

CROCIFFISSO DEL TUFO ETRUSCAN NECROPOLIS

Besides the Hypogea di Volumni outside of Perugia, the **Crocifisso del Tufo Etruscan Necropolis** (% 0763 34 36 11; Loc. Le Conce, SS71, Km 1.6; adult/concession €3/1.50; h 8am-7pm) is one of only two Etruscan necropolises that travellers can visit in Umbria. It dates back to the mid-6th century BC. Several series of burial chambers feature the etched names of their deceased residents. The manner in which the graves are laid out shows the preciseness of good ancient urban planning, albeit one whose residents couldn't quite appreciate it. Many of the furnishings from the Necropolis can be found at the Louvre, British Museum and various other museums, though some of the collection hasn't left: the Museo Claudio Faina e Civico still holds onto a good chunk.

Festivals & Events

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 bewildered 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.

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 p324 for details of the summer jazz festival.

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 on the weekend or if you're planning to visit during 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 few kilometres away.

Hotel Posta (% 0763 34 19 09; www.orvietohotels.it; Via Luca Signorelli 18; s with/without bathroom €37/31, d €56/43; breakfast €6) 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 at the time of writing that included new mattresses and some much needed TLC, so expect the quality to increase.

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 Duomo, at 76 rooms, there's space for a gaggle of pilgrims. The building dates back to the 1500's, 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.

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 two friendly dogs. All rooms

TOP FIVE GREAT-VALUE PLACES TO SLEEP IN UMBRIA

For the top bang for your buck, try these hotels:

Al Grappolo d'Oro (p332) With an outdoor pool, inclusive breakfast, in-room DSL connection and breathtaking vista, you'll feel like you should be paying double.

La Casa sul Lago (p359) With every amenity known to hostelkind – including laundry, free internet access, bicycle rentals, a bar, comforting home-cooked meals, etc, etc, etc – Mom will trust you're in good hands.

Residenza di Via Piccardi (p350) Start your day off with breakfast in the quiet garden in this sweet and romantic home-away-from-home.

Residenza d'Epoca Vecchio Molino (p378) Not inexpensive, but the weeping willows, sacred river and 600 years of history feel like they should be in a five-star resort.

Hotel dei Priori (p393) Perfectly central with an excellent restaurant and a mix of modern and historic rooms, most with a view, is reason enough to venture into the undiscovered hamlet of Narni.

have private bathroom, TV and hairdryer, and laundry service is available.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Corso (% /fax 0763 34 20 20; www.hotelcorso.net; Corso Cavour 343; s €50-64, d €80-87, tr €100-115; a i) 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 Virgilio (% 0763 34 18 82; www.hotelvirgilio.com; Piazza Duomo 5) This three-star hotel on the Piazza Duomo was undergoing a full renovation when we visited, so check the website for the most recent prices.

Hotel Maitani (% 0763 34 20 11; www.hotelmaitani.com; Via Lorenzo Maitani 5; s/d/ste €77/126/170, breakfast €10; p) 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.

TOP END

Grand Hotel Italia (% 076 334 32 75; www.grandhotelitalia.it; Via di Piazza del Popolo 13; s €90, d €150-200, all incl breakfast; p) The rooms reflect the elegance of the 19th-century building, many with superb views and a few with balconies. An elegant garden, fireplaces in the salon and a sumptuous breakfast buffet are just a few of the extras

at this city-centre hotel. Its private parking costs €8.

Hotel La Badia (% 0763 30 19 59; www.labadiahotel.it; Loc. La Badia 8; d/ste €221/270; p a s) Occupied 1200 years ago by Benedictine monks, this hotel – claimed to be the oldest in Italy – was once known as the Abbey of St Severo and Martirio. It's been a holiday retreat since the 15th century, with guests such as Pope Paul II, Borghese and Barberini. For the past century it's been under the ownership of a noble family who turned it into the hotel it is today. Twenty-one rooms and seven suites consist of modern comforts along with attractive antiques and furnishings, a swimming pool and tennis court. The hotel is closed early January to early March.

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.

Le Grotte del Funaro (% 0763 34 32 76; Via Ripa Serancia 41; mains around €10; h Tue-Sun) Eating here, you'll think you have died and gone to...well, a funerary cave. This restaurant was created out of a cavern and drips with atmosphere. There's an amazing view through the narrow windows, as well as antique agricultural objects and a piano bar.

Osteria dell'Angelo (% 0763 34 18 05; Piazza XXIX Marzo 8a; mains €22; h Tue-Sun) Judged by local food writers to be one of the best restaurants in Umbria, this is certainly an elegant place.

SLOW FOOD, SLOW CITY

In 1986 McDonald's was about to open a restaurant at the famed Spanish Steps in Rome. Carlo Petrini, a wine writer, was so appalled that he started a movement that has grown to include around 80,000 members on five continents. Called 'Slow Food' (see p21), about half of the members are based in Italy, but convivia are opening around the world at a rapid pace as people are adopting the Italian and, more so than any other province, Umbrian way of cooking and eating.

From the Slow Food Movement grew the Slow City Movement. Its members are concerned that globalisation is wiping out differences in traditions and culture and replacing them with a watered-down homogeneity.

To become a Slow City (or *Città Lenta* as they're known in Italy, where most of the Slow Cities are located), towns have to pass a rigid set of standards, including having a visible and distinct culture. The towns must follow principles such as relying heavily on autochthonous (from within) resources instead of mass-produced food and culture, cutting down on air and noise pollution, and relying more and more on sustainable development, like organic farming and public transport. Umbria boasts six Slow Cities: Trevi (p346), Todi (p373), San Gemini, Orvieto (p364), Città di Castello (p352) and Castiglione del Lago (p357).

As you travel through these towns, you will never hear a car alarm, you can be assured you'll find plenty of public space and there will never, ever be a McDonald's.

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.

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. Try the *cinghiale* (wild boar).

○ **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 trattorie. And for good reason. The menu changes daily, but a dedicated chef cooks inventive dishes such as a smoked 'streaky' bacon with radicchio appetizer (€9) and golden raisins 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.

La Badia Ristorante (☎ 0763 30 19 59; Loc. La Badia 8; meals €45; 📅 Thu-Tue) The restaurant at La Badia is as refined as its hotel (p369). The

chef's speciality is suckling pig and tagliolini pasta with truffles. If you enjoy the Orvieto Classico here, tell the owner, Count Fiumi, as it comes from his vineyards. Even if you don't stay or eat here, you can still see it; when you're in the Orvieto Underground, look for the 8th-century abbey in the fields below.

○ **Ristorante I Sette Consoli** (☎ /fax 0763 34 39 11; www.isetteconsoli.it; Piazza Sant'Angelo 1/a; meals €45; 📅 Thu-Tue) Foodies have been known to flock here from Rome or Milan just for lunch, as it is quickly gaining fame as one of Umbria's top restaurants. With dishes like pan-fried pigeon with caramelised grapes or tagliolini pasta with zucchini blossoms and baby squid, it's no wonder it's considered a leader in nouvelle cuisine. In summer, dine under the gauzy tent out in the private garden. Reservations highly recommended for dinner.

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) A family-run *enoteca* (wine

bar) 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

Il Palazzo del Gusto (☎ 0763 39 35 29; www.orvietowine.info; Via Ripa Serancia 1 16; wine-tastings €5-11; 📅 11am-1pm & 3-5pm Mon-Fri 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 its many weekend events are open to the public.

Vinosus (☎ 0763 34 19 07; Piazza Duomo 15; tapas €6-10; 📅 Tue-Sun) In photo-op range of the cathedral's northwest wall is this wine bar and eatery. The smattering of cheese plates makes this an elegant spot for a wine and cheese break. It is open until the wee hours for wine-tasting.

LE STRADE DEL VINO

The Etruscans produced wine in the district, the Romans continued the tradition and today several regions around Umbria embrace their viticulture heritage.

However, although Umbria is a major wine-growing region, it is just starting to adopt the concept of wine-tasting. Most visitors have simply tasted their wines one bottle or glass at a time with lunch and dinner, or in town at an *enoteca* (wine bar) or a shop that offers *degustazione* (tasting). But Umbria is starting to offer the driving wine routes many seasoned wine lovers would recognise.

If you do want to venture out to the countryside, pick up a brochure of one of these guided itineraries at any nearby tourist office. Umbria is divided into four wine routes known as the *strada dei vini* (wine trails). Each route is based not only on wine, but the history, culture, art, tradition and archaeology of a region. The routes are quite lengthy and seem to cover at least 80% of Umbrian secondary roads, but you can do just a section of the route. Check the website www.umbriadoc.com (in Italian) for more information on the routes and links to the wineries themselves.

La Strada dei Vini del Cantico The most sprawling route, it criss-crosses a triangle between Perugia, Todi and Spello, stopping in Torgiano, Assisi and Marsciano.

La Strada dei Vini Etrusco Romana Connects Orvieto with Amelia and many points in between.

La Strada del Sagrantino The area surrounding Bevagna and Montefalco, the fastest-growing wine area in the region.

La Strada del Vino Colli del Trasimeno Starts at Corciano near Perugia and circles through the *colli* (hills) around the lake.

Entertainment

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 Winter but offers ballet, concerts and tours all year in a stunning 19th-century theatre lined with elegant boxed seats and frescoes.

Shopping

Despite being a tourist town, Orvieto still has plenty of shops selling decent ceramics, lace, and delicious sample packs of local wines, sausage, olive oil, cheeses and *funghi* (mushroom) products. Via Garibaldi is a pedestrian shopping street with as many clothiers as ceramicists.

Getting There & Away

Orvieto is on the main Rome to Florence train 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), and Perugia (€6.10 to €6.80, 1¼ hours, at least every other hour). Buses depart from the bus station on Piazza Cahen, stopping at the train station. **Bargagli** (☎ 057778 6223) 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 Lake Trasimeno.

DETOUR: LA SCARZUOLA

Fans of architecture, theatre, philosophy, religion, history, horticulture or conspiracy theory should head out to the country to **La Scarzuola** (☎ 0763 83 74 63; <http://grandigiardini.it/2005/eng/giardini/umbria/scarzuola.htm>; Montegabbione; admission €10; 1/2 year-round). Famous Milanese architect Tommaso Buzzi (1900–81) bought this property, the site of a 1218 Franciscan monastery, in 1956. Francis was said to have planted a bush here that developed into a spring, growing the *la scarza* (marsh plants) he and his followers used to build themselves shelter. Buzzi added onto the monastery – itself a treasure-trove of relics – in a labyrinthine stone structure he called ‘The Ideal City’. It symbolises the dance between the sacred and the profane, surrealism and simplicity, life without death. Ancient Greek architecture, monsters and a mysterious Egyptian third eye (his nephew, who runs La Scarzuola now, confirms Buzzi was a Mason) intertwine into the most curious of edifices. Starting in 2006, La Scarzuola will hold a series of evening concerts open to the public (check the website). To visit during the day, call ahead, as it requires at least 10 visitors a day to open.

To arrive, head to the far central western part of Umbria, between Orvieto and Città della Pieve. On the road from Pornello to Montegiove, keep your eyes out for a tiny sign on the left for La Scarzuola. Head down a dirt road that’s much longer than you’d expect and you’ll see the expansive gates.

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 Repubblica.

LAGO DI CORBARA

Running along the SS448 road that connects Orvieto and Todi is a meandering lake with several excellent restaurants and a fantastic *agriturismo* (farm-stay accommodation).

Scacco Matto Bar/Ristorante Camping/Hotel Lamincia (☎ 0744 95 01 63; www.scaccomatto.net; SS448, Lago di Corbara; camping per person €5–5.50, per tent €5–5.50, per car €3; hotels €44–49, d €67–75; 1/2 camp sites Mar–Oct; p a) A full-service stop closer to Orvieto than Todi on the SS448 just alongside the lake, hotel rooms, camp sites, a restaurant (meals €28; open Thursday to Tuesday) and a bar. The one-star camp site has a few dozen basic spots (no hot showers), but it’s practically on the lake.

Agriturismo Castello Titignano (☎ 0763 30 80 00; www.titignano.it; Loc. Titignano di Orvieto; r per person incl

breakfast €45, per person half-/full board €60/75; p s) Titignano has been turned into somewhat of a holiday complex for guests looking for a bit of history, relaxation and gastronomic adventure. The castle was built in the astonishingly old date (even for Umbrian standards) of 937 AD. As you see it now, the attached village was built as its court in the 16th and 17th centuries. In it, you’ll find a shop for buying its wine and olive oil. The castle’s later addition, the palace is now used for the stunning restaurant (meals €35), with a stone balcony romantically overlooking Lago di Corbara

Trippini (☎ 0744 95 03 16; www.trippini.net; Civitella del Lago; meals €30; 1/2 Tue–Sun) Although Vissani and Trippini went to school together, Trippini opened a simple restaurant while Vissani opened an empire. Adolfo Trippini’s restaurant is within the town centre, where one could describe it in contrast as elegant but not cloyingly so, and creative without the overkill. He does beautiful things to shrimp and seafood, and even teaches cookery courses (call the number listed above for information).

Vissani (☎ 0744 95 02 06; www.vissani.net; meals €145; 1/2 closed Mon lunch, Wed all day, Thu lunch, Sun dinner, holidays in late Jul, late Aug & Christmas) The hype surrounding Gianfranco Vissani’s eponymous restaurant has hit astronomical levels of name recognition, even for Italian standards. While the rest of Italy and the world flock to Umbria just to eat at the famed restaurateur’s lake-

side abode (located down a locked private drive), and Gambero Rosso (the source of all food knowledge in Italy) has rated Vissani as Italy’s top restaurant – Umbrians are not yet convinced.

Sit near the kitchen, as you can watch the chefs’ artistry – up to 17 at a time, as apprentices from all over the world pay for the privilege of cooking at Vissani’s – through the gilded framed windows. Dishes change seasonally, but the tuxedoed service remains the same. After dinner, guests are invited to move to the dessert room, where an after-dinner drink apothecary serves espresso and tea while diners sup gorgeously designed sweets.

TODI

pop 17,041

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.

History

Todi has been thriving for millennia. Three thousand years ago, the Umbri tribe developed the area, sharing it for a spell with the Etruscans. Rome conquered Todi around the 2nd century BC. In Roman days, Todi was known as Tuder and was the home to temples of Jupiter and Minerva and Roman baths. The Dark Ages weren’t terribly kind to Todi, but in 1213 the city cemented its reputation as an area powerhouse.

Information**EMERGENCY**

Police station (☎ 075 895 62 43; Piazza Jacopone)

BUS TICKETS

Rosso Pomodoro (Piazza Jacopone 7; 1/2 7.30am–8pm Mon–Sat, 10am–8pm Sun) Also sells decent slices of pizza for under €2.

ONE WEEK IN THE UMBRIAN COUNTRYSIDE

○ **Todi Castle** (☎ 0744 95 20 04; www.todicastle.com; Vocabolo Capecchio, Morre; weekly villa/castle for up to 10 people from €1500/4500; ps) Here’s your chance to live in an honest-to-goodness castle for a week, or an equally perfect (and much more affordable) private villa, set not far from Lago di Corbara. The best part about staying here is the incredible attention to detail the staff provides – help setting up visiting itineraries, freshly squeezed orange juice and cakes for breakfast, even a fabulous driver for hire. See p316

INTERNET ACCESS

Biblioteca Comunale Lorenzo Leonj (☎ 075 895 67 10; 1/2 8.30am–2pm Mon–Fri, 3–6pm Tue & Thu) Two free high-speed internet terminals. Requires passport for first-time registration.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Todi (www.todi.net)

Todi Comune (www.comune.todi.pg.it) The official governmental tourist site.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hospital (☎ 075 8 85 81; Via Giacomo Matteotti)

POST

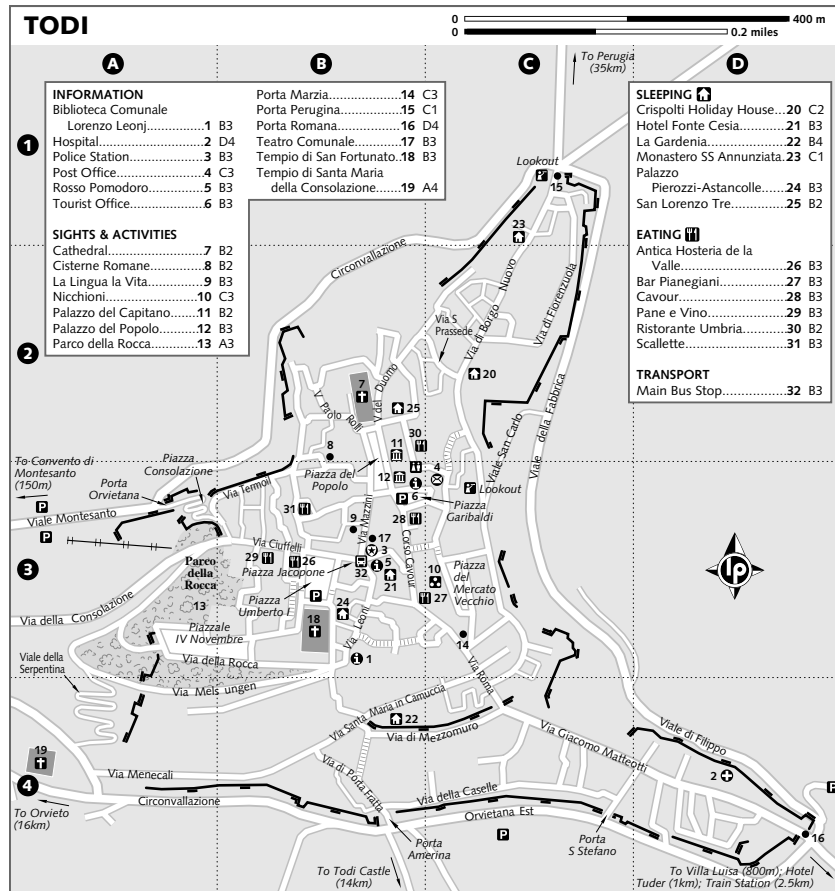
Post office (☎ 075 894 24 26; Piazza Garibaldi; 1/2 8am–6.30pm Mon–Fri, 8am–12.30pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 075 894 54 18; Piazza del Popolo 37; 1/2 9.30am–1pm & 3.30–6.30pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1.30pm Sun & holidays Mar–Oct, 9.30am–1pm & 3–6pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun & holidays Nov–Mar)

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. Todi’s town centre, the Piazza del Popolo, is one of the most renowned squares in all of Italy. Its lugubrious medieval cathedral and buildings cradle the interior piazza, enclosed with four gates during the medieval years but now filled with bustling shops, cappuccino-sipping residents and travellers gazing in wonderment at living history. The Lombard-style 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 Tue-Sun Mar-Oct, 10.30am-1pm & 2.30-5pm Tue-Sun Nov-Feb), which features an elegant triple window and houses the city's recently restored *pinacoteca* (picture gallery) and an expansive archaeological museum housing exhibits on archaeology, numismatics (coins), weaving and ceramics, in addition to the impressive frescoed rooms of the *pinacoteca*. Artwork includes paintings by Giovanni di Pietro (Lo Spagna) and a copy of an Etruscan statue of the Roman god Mars (the original bronze is at the Vatican).

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, open 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 northwest end of the square, has a magnificent rose window and intricately decorated doorway. However, there are two much more impressive churches which no visit to Todi should go without. The lofty **Tempio di San Fortunato** (Piazza Umberto I; admission free; 9am-1pm & 3-7pm

Wed-Mon Mar-Oct, 10am-1pm & 2.30-5pm Wed-Mon Nov-Mar), contains frescoes by Masolino da Panicale and the tomb of Beato Jacopone. Inside, make it a point to climb the **Campanile di San Fortunato** (adult/concession €1.50/1; 10am-1pm & 3-6.30pm Mar-Oct, 10.30am-1pm & 2.30-5pm Nov-Mar, closed Mon), where you can gaze across the hills and castles surrounding Todi. Just across from the temple you'll find the **Teatro Comunale**, the municipal theatre inaugurated with a Verdi opera in 1876, that is still used today (check with the tourist office for a schedule).

The postcard home you've just written from the Piazza del Popolo (see above)? Most likely it's of Todi's famed church, the early Renaissance masterpiece **Chiesa di Santa Maria della Consolazione** (no phone; Via della Consolazione at Via della Circonvallazione; 9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mar-Oct, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-5pm Nov-Mar, Wed-Mon), considered one of the top architectural masterpieces of the 16th century, is just outside the city walls. Possibly designed by Donato Bramante in 1508 but not completed until 99 years later, the construction was a veritable modern feat in Renaissance architecture. Inside, fans can admire its geometrically perfect Greek cross design. Outside, its soaring cupola-topped dome is visible from 10km away.

The **Parco della Rocca** is at the highest point in Todi and contains the ruins of the old *rocca* (fort). From here you can see part of the old Roman wall, called the *Nicchioni*. These mysterious 'little niches' are a bit of a misnomer, as the loggia-like arches embedded in the Roman walls are up to 7m high. No-one quite knows their origin or use, but historians have hazarded a few guesses – possibly recesses used for the civic forum, or an engineering device used to help hold up the above road.

Todi features a staggering amount of old city walls, some of them medieval, some Roman and some pre-Roman. The gates are a magnificent example of ancient architecture, especially the **Porta Romana** (Roman Gate), **Porta Perugina** (Perugia Gate) and **Porta Marzia** (Gate of Mars).

Just outside the main town walls you can see the **Convento di Montesanto**, now a working convent but built as a fortress in 1325 to guard against Orvieto.

Courses

Sign up for some courses at **La Lingua La Vita** (☎ 075 894 83 64; www.lalingualavita.com; Via Mazzini 18).

COMBINED TICKET

If you'll be spending a day or two in Todi, it's a good idea to buy a **biglietto cumulativo** (adult/concession/child €6/5/4), which will allow you to gain entry into the Museo Pinacoteca, Cisterne Romane and the Tempio di San Fortunato. The ticket can be purchased at any of the museums or at the tourist office.

While many students and younger folk head to Perugia to learn and party, the more mature student (meaning 25 plus) might enjoy studying Italian in Todi. You can sign up for group or individual lessons, but both options involve participation in a handful of activities including cooking classes, Italian films and field trips in and around Todi. Costs start at €400 per week for accommodation and classes.

Festivals & Events

The **Todi Festival** (www.todifestival.it), held for 10 days each July/August, is a mixture of classical and jazz concerts, theatre, ballet and cinema.

Sleeping

Todi has only six hotels (all but one are three-star or higher) so you might need to be a bit creative in your sleeping options.

BUDGET

Monastero SS Annunziata (☎ 075 894 22 68; www.monastero.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, nuns from the Mary's Servant of Repair order.

MIDRANGE

Villa Luisa (☎ 075 894 85 71; www.villaluisa.it; Via Cortesi 147; s €45-60, d €70-135, incl breakfast; p a s) Once a grand villa, the statuesque hotel is still set in parklike grounds worthy of a visit even if you're not staying here. The pool and terrace mean you can spend hours enjoying the view, and the full-service staff will help arrange baby-sitting, laundry or sightseeing itineraries. It's just outside the city walls, along the

bus line coming in from the train station, with an on-site restaurant.

Crispolti Holiday House (☎ 075 894 48 27; www.crispolitholidayhouse.com; Via S Prassede 36; s €50, d €80-90, tr €90-120, q €120-160, incl breakfast) 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.

San Lorenzo Tre (☎ 075 894 45 55; www.sanlorenzo3.it; Via San Lorenzo 3; s/d incl breakfast with bathroom €73/110, s/d without bathroom €68/78; 1 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 an honest representation as you'll find anywhere in Umbria. Filling, home-cooked breakfasts, a library dating back a century and a stunning rooftop view of the surrounding valley add to the romance.

Hotel Tuder (☎ 075 894 21 84; www.hotelituder.com; Via Maesta dei Lombardi 13; s €50-60, d €100-125, incl breakfast; p a) This three-star hotel is about 1km outside the city centre on the bus route from the train station. The 40 rooms are divided into 'standard' and 'comfort', and you'll get posher furniture, better showers, more space and higher prices in the comfort category. All rooms come with TV and direct-dial phones.

Palazzo Pierozzi-Astancolle (☎ 320 273 1035; Piazza Umberto 1; www.palatodi.it; 2-8 guests per day €90-200, per week €450-1000) Years of restoration went into creating this masterpiece of 16th-century Italian history and 21st-century Scandinavian minimalist design. The English-speaking Danish/Italian couple who oversee the apartments are charming and erudite hosts, armed with a wealth of knowledge of the area and Italy. Five apartments can be rented separately or together, but each is outfitted with a modern kitchen and various exquisite touches: balconies, fireplaces, antique tapestries, frescoes, plush living rooms and washing machines.

La Gardenia (☎ 347 611 52 20; www.lagardeniatodi.com; Via Santa Maria in Camuccia 45; up to 5 guests per week €450-550) A fruit basket greets you at your new home in Todi. This central apartment has everything to make you feel like Todi is home, including two double beds, one single bed, a washing machine, dining room, TV, stereo and iron. The view of Santa Maria delle Consolazioni,

the hills and the campanile will bring anyone to tears. Trade English and Italian lessons with your sweetheart of a host, Carlo.

Hotel Fonte Cesia (☎ 075 894 37 37; www.fontecesia.it; Via Leoni 3; s €112-116, d €140-164, ste €192-208, incl breakfast; p a i) The top hotel in Todi, the exquisitely decorated rooms have all the amenities: satellite TV, hairdryer, minibar etc. You can upgrade to a junior suite, some of which have private balconies and claw-foot bathtubs.

Eating

Cavour (☎ 075 894 37 30; Corso Cavour 21; pizzas from €4.50; 1 until 2am Thu-Tue) A casual place populated with locals, this is where to come to get a light meal or pizza. Serves several different traditional soups (€4 to €5), a nice addition on a rainy day.

Antica Hosteria de la Valle (☎ 075 894 48 48; Via Ciuffelli 17/19/21; meals €23; 1 Tue-Sun) Most of the time you will be dining here with the locals. The pasta is homemade and delicious, but the traditional *farro* (spelt) soup (€7) should not be missed.

Scalette (☎ 075 894 44 22; Via delle Scalette 1; meals €24; 1 Tue-Sun) Wander off the main road down this ancient stairway for a reasonably priced feast in a hobbit-like abode. This ancient farmhouse feels like it's practically in Middle Earth and, with its stone walls, roasted meat dishes and decadent desserts, is a precious spot for a mini-medieval banquet.

Pane e Vino (☎ 075 894 54 48; Via Ciuffelli 33; meals €26; 1 Tue-Thu) Now you're definitely in Italy. Dine on dishes such as risotto with yellow pumpkin (€8) or just nibble on the antipasto plate (€11) while tasting from the extensive wine list that includes wines from all over Italy. Relax on the outdoor patio or at candlelit tables under the curved brick ceiling in this narrow, atmospheric *enoteca*.

Ristorante Umbria (☎ 075 894 27 37; Via Santa Bonaventura 13; meals €29; 1 Thu-Tue) What's more enjoyable: the food or the outdoor patio with a view back in time? Look in the display case to salivate over which goodies you'd like for your meal, perhaps some prosciutto or *salumi* (cured pork)? Try the *palombaccio* (€13), a type of pigeon, a risotto dish or its speciality (truffles, of course).

Bar Pianegiani (☎ 075 894 23 76; Corso Cavour 40; 1 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

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

MONTE CASTELLO DI VIBIO

pop 1657

The real draw in this tiny speck of a town about 20km from Todi is its even tinier speck of a theatre. Throw in sleeping (or dining) in a castle, gorgeous views and a working *agriturismo* and you're set for one or two days.

Monte Castello di Vibio feels like it's in the middle of nowhere, but it's just a few kilometres from the SS3B-E45 that links Perugia and Terni (just north of Todi). Tourist information can be found at the Associazione Culturale (Via Roma 1), just behind the theatre. The post office next door sells stamps with the image of the theatre.

In keeping with the proportions of the tiny town, **Teatro della Concordia** (Teatro Piccolo; ☎ 075 878 07 37, 328 918 88 92; www.teatropiccolo.it; admission free but donations accepted; 1 10am-12.30pm & 3.30-7.30pm Apr-Aug, 10am-12pm & 3-6pm Sat, Sun & holidays, closed Sat morning Nov-Feb) is billed as the smallest theatre in the world. It seats 99 people, 32 on the main floor and 67 in the stalls. The theatre was built in 1808, when nine Monte Castello di Vibio families decided that their town needed a theatre. In 1850 residents added frescoes to the ceiling and stalls. Along with red velvet seats, the theatre gained a sophisticated look to rival any larger, grander theatre. Gina Lol-

labrigida acted in her very first play here. In 1951 the theatre was almost shut down for lack of revenue, but the community voted to pay extra taxes to keep the theatre going. In 1993 the theatre teamed up with the theatre in Parma – one of the world's largest – to put on a series of events. Performances are staged for much of the year, especially on Saturday nights. The theatre is also open by appointment and an English audio guide is available. It also does fantastic destination weddings.

A brilliant marketing campaign (and honestly, a really fun way to spend a day and a half) is to take advantage of the **Weekend in Umbria** (☎ 075 89 42 161; weekend@teatropiccolo.it) package (for one/two people €90/150). Available only on Saturday night, you arrive in Monte Castello di Vibio and are provided with accommodation at Relais Il Castello or one of the local *agriturismi*, as well as dinner, a show at the theatre and breakfast on Sunday morning. You can even arrange to be picked up at the closest train station, in Fossato di Vico.

○ **Agriturismo/Ristorante Fattoria di Vibio** (☎ 075 874 96 07; www.fattoriadivbio.com; Località Buchella 9, Doglio; per day €80-105, per week €455-735, 3-bdrm cottages per week €800-1900; p a s) The view from the spa's pool – out a plate glass window, overlooking an enormous expanse of perfectly rolling, stone villa-capped hills – is reason enough to make the haul here. In the middle of nowhere but with absolutely every amenity a world-class *agriturismo* might need, the *fattoria* offers enough activities to keep guests busy for a week of dining, getting massaged, wine-tasting, horseback riding...or, just relaxing and staring at the view.

Relais Il Castello (☎ 075 878 06 60; www.relaisilcastello.com; Piazza Marconi 5, Monte Castello di Vibio; B&B per person €45-57, half-board per person €57-77, full board per person €68-87; p a s) A suit of armour greets visitors at the door in this honest-to-goodness castle. While the former Hotel Il Castello may have taken the relais concept a tad far (a relais usually refers to a very high-end establishment), the Il Castello has nevertheless upgraded significantly since undergoing renovation in 2006. Rooms that felt historical (but not necessarily in a good way) now feature slightly more comfortable furnishings and several upper-end amenities such as room service, private balconies and satellite TV. Fans of King Arthur will want to dine in the downstairs restaurant, every inch covered in medieval stone walls with

an enormous wrought-iron chandelier. The menu is huge for Umbrian standards and features an array of risotto, soup and pasta dishes (meals €27).

Take the SS3–E45 from Todi to Perugia. Exit at the Monte Vibio sign and continue for about 4km (at the roundabout that doesn't tell you where to turn, veer left). It's on the S397 between Todi and Marsciano.

CAMPELLO SUL CLITUNNO

pop 2407

If you're heading between Foligno and Spoleto, a pleasant place for a stroll is the Campello sul Clitunno, where you'll find the **Fonti del Clitunno** (☎ 0743 52 11 41; Loc. Pissignano; admission €2; 10am–12.30pm & 2.30–5.30pm winter, 9am–8pm summer), the source for the Clitunno river. This Zen-like garden proffers crystal clear springs, a tranquil lake and exquisitely lush foliage. In ancient times, it was a popular site for religious pilgrimages. Caligula was known to come here to consult the god of the Clitunno River and it was also used for theatre performances, feasts and gladiator matches. While you can't witness gladiator matches, you can stroll the lovely grounds.

In the same area is the **Tempio del Clitunno** (☎ 0743 27 50 85; Via Flaminia, Km 139; 10am–8pm Apr–Oct, 8am–6pm Nov–Mar). This Paleo-Christian building was first thought to be an ancient Roman ruin, but artefacts have shown that it was built sometime between the 5th and 8th centuries AD. It has many of the classic Roman features, such as Corinthian columns and neo-Augustan inscriptions (in big block lettering).

Residenza d'Epoca Vecchio Molino (☎ 0743 52 11 22; www.vecchio-molino.it; Via del Tempio 34, Loc. Pissignano, Campello sul Clitunno; s/d/ste incl breakfast 73/115/135; 10am–8pm Apr–Oct; P) We have a reader's letter to thank for alerting us to this sacredly soothing historical residence, and Umbrians backed up the recommendation wholeheartedly. The former 15th-century mill sits on the languid banks of the Clitunno River, where, according to local myths, the Italian people were born. Every centimetre of the hotel is covered in medieval history, from the vaulted oak-beamed ceilings to the stone bridge over the river.

SPOLETO

pop 38,717

Spoleto was one of those sleepy Umbrian hill towns until, in 1957, Italian-American composer Gian Carlo Menotti changed

everything. For a while, Spoleto saw its tourist season peak for only 10 days from the end of June to the beginning of July during its immensely popular Spoleto Festival (p381). During the festival this quiet town takes centre stage for an international parade of drama, music, opera and dance.

Now so many people have discovered the town via the festival that it's become a popular destination for most of the year (although as in the rest of Umbria, you'll have the town mostly to yourself in winter). Even outside the festival season, Spoleto has enough museums, Roman ruins, wanderable streets and vistas to keep you busy for a day or two.

If you plan to visit during the Spoleto Festival, book accommodation and the most popular performances at least two or three months in advance. Or, stay in one of the adjacent towns along the train route (Trevi, Spello, Assisi or Perugia are good choices) and ride in for performances.

History

Umbria was first divided in half between the Etruscans and Umbrians. After Rome fell, it was divided again: Byzantines on the east of the Tiber River, Lombards to the west. Spoleto, which was just to the west of the Tiber, became the capital of the Lombardy duchy and in 890 AD, the title of Holy Roman Emperor went to a duke from Spoleto. Although much of its pre-Lombard artwork has been lost, you'll see many of the signature religious buildings and hermitages in the area.

The surrounding Umbra Valley is a masterpiece of well over 2000 years of agricultural practice. From the original Umbrian tribes to the Romans and farmers in the medieval period, the Vale di Spoleto, as it was known then, has been drained using an intricate system of hydraulics and agricultural techniques.

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 city 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 Duomo you'll find the bulk of the city's monuments and some fine shops.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Il Libro (☎ 0743 46 678; Corso Mazzini 63) A wide selection of maps, cookbooks, guidebooks and novels in English.

EMERGENCY

Police (Polizia Municipale; ☎ 0743 23 241; 191 Via la Marconi)

INTERNET ACCESS

A Tutta Birra (☎ 348 241 18 40; Via di Fontesecca 7; 11 noon–11pm Wed–Mon)
Pizzeria Zeppelin (p382; per hr €3)

MEDICAL SERVICES

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

POST

Post office (☎ 0743 20 15 20; Piazza della Libertà 12; 11 8am–6.30pm Mon–Fri, 8am–12.30pm Sat) The entrance is off Viale Giacomo Matteotti.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Con Spoleto (☎ 0743 22 07 73; www.conspoleto.com; Piazza della Libertà 7) A privately owned service that can book accommodation.

Tourist office (☎ 0743 23 89 20/1; info@iat.spoleto.pg.it; Piazza della Libertà 7; 11 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; 11 8.30am–7.30pm), located on the western edge of Piazza della Libertà. Since 1985, this former Benedictine monastery and prison has been used as a museum. It holds a well-displayed collection of Roman and Etruscan bits and bobs from the area, including two marble statues of Augustus and possibly Caesar. 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) and is an understandably popular venue during the Spoleto Festival.

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 marked the grandiose entrance to the Roman forum. The

excavated **Casa Romana** (Roman House; ☎ /fax 0743 23 42 50; Via di Visiale; adult/child €2.50/2; 11 10am–6pm daily) 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, and still has vestiges of mosaics and paintings. The city boasts an **Anfiteatro Romano** (Roman Amphitheatre), one of the country's largest. Unfortunately it is within military barracks and closed to the public. Wander along Via dell'Anfiteatro, off Piazza Garibaldi, in search of a glimpse.

An hour-long stroll or an all-day hike is a lovely way to while away an afternoon along the Via del Ponte to the **Ponte delle Torri**, erected in the 14th century on the foundations of a Roman aqueduct. The bridge is 80m high and 230m across, built in an imposing set of 10 arches. Cross the bridge and follow the lower path, **Strada di Monteluco**, to reach the **Chiesa di San Pietro** (☎ 0743 4 48 82; Loc. San Pietro; admission free; 11 9.30am–11am & 3.30–6.30pm). The 13th-century façade, the main attraction of the church, is liberally bedecked with sculpted animals.

ROCCA ALBORNOZIANA

The **Rocca Albornoziana** (☎ /fax 0743 22 30 55; Piazza Campello; single ticket €6, combined ticket to Rocca & museum €7.50; 11 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), an example of a Cardinal Albornoz–built fortress from the mid-14th century. Cardinal Albornoz led Pope Innocent VI's forces in the fight to take back control of Umbria. He fostered the building of many of the *rocche* (fortresses) in the area, including the one still standing in Narni (p391), the ruins of one in Orvieto (p368), and one in Perugia (p321) that was destroyed in an uprising against the Pope just three years after it was built. The monstrosity dominates the city. For hundreds of years, until as recently as 1982, Spoleto's *rocca* was used as a high-security prison housing such notables as Pope John Paul II's attempted assassin, Ali Agca. It now hosts open-air concerts (most notably during the Spoleto Festival) and a museum displaying local history.

In 2007, the Rocca became home to the **National Museum of the Dukedom of Spoleto** (☎ /fax 0743 22 30 55; Piazza Campello; single ticket €6, combined ticket to Rocca & museum €7.50; 11 10am–7pm Thu–Sun) which houses historical information as well as artwork from Spoleto's *pinacoteca*, which will remain closed for several years.

Ostello Villa Redenta (☎ 0743 22 49 36; www.villaredenta.com; Via di Villa Redenta 1; dm/d incl breakfast €18-24/42-55; p) Pope Leone the Twelfth 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 from 8am to 1pm and 3.30pm to 8pm.

Hotel Il Panciolle (☎ /fax 0743 4 56 77; Via del Duomo 4; s €30-50, d €35-65) 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.

Istituto Bambino Gesù (☎ 0743 402 32; Via Sant'Angelo 4 at Via Monterone; s €18-36, d €36-70, all incl breakfast) 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 postage 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 San Carlo Borromeo (☎ 0743 22 53 20; www.geocities.com/sancarloborromeo; Via San Carlo; s €25-5, d €30-70, tr €50-100, all incl breakfast; p a i) 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 €40-65, d €55-100, tr €70-115, all incl breakfast; i) Just off Piazza della Libertà, the Aurora is central and offers fabulous value. Opened in 1958 to coincide with the Spoleto Festival, the Aurora has been hosting satisfied artists and performers ever since. 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 €40-75, d €52-135, tr €99-160, all incl breakfast; p a i) 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. Internet access (per hour €6) is also available. The wood-beamed attic suite is worth the splurge. Parking costs €10.

TOP END

Palazzo Leti (☎ 0743 22 49 30; www.palazzoleti.com; Via degli Eremiti 10; s €150, d €200, ste €260-320, incl breakfast; p a) In the southeast part of town facing the hills, this former noble palace exudes romance and charm down to the last detail, from the delicate breakfast china to the historical oak and wrought-iron furnishings. With the view and perfect silence, you'll feel like you're staying in the country, but you're a three-minute walk from the centre of Spoleto. Parking will set you back €13 the first night, and €7 subsequent nights.

Hotel San Luca (☎ 0743 22 33 99; www.hotelsanluca.com; Via Interna delle Mura 21; s €95-170, d €110-240, ste €210-300, incl breakfast; p a) Practically perfect hospitality is one of the main draws of the Zuccari family's (p344) second hotel. With enough services to rival any of the five-stars in Umbria (sound-proofed rooms, babysitting, laundry service), San Luca has an atmosphere that is rather relaxed, enough to cater to bicyclists and walking tours. Pastel tones and antique furnishings inside complement the 17th-century manicured outdoor garden.

Eating

Spoleto is one of Umbria's main centres for the *tartufo nero* (black truffle), which you'll often find shaved over pasta. On Via dell'Arco Druso is a gathering of five shops selling meat, bread, sauces and wine, perfect to pick up supplies for a picnic.

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

Osteria dell'Enoteca (☎ 0743 22 04 84; Via A Saffi 7; tourist menu €15; h Wed-Mon) Extremely fit waiters carry dishes up and down a curving iron staircase into this 12th-century tavern. Diners sit on dark wood benches under a high-stone ceiling surrounded by rows and rows of local wines from which to choose. Dishes are typical of the area – *strangozzi alla spoletina* ('shoelace' pasta in a tomato, garlic

and chilli sauce, €6.20), truffle omelette (€6.20) – and priced to allow at least one or two meals while in town.

Taverna La Lanterna (☎ 0743 4 98 15; Via della Trattoria 6; tasting menus around €15; h Thu-Tue) A great place with extremely reasonable prices in the town centre, La Lanterna serves a variety of Umbrian pasta dishes. Tasting menus include vegetarian offerings for €11, regular for €13, and porcini and tartufo for €15.

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

L'Angolo Antico (☎ 0743 4 90 66; Via Monterone 109; meals €26; h Tue-Sun) In a neighbourhood restaurant just outside the main city is this family-run ristorante and pizzeria, with a few suits of armour thrown in for good measure. Nothing fancy on the menu, just good filling *strangozzi alla spoletina* and *scallopine al limone* (pork in a lemon sauce).

Ristorante degli Abeti (☎ 0743 22 00 25; Via Benedetto Egio 3/5; meals €27; h 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).

Ristorante Apollinaire (☎ 0743 22 32 56; Via S Agata 14; tasting menus incl vegetarian €30-48; h Wed-Sun) A delight for the senses, Apollinaire is an extraordinary culinary experience set amid ancient 12th-century walls and low oak beam ceilings lit by flickering candlelight. The menu changes seasonally, but you can choose to go with one of its tasting menus – vegetarian, truffle or traditional – or choose from its nouvelle menu. 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.

Shopping

Gathered along Via dell'Arco Druso are several shops that sell locally produced meats, wines or delicacies.

L'Antico Frantoio (☎ 0743 49 893; Via dell'Arco Druso 8) Sells plenty of pasta, *lenticchie* (typical Castelluccian minilentils), wine, oil and cheese for

a great gift or picnic. Each town in Umbria has several of these gourmet goods stores, but here the fiery owner, Sandra, makes many of her own sauces. Try anything with *tartufi* (truffles), olive or *carciofi* (artichokes). She will carefully package and FedEx any purchases you make to anywhere in the world.

Getting There & Around BUS

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).

To reach town from the train station, take city buses A, B or C for €0.80 (make sure the bus reads 'Centro').

TRAIN

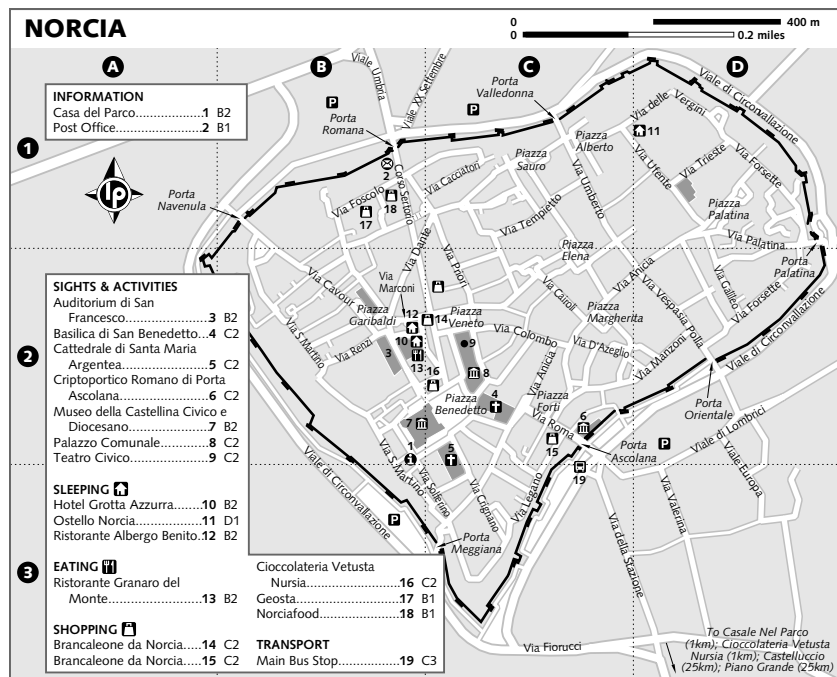
Spoleto is on a main train line so it's extremely easy to reach from just about anywhere. Trains from the main train station (☎ 0743 4 85 16; Piazza Polvani) connect with Rome (€7.10 to €11.60, 1½ hours, hourly), Perugia (€3.70, one hour, nine daily – take care not to land on one of the €9.10 Eurostars) or Assisi (€2.80, 40 minutes, hourly).

NORCIA

pop 4971

As the jumping-off point to the Valnerina and Monti Sibillini, venerable Norcia more than delivers its fair share of impressive churches and museums, but that's not the reason most people come here. No, visitors make it this far for the pigs. And the wild boar. And the lentils, cheese, ham, prosciutto, chocolate, *farro* (spelt), mushrooms and, of course, black truffles. To learn more about the art of hunting truffles, see the boxed text on p170.

Norcia is known throughout Italy and the world as a capital of pork butchery. In fact, the word *norcineria* is now used to denote butchers specialising in pork products. The techniques used in Norcia date back to Roman times when the harsh terrain led area inhabitants to focus on animal husbandry as the main food source. The town was also put on the world map as the birthplace of St Benedict in 480 AD, the patron saint of Europe.



Orientation

Norcia is almost entirely flat, a rarity in Umbria. The main gate for Norcia is the Porta Ascolana, also known as the Porta Massari, which is where buses arrive. Most of Norcia is pedestrian only, but there are many pay car parks around the city walls, including one near Porta Ascolana.

Information

Bianconi Hospitality (www.bianconi.com) Serving Norcia-bound tourists for 160 years now, the family's hospitality group website includes information on its hotels and restaurants as well as truffle hunts and activities in the Valnerina and Monti Sibillini.

Casa del Parco (☎ 0743 81 70 90; Via Solferino 22; h 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Sat & Sun) Offers tourist information and plenty of Monti Sibillini information, including guided trips, public transportation to the area, detailed walking maps and local products. During the summer, ask about low-priced English-language excursions throughout Monti Sibillini.

Geosta (☎ 0743 82 84 70; Via Foscolo 10; h 9am-12.50pm & 3.45-7.20pm Tue-Sun; per 30min €1) Currently the only internet spot in the town centre, it also has a

superb collection of local maps and books, and outdoor gear.

Norcia (www.norcia.net) Private tourist information.
Post office (next to Porta Romana)

Sights & Activities

The **Basilica di San Benedetto** (Piazza San Benedetto) is an impressive show of architectural know-how. Named after St Benedict, patron saint of Europe, who was born in Norcia, it was built in the shape of a Latin cross with a polygonal apse. The bell tower dates back to 1389 and its portico is Gothic. Frescoes inside the church date to the 16th century, including *Resurrezione di Lazzaro* (Resurrection of Lazarus) by Michelangelo Carducci (not the Michelangelo, but one from Norcia) and *San Benedetto e Totila* (St Benedict and Totila) by Filippo Napoletano, completed in 1621. If you're in town on a Sunday, be sure to stop in at 5.30pm or 7.45pm, when Benedictine monks from the attached monastery chant in the crypt.

The **Museo della Castellina Civico e Diocesano** (La Castellina Diocesan Civic Museum; ☎ 0743 81 70 30; Piazza San Benedetto; adult/concession €4/3; h 10am-1pm & 3-5pm

winter, 4-6pm summer) contains a small collection of Roman artefacts and local artwork. It is open late some nights in August. The admission price also gains you entrance to the **Criptoportico Romano di Porta Ascolana** (Roman Crypt of Porta Ascolana), which is a remnant of a small Roman necropolis.

Next to the museum is the **Cattedrale di Santa Maria Argentea** built in 1560 but modified after several earthquakes in the 1700s. The heavy wooden doors are original. Works by several Flemish masters grace the walls. Also on Piazza San Benedetto is the **Palazzo Comunale**, parts of which date back to the 14th century. Its bell tower dates to 1713.

Feel the love at the **Teatro Civico** (☎ 0743 81 60 22; Piazza Veneto; h 11am-1pm & 5-7pm for free tours), a beaux arts building dating from 1872 which was rebuilt by dedicated Nursine (residents of Norcia) after a fire in 1952. There are also performances at the **Auditorium di San Francesco** (☎ 0743 816 44 88; Via Renzi).

Festivals & Events

Truffle lovers, foodies and mooches should head to Norcia on 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 Italian food has to offer.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Ostello Norcia (☎ 349 300 20 91; www.montepatino.com; Via Ufente 1/b; dm incl breakfast €15) Brought to you in conjunction with the Casa del Parco folks,

ONE-STOP ORGANIC HOLIDAY

○ **Casale Nel Parco** (☎ ffax 0743 81 64 81; www.casalenelparco.com; Loc. Fontevena 8; s €50-60, d €100-120, half-board s €70-80 d €130-150, full board €170-190, extra person €30-35; p s) Only 1km from Norcia towards Castelluccio, this working organic *agriturismo* grows its own lentils, spelt and vegetables (which you can sample at dinner). Swim in the terracotta-tiled pool under the eye of snow-capped Monte Patino, ride the horses through the foothills of Monti Sibillini or ask your hosts to arrange any outdoor activity you can imagine. Fourteen rustic and romantic double rooms are individually designed.

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. Try calling ahead to book as it closes intermittently during the day and often fills up with school groups on outings. Bed sheets included.

Ristorante Albergo Benito (☎ 0743 81 66 70; www.hotelbenito.it; Via Marconi 5; s/d/tr incl breakfast €50/75/85) Located perfectly in the centre of town, it's a friendly one-star hotel with eight modest rooms. Nothing fancy, but the rooms are tidy and quiet. The attached restaurant (below) is excellent.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Grotta Azzurra (☎ 0743 81 65 13; www.bianconi.com; Via Alfieri 12; s €37-88, d €44-125; a) A suit of armour greets guests in the reception of this 18th-century palazzo. The family-run hotel can be a fabulous deal during the week and low season, and is steeped in the area's history. Cross-vaulted rooms are stately if a bit dark, complete with carved ceilings and recently upgraded bathrooms. This hotel has the most personality by far, and you can still take advantage of the activities the group offers: baby-sitting, evening events, gym classes, a sauna and outdoor activities, like truffle hunts.

Eating

The town is full of *norcinerias* – butchers serving Norcia-produced dried meats. In fact, the word *norcineria* is now used to mean a butcher throughout all of Italy. Famous food items from the area also include *cinghiale*, lentils and *pecorino* cheese.

Ristorante Granaro del Monte (☎ 0743 81 65 13; Via Alfieri 12; meals €28) One of the most famous restaurants in Umbria for visitors, it 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 in the enormous banquet-sized interior, and in summer, relax on the pleasant outdoor dining area. Its signature dish is *filetto tartufato del cavatore*, a veal dish sautéed in butter, black truffles and red wine – as rich as it is delicious.

Ristorante Albergo Benito (☎ 0743 81 66 70; Via Marconi 5; meals €30; h Tue-Sun) This simple but

BE THANKFUL FOR UMBRIAN OLIVE OIL

Most visitors to Umbria notice the bread right away. Many words have been used to describe it: namely 'bland', 'hard' and 'dry'. But Umbrians are intensely proud of their bread, partly due to the historical significance. In 1540, Pope Paul III levied a salt tax on Umbria. The hardy and self-reliant peasants refused to pay, and began baking bread without salt. They soon found out unsalted bread didn't spoil as easily, and spiced up quickly when moistened with olive oil, topped with tomatoes, or added to soup or salad. Be sure to try the delicious bruschetta (toasted bread topped with olive oil, tomatoes, truffles, artichokes etc) or *panzanella* (bread salad), but try to keep your appetite for your meal, not the bread bowl.

delicious restaurant within the hotel of the same name (p385) offers many dishes served with local meats and truffles.

Shopping

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.

Norciafood (☎ 0743 82 83 62; www.norciafood.com; Via dei Priori 38) This is one of the largest and most complete Norcineria and local produce shop. It ships to anywhere in the world and you can order many of their products on the website.

Brancaleone da Norcia (☎ 0743 82 83 11, 0743 81 75 15; www.gustusitaliano.com; Corso Sertorio 17 or Via Roma 24) A savvy shop specialising in locally produced products of every sort, size and type – cheese, lentils, jam, and every conceivable cut of pork known to humankind. Once you're home, order anything you want from their website.

Cioccolateria Vetusta Nursia (☎ 0743 81 73 70, shop 0743 82 80 70; Viale della Stazione 41/43) A kilometre outside Norcia on the road to Castelluccio you'll pass what looks like a boring warehouse. Step inside and you'll find the best prices on a huge selection of chocolate, wine, lentils and local (non-meat) products. Best of all, there is always something available to taste. There's also a smaller and more expensive shop in town at Via Mazzini 6.

Getting There & Away

The closest train station is in Spoleto, so the best way to get to Norcia is by bus or car. The main bus stop is near Porta Ascolana. SSIT (☎ 0743 21 22 11; www.spoletina.it) runs trips to Norcia from Spoleto (€4.40, one hour, five daily) and Perugia (€6.80, two hours, one daily at 2.10pm).

You can travel to Castelluccio only once a week, and Norcia is the town to do it from. The bus leaves Norcia at 6.25am and 1.30pm on Thursday only (€3.20, 40 minutes). It originates in Castelluccio, returning at 7.20am or 2.20pm, so if you just wanted to take a drive through the region, you could technically buy a return ticket and take it straight through.

MONTI SIBILLINI

Monti Sibillini is one of those places it would be great to discover by accident, but there's no way you're going to haul yourself up from Norcia (if you make it to Norcia at all) unless you hear how beautiful this area is.

This area is really, really, really beautiful. Really. Go. Even during summer, its jagged peaks keep a healthy dusting of snow. Mt Vettore – the highest peak in Monti Sibillini – stands at 2476m. In May and June, infinite expanses of wildflowers blanket the Piano Grande, the great plain surrounding Castelluccio. Wolves run free, icy streams flow and fairies dance. Well, so the story goes. During the Middle Ages, the Sibillini mountains were known throughout Europe as a place that held demons, necromancers and fairies. A woman named Sybil was said to live in a cave and tell fortunes. These days, the area is home to peregrine falcons, royal eagles and porcupines (brought over in the last few decades). Eighteen hundred botanical species have been counted just in this one area.

Before going off into the Monti Sibillini, you can pick up a host of maps at the Casa del Parco (p384) in Norcia, depending on how strenuous or leisurely you want to be. Any level of activity is possible here, spanning from day paths to week-long survival treks circling the mountain chain. The office has a lot of useful information available on different kinds of inexpensive guided trips in English, as well.

For information, try the official **Parco Nazionale dei Monti Sibillini** (www.sibillini.net).

Castelluccio

Castelluccio looks impossible. The crumbling village sits atop a lonely hill-top like an outpost in the middle of the vast expanse of the Piano Grande. It's difficult enough these days to traverse the dozen kilometres (at least) over treacherous mountain passes to reach the nearest village in any direction, especially during winter when temperatures can reach -30°C, but Castelluccio was even more isolated in the past and as such, has stayed relatively poor.

The hamlet now boasts a smattering of small eateries and a few places to stay, but what has put it on the map is the Castelluccio *lenticchie*: small, thin-skinned legumes that keep many of the hundred or so permanent residents in business and many Umbrian bellies warm and full during the winter. The town is also famous for its *pecorino* and ricotta cheeses.

During the day, head out in any one direction to hike, ski, hang-glide or go horseback riding. Or, wander the perimeter of the main square (the area around the car park) to chow down in small shops selling all sorts of Castelluccian goodies. Since the nightlife consists mostly of chasing goats around dilapidated stone buildings, a good night's sleep is practically guaranteed.

INFORMATION

The Casa del Parco (p384) in Norcia has information about the town of Castelluccio.

ACTIVITIES

Pro Delta (☎ 0743 82 11 56, 339 563 54 56; www.prodella.it; Via della Fate 3, Castelluccio) is one of the most well-respected hang-gliding institutions in Europe and has a solid reputation for safety. A basic five-day hang-gliding or paragliding course costs €400 and refresher courses start at €120. Those with a sense of adventure but neither time nor money can take a two-person paragliding and hang-gliding ride for €25 to €70. Check the requirements page of its website before arriving for a course.

Another school is **Fly Castelluccio** (☎ 0736 34 42 04; www.flycastelluccio.com; Via Copernica 12, Ascoli Piceno), in the neighbouring region of Le Marche. It offers weekend, five- or 10-day elementary courses in paragliding and hang-gliding, as well as paramotoring.

For horseback riding, contact **Associazione Sportiva Piangrande** (☎ 0743 81 72 79; Castelluccio), which is open from Easter to October, and on weekends in winter. The organisation offers half- and full-day treks throughout Monti Sibillini, plus bicycle tours of the region. Mountain-bike riders should pick up the *Pedalling in the Park* brochure at any Casa del Parco office.

SLEEPING & EATING

Agriturismo Locanda de Senari (☎ 0743 82 12 05; www.agriturismosenari.it; Via della Bufera; B&B per person €40, subsequent nights per person €35; ☾ Mar-Oct) This *agriturismo* is housed in an old barn in the heart of the old town. There are just five rooms in the time-worn stone building, but all are modern and well designed. The downstairs restaurant (meals €24) is the liveliest place in town. The owners serve all the products from their nearby farm here – spelt, lentils, ricotta cheese, beef and salami.

Albergo Sibilla (☎ 0743 82 11 13; Via Piano Grande 2; s €29-36, d €45-60; ☾) Offers very basic rooms with rudimentary bathrooms. But they're clean and it's whisper quiet at night. The view is the reason you're staying here (that, and, well, it's one of the only hotels in town). There's a decent restaurant downstairs, so consider the half-board option.

Taverna di Castelluccio (☎ 0743 82 11 58; Via Dietro la Torre 6; meals €22.50; ☾ Thu-Tue Easter-Oct, daily in August) A ramshackle edifice on the outside, but the hearty, filling meals is what brings the hang-gliders and paragliders out by the wingful. The dish to try, of course, is the lentil soup, but truffle frittatas and *farro* (spelt) soup round out the territory's offerings.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

You can travel to Castelluccio only once a week, and Norcia is the town to do it from. The bus leaves Norcia at 6.25am and 1.30pm on Thursday (€3.20, 40 minutes). It originates in Castelluccio, returning at 7.20am or 2.20pm, so if you just wanted to take a drive through the region, you could technically buy a return ticket and take it straight through.

VALNERINA

Forget all those soft rolling hillsides and delicate vineyards gracing much of the rest of Central Italy. The landscape in the Valnerina is a geographically feral contrast to the nearby time-worn topography. Named for the

valley of the Nera River, the ancient flow created steep valleys and jagged mountains, and millennia of isolated history has placed hidden monasteries and castles throughout. The entire area has been nominated as a Unesco World-Heritage site, although it remains one of the most overlooked spots in Umbria. Outside of the wildly popular Cascata delle Marmore waterfalls, the Valnerina shyly beckons travellers with its unequalled beauty. Those with their own transportation (do not even consider coming here without) will have the back roads (and even the main highways) all to themselves.

Information

Associazione Gaia (☎ 338 767 83 08; www.asgaia.it; Via Cristoforo Colombo 1/a, Foligno) Specialises in rafting trips, but it also offers environmental education, mountain biking, horseback riding and free climbing. Before each rafting trip commences, it offers a very informative small introductory course on the natural surroundings of the Corno River.

Rafting Umbria (☎ 0742 231 46, 348 351 17 98; www.raftingumbria.it; Via Santi Brinati 2, Foligno) A full-service outdoor activity centre offering much more than rafting. Activities include canoeing, kayaking, horseback riding, free climbing, mountain biking, white-water rafting, orienteering and survival skills. Based out of Foligno this outfit arranges rafting trips in the Valnerina on the Corno and Nera Rivers, bicycling in Monti Sibillini and free climbing in Ferentillo.

www.valnerinaonline.it Look up information on accommodation, activities, events and dining in English or Italian.

Cascata delle Marmore

Don't let the tourist trap entrance to this attraction scare you off (except on weekends in August – then you should run screaming). These waterfalls are the highest in Europe, and are a truly amazing sight to behold. The Romans created them in 290 BC when they diverted the Velino River into the Nera River. These days, the waterfall provides hydroelectric power to the region. If you are without a car, it is worth catching a bus out to see it, particularly to witness the arrival of the water after it has been switched on. If you need to travel from Terni out to these falls, jump on local bus 7.

Whenever the waterfalls are operational, the SS209 (connecting Terni and Perugia to Norcia and Ferentillo) and the SS79 (connecting Terni and Perugia to Piediluco and

ROAD TRIP: VALNERINA

The Valnerina is easily accessed as a day trip from Spoleto, Terni or Norcia, and is only a little over an hour from Trevi, Foligno, Narni or Todi. The SS395 from Spoleto and the SS209 from Terni join with the SS320 and then the SS396, which passes through Norcia. The best way to see the area is to take a day trip along the SS209, starting at **Cascata delle Marmore** (left) in the morning, visiting Ferentillo and its **Mummy Museum** (below) after its 2.30pm afternoon opening time and ending up at **Il Cantico** (opposite) in San Pietro in Valle for a memorable dinner.

Rieti) come to a virtual standstill. There are four car parks throughout the area. Plan on staying a while, as the area surrounding the falls is equally attractive.

The falls operate on a bizarrely complex schedule that probably isn't even accurate. Just about any tourist office in Umbria will have the schedule for the waterfall, but the local tourist offices – Terni, Narni, Spoleto, Norcia and Perugia – are most likely to know the correct data, or you can call ☎ 0744 629 82. The falls are completely closed in December, January and February. The best time to see them is between 10am and noon, or 3pm or 4pm up until 9pm or 10pm in the summer, during holidays and on Sundays. Opening hours are even more restricted on Saturdays and weekdays.

The skittish and the completely insane are both welcome at **Centro Canoe e Rafting Le Marmore** (☎ 330 75 34 20; www.raftingmarmore.com; Via Carlo Neri), based in Terni. One can try 'hydro-speeding' – the white-water equivalent of bobsledding – or take what is called a 'soft rafting' excursion down the Nera, more appropriate for all ages and skill levels.

Ferentillo

As you head from the waterfalls north up the SS209 you'll see a set of medieval walls placed precariously over a hill above this quiet town set in the midst of the fluvial Valnerina.

Fans of the macabre will have a deathly good time at the goosebump-inducing **Museo delle Mummie** (Museum of the Mummies; ☎ 0743 543 95; Via delle Torre; adult/concession €3/2; 11 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-7.30pm Apr-Sep, 10am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Oct & Mar,

10am-12.30pm & 2.30-5pm Nov-Feb), reached through an eerie subterranean 4th-century crypt. You'll find a collection of ancient Ferentilian mummies – glorified desiccated corpses, really – in various stages of decay, mummified naturally with a process of salt, ammonia and mushrooms. Dozens of mummies – one, a visiting 19th-century Chinese doctor – sit, stand or lie down, some still clothed, others with a full set of teeth or hair, a mother and child, and the ever-popular display of disembodied heads.

The second thing Ferentillo is known for is its rock climbing. You can contact certified rock-climbing guide **Kathleen Scheda** at **Duka Duka Outdoors** (☎ 0765 6 32 02; dukadukaoutdoors@libero.it) to arrange climbing expeditions. Kathleen's family owns a B&B just across the border in Lazio called **La Torretta** (☎ /fax 0765 6 32 02; www.latorrettabandb.com; Casperia, Lazio; s/d/f €60/80/140). It's in a medieval town about an hour from Rome and close to the best climbing spots in Lazio and Umbria. The B&B has a two-night minimum stay and offers one-week rock-climbing trips, as well as cooking courses and hiking excursions.

Ostello Il Tiglio (☎ 0744 38 91 04; www.umbriahostels.org; Via Abruzzo; dm €14.50, f per person with bathroom €17; p) is perfectly situated to reach many different parts of the Valnerina, Norcia and La Cascata delle Marmore for river rafting and rock climbing. It's a small hostel with just 25 beds, but perfectly outfitted for jaunts into the nearby area. Breakfast is €1.60, dinner is €9 and staff will even pack you a lunch for €7!

Le Due Querce (☎ 0744 78 14 41; www.bellaumbria.net/agriturismo-Leduequerce; Via del Piano 5; d/tr/q €50/70/90, camping per person/tent €6/1.50; p) is a full-service **agriturismo**, camp site and horseback-riding stables, next to the Nera River. It produces eggs, olive oil, cheese and truffles, and can set you up to do every outdoor sport in the Valnerina.

o **Ristorante Piermarini** (☎ 0744 78 07 14; www.saporipiermarini.it; Via Ancaiano 23; meals €46; 11 Tue-Sat, Sun lunch, bookings required for lunch Tue-Fri) Off the beaten track but on a well-signed back road, the Piermarini farm estate provides an elegant backdrop for extravagant cookery, featuring home-grown olive oil, grains and truffles from the nearby hills. A far cut above the home-style cooking found in most roadside establishments, the restaurant features refined local cuisine, heavily seasoned with truffles, along with expert service and upscale presentation. A most worthy destination for

gastromes and oenophiles, with at least 2½ hours for a meal.

San Pietro in Valle

There is some serious history going on at San Pietro in Valle (St Peter Abbey) in the town of Valle, just 6km north of Ferentillo. Evidence suggests it was a pagan temple before two wandering Syrian hermits happened upon it in the 5th century. The interior of the abbey has pre-Giotto frescoes from the Roman and Lombard epochs.

The **Residenza d'Epoca Abbazia San Pietro in Valle** (☎ 0744 780 129; www.sanpietroinvalle.com; SS209 Valnerina, km 20; s €98-109, d €129-139, ste €175-189; 11 open around Easter-Oct; p), also known as a hotel, is a special place, away from the crowds. Rooms have been upgraded quite a bit since their days as medieval nunnery cells. A few have stone fireplaces or breathtaking views over the cloisters and the surrounding valley; ask for any last-minute discounts. The hotel owners can give you hiking maps of the area and set you up with all sorts of adventurous activities. It serves an enormous breakfast of freshly baked bread and home-made preserves on the abbey's outdoor patio. There is a free sauna for guests.

The attached restaurant **Il Cantico** (☎ 0744 78 0005; meals €31; 11 mid-Mar-Oct) is tucked under the abbey in a centuries-old subterranean stone vault. Seasonal dishes include crayfish ravioli with Trasimeno bean soup, pumpkin flan with pecorino sauce and truffles, and pigeon breast in Sagrantino wine sauce, all made with fresh, local ingredients. A great bet is to order one of the four enormous tasting menus: vegetarian (€35), rivers and lakes (€40), Valnerina specialities (€38) or meat (€40).

CREEPY UMBRIA

Visit one of these places for a hair-raising experience:

- See medieval corpses frozen in time at the **Museo delle Mummie** (opposite) in Ferentillo
- Get a history lesson on the Battle of Trasimeno and how to beat the Romans in **Tuoro** (p358)
- Visit **Narni Sotterranea** (p391) to see an Inquisition prisoner's desperate graffiti

TERNI

pop 104,938

There are only two reasons to come to Terni – passing through on your way to the Valnerina, Norcia and Monti Sibillini or because you're an art historian. Terni is a major industrial city, virtually obliterated in WWII bombing raids and subsequently rebuilt. Known as 'the steel city' or 'the Manchester of Italy', its modern factories used to attract tourists in the early 1900s.

Terni's **tourist office** (☎ 0744 42 30 47; info@iat.terni.it; Viale Cesare Battisti 7; 11 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri) is south of the main train station and just west of Piazza C Tacito, near Largo Don Minzoni.

Art lovers should stop by the **pinacoteca** (☎ 0744 45 94 21; Via del Teatro Romano 13; adult/concession €4/2.50; 11 10am-1pm & 3-7pm) to have a look at one of the more important remaining works by Piero Matteo d'Amelia, Pala dei Francescani. He was the most important artist of his time but has been surpassed in history as his finest work, a certain Vatican chapel's ceiling, was painted over by some newcomer named Michelangelo.

One of Terni's charms is its devotion to that famous Umbrian pastime, the festival. Its most famous home-town hero is St Valentine, who was the bishop of Terni until Placidius Furius, on orders of Emperor Aurelius, got really angry and had St Valentine executed in AD 269. Well after Valentine's martyrdom, a legend was created. It was said that he would often give gifts of flowers from his own garden to his young visitors. Two of these visitors fell in love and married, forever linking St Valentine with love. Now, a huge feast engulfs the city on 14 February, but the entire month is dedicated to love and romance.

From Terni, you can catch an ATC Terni bus to Perugia (€6.90, 1¼ hours, three daily) and Narni (€1.80, 30 minutes, every other hour with a gap between 10am and 1.30pm). If you arrive in Terni by train and need to get to the bus station on Piazza Europa, or vice versa, catch local bus 1 or 2.

NARNI

pop 20,054

While Umbria is called the 'Green Heart of Italy', the town of Narni could be called the true heart of Italy. It's the closest town to the geographic centre of the Italian peninsula, a symbolic position not lost on its inhabitants. Umbria is one of the more rural provinces

in Italy, and Narni exudes the friendly, laid-back charm that's so pervasive throughout the southern part of Umbria. You're not just imagining it: people here *are* friendlier.

As one Narni local puts it, 'We have the bread, but we don't have the teeth'. He's referring to the amazing array of tourist sites – a 13th-century hill-top *rocca* guarding mightily over the town; the Narni Sotterranea, a subterranean world of caves that used to house Inquisition prisoners; churches and palaces galore – but practically no tourist structure. The *rocca* is difficult to get to and Narni Sotterranea is only open on public holidays, Sundays and a few Saturdays (the entrance is through a day-care centre playground). However, the tourist board just published its first Narni map, available in English, which will help ensure you don't miss its bread for lack of teeth.

History

Narni became a Roman stronghold in the 2nd century BC as the Via Flaminia ran from Rome to Rimini through Narni. Its importance grew partly because of the Nera River, which flowed at the bottom of Narni's great hill. The town developed into a *comune* (city-state) as early as the 11th century but was partially destroyed in the 14th century by northern mercenaries on their way home from sacking Rome. After rebuilding, Narni regained its status as a centre for art and goldsmithing, and held great artistic prominence throughout the Renaissance.

Orientation

Narni has two historic centres: the quieter Piazza dei Priori, which houses the tourist office and Palazzo del Podestà; and Piazza Cavour, home to the cathedral. Just outside the main town gate – the *Arco Romano* – is Piazza Garibaldi, along the back of the cathedral, where you'll find restaurants, cafés and the bus stop. Everything is a short walk from these two, except for the *rocca*, which is either a drive or a pretty decent hike up the hill. At the bottom of the hill flows the Nera River, where the Roman Ponte d'Augusto lies.

Information

EMERGENCY

Police station (☎ 0744 71 52 34; Via Portecchia)

INTERNET RESOURCES

Bella Umbria (www.bellaumbria.net/narni) The best private tourist information on Narni.

Narnia (www.narnia.it)

Narnia Comune (www.comune.narni.tr.it) The government website for Narni.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hospital (☎ 0744 74 01; Via Cappuccini Nuova)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 0744 71 53 62, 0744 74 72 47; www.comune.narni.tr.it; Piazza dei Priori 3; 11 9.30am-12.30pm daily, 4.30-7pm Mon-Tue, 3.30-7pm Wed-Sun)

Sights

Plan your visit to Narni around the concise opening hours of the tortuously fascinating **Narni Sotterranea** (Narni Subterranean; ☎ 0744 72 22 92; www.narnisotterranea.it; Via San Bernardo 12; admission €5; 11 tours 10.15am, 12.15pm, 3.15pm, 4.15pm Sun & public holidays, 3pm & 6pm Sat Apr-Oct). The 1½ hour tour (in Italian, English or both) guides you through millennia of history, starting with a look into Roman plumbing and an underground Romanesque frescoed church, and moving on to an Inquisition prisoner's cell from 1759 and the torture devices with which he might have been familiar. Skulls and bones abound throughout the tour. The subterranean was rediscovered in 1979 on the advice of an older town resident whose grandfather had heard the stories passed down for centuries. The current archaeological director rents a tranquil apartment outside of town, **Podere del Cardinale** (p393), and guests or visitors might be able to lend a hand during the week for

the ongoing archaeological excavations. In addition to the above hours the subterranean is also open weekdays during the Corso all'Anello and Ferragosto, or by appointment during the week.

Above the subterranean is the Chiesa di San Domenico where the Dominican inquisitors preached love and kindness when they weren't inquisiting and torturing. The Sotterranea's archaeologist is spending several years excavating the floors under the church. There was a pathway recently discovered that led the monks from the church into the subterranean. Search for the hidden symbols – a Templar 'rosy' cross (a cross hidden in a four-sided rose) and the sun and the moon, the Lombard symbols for the beginning and the end.

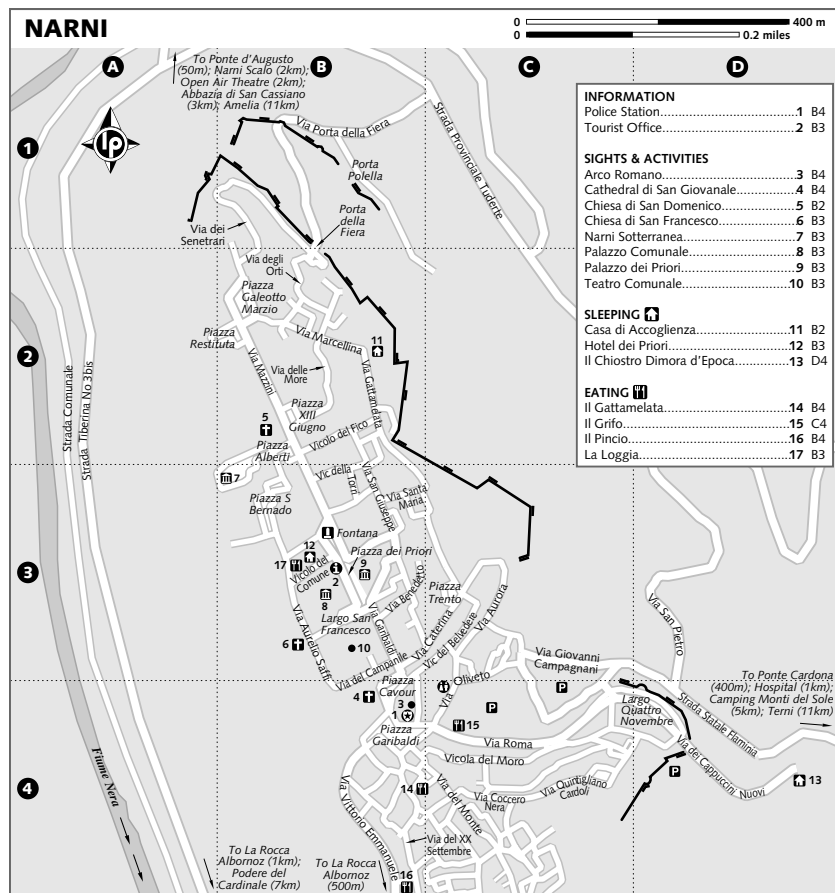
Above town is the fortress **La Rocca Albornoz** (admission €3; 11 11am-7pm summer, 10am-5pm winter, weekends & holidays; 11 11am-7pm), built by Cardinal Albornoz, who was the heavy charged with switching Narni from a free *comune* to a papal-controlled state in the 13th century. The pope needed an imposing bastion to guard against the pro-Emperor Ghibellines and to scare the people into submission. Some original frescoes still exist, but its use as a prison for hundreds of years took its toll on the building. The climb up the tower stairs can be treacherous but it is well worth it for the 360-degree perfect Umbrian views when you get to the top. La Rocca now opens its doors to choirs and orchestras and has a collection of photos from its medieval festival. Also housed

NARNI/NARNIA

One might notice the mythical setting of Narnia from CS Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* bears a striking etymological similarity to the town of Narni, and even more remarkably like its old Roman name, Narnia. When, in summer, you see the Disney cruise line bus drive through town, you'll realise the moniker isn't just a passing resemblance.

While researching Roman history at Oxford, CS Lewis was inspired by several descriptions of the ancient town of Narnia. He most likely remembers the name from reading books by Livy or Pliny the Elder, which described a stunning Roman village with beautiful villas and baths. In fact, Lewis showed his biographer, Walter Hooper, the ancient atlas in which he'd underlined the town name. The biographer eventually made a literary pilgrimage to Narni in the 1990s with his godson.

Although CS Lewis never visited, *Narnese* (residents of Narni) like to point out the similarities between mythical and historical Narnia. Narni's symbol is the flying griffin, and fans of the movie will undoubtedly remember the flying gryphons. In the fourth nave on the right side of the **Cathedral di San Giovanni** (above) lies the rather creepy remains of Beata Lucia, Blessed Lucy. At the **Palazzo di Comune** (above), look for the stone lion statue, Narni's own Aslan. And if you head down the Via Flaminia towards the **Ponte d'Augusto** (above) stop off at the halfway point to hunt for the pre-Roman stone altar, similar to the one where Aslan was sacrificed.



is a fascinating motorcycle collection, including a 1906 foldable motorcycle, a rare surviving joint venture from Aermacchi (a popular Italian manufacturer) and Harley Davidson. Imagine the bomber helmet you might have worn sitting in the 1938 BMW sidecar. Contact the tourist office for information.

The Romans built the Ponte d'Augusto, a bridge on the ancient route of the Via Flaminia, in 27 BC. The bridge now has only one remaining arch, but it's not everyday you see a giant Roman arch.

Around what was the Roman forum is now the municipal and social centre of Narni. The Palazzo dei Priori (10am-1pm & 3-7pm) construction is attributed to Gattapone in 1275. Look up at the balcony called the *loggia colpire*,

from where a town crier used to yell the equivalent of the evening news. Across the street from the Palazzo dei Priori is the Palazzo Comunale (0744 74 72 69; Piazza dei Priori 1; admission free; 10am-1pm Mon, 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun summer, to 6pm Tue-Sun winter), a 13th-century building formed by the union of three towers. If no-one is inside, you can take a peek in the council chamber to see the *Pala di Ghirlandaio*, a representation of the coronation of the Virgin Mary. In the courtyard is the Roman statue of a lion, Narni's own version of Aslan from *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The 12th-century Cathedral of San Giovanale (Piazza Cavour; 7.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-7pm) is dedicated to Narni's patron saint, San Giovenale, who became the first bishop of Narni in AD 386. You'll see

the remains of Beata Lucia, who received the stigmata, and now reminds visitors to Narni of Lucy Pevensie, one of the four children in *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

The Teatro Comunale (0744 72 63 62; Via Garibaldi; admission free; 4-7pm Sat, 9am-1pm & 4-7pm Sun) is a glorious 19th-century theatre that can accommodate up to 350 patrons. You can visit it for free on the weekends, and it's also a lovely place to see a performance. Make sure you make an appointment first.

The simple Chiesa di San Francesco (Via Aurelio Saffi) was built several years after the death of St Francis on the same site of a place where the Assisian himself had briefly lived.

The geographic centre of Italy is just outside Narni at the Ponte Cardona (0744 72 22 92), a Roman bridge that is the only remnant of an old Roman aqueduct dating to the 1st century AD. It's off the Via Flaminia heading south towards Terni. Call for information or to book a guided tour.

Abbazia di San Cassiano is an imposing abbey dating back to the 11th century, built in the plan of a Greek cross. It's thought to have been the first Benedictine abbey constructed in the area.

Festivals & Events

Corso all'Anello (The Race for the Ring) The town's major festival of the year is held from the end of April to the beginning of May. The town goes all out for this festival. As a rare foreign tourist, you will be welcomed with open arms. There are all sorts of feasts, competitions and performances by the Anerio Choir, an ancient choir formed by Palestrina, who was one of the founders of baroque music. The race itself is held on the second Sunday of May.

International Folklore Festival Held from mid-July to mid-August, this festival sees folklorist groups from all over the world perform nightly at the Piazza dei Priori.

Sleeping

Narni has very few hotels but the options available are quite good, including one of Umbria's best religious accommodation options, a peaceful oasis outside of town and a fabulously central hotel.

BUDGET

Camping Monti del Sole (0744 79 63 36; montisole@libero.it; Strada Borgaria 22, SS Flaminia, Km 80.800; per person €6-7, per tent €5-6, per car €2-3; Easter-Sep; p s) This camp site, 5km south of Narni, has a pool, restaurant and tennis courts. It's

surrounded by forested grounds. Camp sites have electric hookups for campers.

Casa di Accoglienza (Suore di Santa Anna; 0744 71 52 17; www.istituto-santanna.com; Via Gattamelata 74; student dm €15, s €19-21, d €34-38, all without bathroom) Go on, take a look from the garden's stone balcony. It's OK to cry. Really. It's that beautiful. Located along the city's ancient walls but walking distance to the centre, the quiet nun's quarters are as simple as you might expect, but the 14th-century building, tranquil garden and outlandishly stunning views are enough to bring tears to anyone's eyes.

Podere del Cardinale (0744 71 70 31; www.podere delcardinale.com; Strada di Massa Bassa 7, Taizzano; per person €20-35) Archaeology buffs will most definitely enjoy staying at this absolutely charming country house. The owner is also the director of the Narni Sotterranea and during the week he often does digs there, and gladly invites guests along. The house itself is down a dirt road surrounded by olive trees. There's a gigantic wood-burning adobe oven that takes up half the living room. The furniture is what country chic strives to be: ancient gnarled farmhouse tables, huge wooden beds and a homey fireplace that makes this more of a retreat than a hotel. With a kitchenette, solar-powered shower and sofa bed, the rooms can accommodate up to four comfortably. Roberto can also give you a tour of a nearby Romanesque church with Templar inscriptions and point you to horseback-riding facilities.

MIDRANGE

Hotel dei Priori (0744 72 68 43; www.loggiadepriori.it; Vicolo del Comune 4; s €48-55, d €60-75, incl breakfast; a) In the centre of town is a fantastic three-star hotel, located in a 15th-century building with contemporary amenities – hairdryer, TV, minibar. It's got 17 beautiful rooms with incredible views, and some with balconies, but the penthouse *camere di torre* (tower room) is the *piece de resistance*, with a balcony that overlooks the entire valley. Inside its walls is the charming restaurant, La Loggia.

Il Chiostro Dimora d'Epoca (0744 76 02 07; www.hotelminareto.com; Via dei Cappuccini Nuovi 32; s €50, d €65-75, incl breakfast; p s) Located at the top of the city, where the view is as good as it gets from anywhere in Umbria. Built in 1603 as the new friary of a band of Cappuccini monks, the cloisters eventually fell into disrepair and it was turned into a holiday spot in 1878 for a local army commander, and in 2003 refurbished

as a hotel with a restaurant and conference facilities. Plenty of historic touches remain – like antique four-poster beds and wrought-iron chandeliers hung from low stone and mortar ceilings – but contemporary touches add comfort.

Eating

Il Grifo (☎ 0744 72 66 25; Via Roma 3; meals €21.50, 1–4 Thu–Tue) Specialising in Umbrian and international cuisine, this large restaurant's view is as enticing as the food. Set along the outer walls of the city, the large plate glass-windows overlook the green valley below. Try the sinfully rich gnocchi with black truffles and *talleggio* cream sauce (€10) or the pizzas (€4.50 to €5). A very simple tourist menu costs €12.90.

La Loggia (☎ 0744 72 27 44; Vicolo del Comune 4; meals €23) Owned by the Hotel dei Priori, this restaurant serves excellent dishes at even better prices. Bright-yellow walls and small tables set in front of an open fireplace make for an intimate dinner. The menu blends typical Umbrian dishes with intricate flavours, such as lamb with artichokes (€11) or pork with juniper berries (€8).

Il Pincio (☎ 0744 72 22 41; Via del XX Settembre 117; meals €24; 1–4 Thu–Tue) Located under a beautiful old nobleman's palace is this restaurant that you might simply walk by if you didn't know part of it was literally inside a grotto. Ask chef Leonardo Passone to suggest a bottle of wine, and you'll soon be circling down a staircase into his famed wine cellar. Try the pasta with zucchini flowers.

Il Gattamelata (☎ 0744 71 72 45; Via Pozzo della Comunità 4; meals €27; 1–4 Tue–Sun) Named after the *capitano di ventura* (mercenary captain) Il Gattamelata, this simply decorated restaurant serves wonderful meals that are a little more imaginative than the typical Umbrian cuisine. You can try dishes such as ravioli with smoked cheese in herb-infused butter (€8). However, the dish you can't leave without trying is the chocolate mousse pyramid dessert, flambéed with essence of vermouth. You can order from two tasting menus that feature foods served during medieval times.

Entertainment

Open Air Theatre (☎ 0744 75 11 97; www.narniopera.it; Parco dei Pini, Piazza Rossellini, Narni Scalo; tickets €12–170, average performances €30–60, reduced prices for under-26s & over 65; 1–4 performances May–Sep) Built specifically for the Narni Opera Open Air concert series

is the 1840-seat, this brand-new theatre puts on world-class performances in a stunning outdoor setting, reminiscent of a Roman theatre. While opera is the main draw, the theatre also hosts a fine array of jazz, classical and world-music performances. In the low-season, performances switch back to the Teatro Comunale (see Sights p393).

Getting There & Away

ATC Terni (☎ 0744 71 52 07) buses leave from Piazza Garibaldi, just outside the main gate. From Narni, you can travel by bus to Amelia (€1.80, 30 minutes, nine daily from Piazza Garibaldi, plus another 10 from Narni Scalo), Terni (€1.80, 30 minutes, almost hourly with a gap between 10.30am and 1pm) and Orvieto (€5.20, one hour and 20 minutes, five daily). To get to Perugia, switch in Terni (€6.90, 1½ hours).

To get to Narni from the A1 autostrada, take the Magliano Sabina exit if you're coming from the south. Take the Orte exit if you're coming from the north.

AMELIA

pop 11,090

Few other words describe this town as aptly as 'sweet'. Perhaps 'quaint', 'delightful' or 'adorable' come close. It's a tiny little village, unassuming and unspoiled, with one of the oldest histories in Umbria. The legend goes that Amelia was founded by a mythological king named Ameroe in the 12th century BC. Latin texts mention the existence of Amelia as a settlement as early as the 11th century BC (four centuries before Rome was founded). A good chunk of the original walls (believed to have been constructed sometime around the 6th century BC) can still be seen by the theatre, but much of the wall is of newer construction. You know, the 4th century BC.

For even more sweetness, take your sweetness down 'Girl-Kissing Alley' or try the town's delicacy, *fichi girotti*, an Amerino snack of fig and chocolate. Locals vie with Narnians for the friendliest people in Italy and, knowing Umbria, they just might invent a festival testing that theory one day.

Orientation

The town is still a walled city, with several *porte* (doors) leading in and out. The main entrance is the Porta Romana. Just outside of it is the tourist office, parking facilities, the bus station and several cafés (some selling

fichi girotti). Signs posted in front of monuments are all listed in Italian and English, so it's easy to get around.

Information

For information on the town, try www.amelia.it.

Pro Loco Città di Amelia (☎ 0744 98 25 59; web: tts.calli.it/proloco.amelia; Piazza Augusto Vera 8; 1–4 9.30am–12pm & 4–7pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–12pm Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 0744 98 14 53; info@iat.amelia.tr.it; Porta Romana; 1–4 3.30–6.30pm Mon, 9am–12.30pm Tue–Sat 15 Sep–30 May, 9.30am–12.30pm & 3.30–6.30pm rest of year) Bypass this office for the more helpful Pro Loco.

Sights

Amelia is almost entirely surrounded by pre-Roman polygonal walls, possibly dating back to the 6th century BC. The huge stones have held together without mortar for over 2500 years. Piazza Matteotti was the site of an ancient Roman forum.

Don't miss the fascinating **Museo Archeologico di Amelia** (Archaeological Museum & Art Museum; ☎ 0744 97 81 20; www.sistemamuseo.it in Italian; Piazza Augusto Vera 10; adult/concession €5/4; 1–4 10.30am–1pm & 3.30–6pm Fri–Sun Oct–Mar, 10.30am–1pm & 4–7pm Tue–Sat Apr–Jun & Sep, 10.30am–1pm & 4.30–7.30pm Tue–Sun Jul–Aug), with its famous bronze statue of Germanico, Roman captain and adopted son of Tiberius. Over 2m high, this almost fully restored statue is covered in armour featuring Achilles' ambush of Troilus in the Trojan War. You'll also find a painting by one of Amelia's most famous residents, Piermatteo d'Amelia. Piermatteo was instrumental in securing Christopher Columbus the three ships he used to discover America and was also the painter of the original Sistine Chapel ceiling.

An **ancient Roman cistern** (☎ 0744 97 84 36; 1–4 4.30–7.30pm Sat, 10.30am–12.30pm & 4.30–7.30pm Sun Apr–Sep, 3–6pm Sat, 10.30am–12.30pm & 3–6pm Sun Oct–Mar) goes underneath Piazza Matteotti from what is now a private house to the youth hostel.

If you're with your darling be sure to walk down from Piazza Matteotti past the Palazzo Municipale to Vicolo Baciafemmine (Girl-Kissing Alley), so named because its narrowness has been known to cause passers-by to get close enough to let their passions run amok.

In 1783 Amelia's Theatrical Society (comprised of the middle class and bourgeoisie) decided that their hamlet needed some culture. They banded together and built the **Teatro Sociale** (☎ 0744 97 83 15; Via del Teatro), turning the

theatre into the most important gathering spot in town. The moving wings still work on the original wood wheels. Domenico Bruschi frescoed the ceiling and booths in 1886. Most of the concerts begin at 8pm.

From the theatre, go to Via della Valle to get the best look at the Mura Megalitiche, stone walls built by the Etruscans in the 6th century BC. The rougher the texture, the older the stone. The builders didn't have mortar, but the walls were constructed well enough so that we can still see them.

The **Chiesa di San Francesco** (☎ 0744 97 81 20; 1–4 10am–noon & 3–6.30pm) was originally built in the 13th century, but most of the architecture now is from the 15th and 20th century. The façade is from 1406, and is decorated in the Romanesque and Gothic styles.

Since 872, there has been a religious institution on the site of the current cathedral (1–4 10am–noon & 3–6.30pm). The cathedral has been rebuilt after several disasters, and is certainly not the most impressive in Umbria, but there are several paintings and sculptures of interest inside. Next to the cathedral is the Torre Civica, which was built in 1050. Like many towers that were built in the medieval period, it was constructed on a dodecagonal (12-sided) plan based on the symbolic importance of the number 12 (12 apostles, 12 signs of the zodiac).

Courses

If you're looking for somewhere easy-going to learn Italian, try **Eurolinks** (☎ 0744 98 18 60; www.eurolinkschool.com; Viale Rimembranze 48), which runs live-in classes at all levels from €660 per week for a double room in a farmhouse to €1232 for two weeks full board staying with a local family. It also arranges wellness retreats, cooking courses, and tours of local wineries and *frantoio* (olive mills).

Festivals & Events

Amelia knows how to throw a party during its medieval *manifestazione* (event), the **Pallo dei Columbi**. Every August, teams comprised of neighbourhood residents vie against each other in competitions recorded in the municipal records from the 14th century. Knights and crossbowmen are paired up to attempt to shoot an arrow through a target, which then sets free a dove. Practically every resident of the town is in full costume. The wooden doors you see on the Porta Romana are closed only on this day each year.

Sleeping

It's rather amazing, but there is not one hotel or B&B in the entire town centre of Amelia. Thankfully, there's a fabulous hostel with family rooms as good as any hotel. Check with the Pro Loco (or the tourist office, but they're generally not as friendly or helpful) as to any new B&Bs or accommodation outside the town walls.

Ostello per la Gioventù Giustiniani (☎ 0744 97 86 73, 339 261 03 98; www.ostellogiustiniani.it; Piazza Mazzini 9; dm/f per person incl breakfast €16/18; ʘ 8-10am & 4pm-midnight 1 Apr-30 Sep; j) Whether bunking in a dorm room or with a friend in a two- or four-person family room, you'll appreciate the relaxing nature of this most comfortable of hostels. Double oak doors add to your sense of privacy. Lockout is virtually all day, so make sure you call ahead for a bed. An HI card is required, but can be issued upon arrival.

Eating

Be sure to try the local sweet *fichi girotti* at any shop in town. It's kind of like eating the hardened insides of a fig biscuit mixed with chocolate and nuts.

Osteria dei Cansacchi (☎ 0744 97 85 57; Piazza Cansacchi 4; meals €22; ʘ Thu-Tue) Set in a medieval atmosphere, this restaurant combines two excellent local delicacies by serving *bistecche di cinghiale e porcini* (wild boar with porcini mushrooms). Pizza is a good and inexpensive bet here, but the fish comes most highly recommended. For an excellent pasta dish, try the *tagliata tartufo*, home-made local pasta with black truffles.

La Gabelletta (☎ 0744 98 21 59; Str Tuderte Amerina 20; meals €25) Its signature dish is *pappardelle al sugo di lepre* (pasta with wild hare sauce).

Getting There & Away

Amelia is serviced by ATC Terni. Buses leave from in front of the main gate. From Amelia, nine buses travel daily to the centre of Narni, plus another 10 to Narni Scalo and the train station (€1.80, 30 minutes). Buses also travel to Orvieto (€4.40, one hour and 10 minutes, seven daily; check with the driver as to whether the bus stops at the train station or Piazza Cahen) and Terni (€2.80, one hour, 16 daily). To get to Perugia, switch in Terni.

Getting Around

Bypass the paid parking near the city-centre and head towards the tourist office. Veer right into the little street along the city walls. At the end of this road, head left under the bridge to

find a free car park. The entire town is within walking distance.

AROUND AMELIA

The area surrounding Amelia is known as the Amerino and has an untold amount of little treasures, natural and cultural. Holm-oak groves, ilex trees, and an ample amount of rivers and interesting geological terrain make this area worthy of a country drive. But Sundays and public holidays – when the museums are open and the rest of Umbria is closed – is the best time to visit.

In nearby Alviano you'll find the Lago di Alviano and Oasi di Alviano, which is more marshland than lake, formed when Lago di Corbara was dammed, and now a bird habitat. To go on a quest to learn about the *capitani di ventura*, journey to the Museo Storico Multimediale Bartolomeo d'Alviano e i Capitani di Ventura (☎ 0744 90 50 28, infoline 199 194 114; ʘ 10.30am-12.30pm year-round & 4.30-7.30pm Jul-Aug, 4-7pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 3-6pm Oct-Mar or by appt), which shares a castle with the Museo della Civiltà Contadina (Museum of Agricultural Heritage). Bartolomeo d'Alviano was a *capitani di ventura*. The Alviano family held a lot of clout over the centuries and was instrumental in building the Orvieto cathedral. Bartolomeo was so famous as a *capitano di ventura* that his likeness was minted on a Venetian coin.

CARSULAE

The most complete example of a Roman city in Umbria, Carsulae (☎ 0744 33 41 33; adult/concession €4.40/3.30; ʘ 8.30am-7.30pm 25 Mar-Sep, 8.30am-5.30pm Oct-24 Mar) isn't quite the size of Pompeii or Rome, but it does offer some spectacular Roman history in a beautiful setting. During the reign of Augustus in the 3rd century BC, Romans built the strategically important Via Flaminia. Carsulae was one of the many outposts systematically built along this Roman version of a highway. It was on the part of the road that joined Narnia to Vicus Martis Tudertium (Narni to the Todi region), so when reconstruction started on a more easterly route, Carsulae fell into decline. Then, barbarians from the north began using this part of the road to head towards Rome, and Carsulae had no chance.

To arrive here, take the road to Perugia from Terni. Look for the sign indicating SS75/San Gemini and you'll then see signs for Carsulae. The closest place to spend the night around Carsulae is in San Gemini.

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