

Umbria's 10 best towns, and the most amazing things to do in each one



Across Umbria you will find glorious countryside to wander, dotted with medieval villages that are likely to impress with a piazza, palazzo or cathedral Credit: GIULIA DE VECCHI

[Tim Jepson](#), Destination expert

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Travel experiences in Umbria are a combination of the cerebral and the sensual, from a plethora of art and architecture – sublime Renaissance paintings and glorious, honey-stoned churches and cathedrals – to excellent regional food and wine and the simple pleasures of wandering around medieval streets or through beautiful pastoral countryside. Better still, you can enjoy variations of these experiences in all of Umbria's many historic towns – all have one or more superb restaurants, say, or a wonderful little art gallery – as well as finding individual events, such as Spoleto's annual arts festival, which are among the most renowned of their kind in Italy and beyond.

Soak up medieval charm

Despite its small size, **Montefalco** offers a variety of amazing things to do and see: there are the views – the name means 'Falcon's Mount'; the local wine, such as the high-quality red Sagrantino di

Montefalco, with [vineyard visits](#) an option; and the charm of its medieval centre where there are a handful of tiny lanes and a stage set of a main square, the Piazza del Comune.

Insider tip: Most visitors to Umbria see Assisi and its famous frescoes: fewer know that Montefalco has an artistic gem, the [Museo Civico di San Francesco](#), with a sublime Renaissance fresco cycle on the Life of St Francis (1452) by Benozzo Gozzoli.

Contact: montefalcodoc.it



In Montefalco there are a wide range of architectural styles, especially in the churches, including Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance Credit: VICTORIA WILKINSON BROWNLESS

Explore a traditional Umbrian hillside town

Spello offers all the classic hill-town experiences, from wonderful medieval streets to explore to standout culture in the shape of vivid frescoes (1501) in [Santa Maria Maggiore](#) by Pinturicchio, and the [Pinacoteca Civica Diocesana](#), a classic small-town museum.

Insider tip: Don't try to drive in town. Instead, leave cars outside the walls in the car park at the top of town near the junction for Collepino and walk from there. Afterwards, drive to Collepino and over Monte Subasio for some glorious views.

Contact: turismo.comune.spello.pg.it



Simply wandering the ancient lanes of Spello is the best way to get to know the town
Credit: Hedda Gjerpen/ROMAOSLO

Indulge your artistic side

Experience a day of varied culture in Umbria's capital, **Perugia**, which is filled with fine Etruscan, Roman and medieval monuments, including one of Italy's finest Gothic palaces, the Palazzo dei Priori. This palace is home to the [Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria](#), a superb picture gallery of Umbria's best art, and the [Collegio del Cambio](#), with sumptuous frescoes by Perugino.

Insider tip: Secret corners of Perugia include the medieval Via dei Priori; San Severo church (which has a Raphael fresco); San Pietro church; the raised medieval walkway north from close to Piazza Morlacchi; and the pretty area around Via del Sole.

Contact: turismo.comune.perugia.it



Palazzo dei Priori was the seat of Perugia's 'first citizens' and houses a fine collection of Italian paintings Credit: JULIAN ELLIOTT PHOTOGRAPHY

Follow the footsteps of St Francis

Medieval and pink-stoned **Assisi** was the birthplace of St Francis and contains one of the region's key artistic attractions: admiring the frescoes of Giotto and others in the saint's burial place, the [Basilica di San Francesco](#). While you're here, check off other points on the St Francis trail – peaceful San Damiano, the Eremo delle Carceri and Basilica di Santa Chiara.

Insider tip: Assisi is among Italy's most popular pilgrimage centres and is busy. Many visitors, though, are day-trippers – stay the night and you'll find the streets quieter come evening. Use the extra time to drive or hike over Monte Subasio towards Collepinio and Spello.

Contact: visit-assisi.it



St Francis was born in Assisi, and Unesco-listed Basilica di San Francesco is the mother church of the Roman Catholic Order of Friars Minor Conventual Credit: TREVOR TINKER

Settle down in a tranquil town

Bevagna is an exception to Umbria's hilltop rule: a tiny serene town on the plain, gathered along a single main street that was once part of a Roman road. The simple main square, Piazza Silvestri, has two of the region's loveliest Romanesque churches: San Silvestro, from 1195, and the similarly venerable San Michele opposite.

Insider tip: There's not much to Bevagna, but its tranquility and position make it a good base for exploring, with a handful of fine hotels and restaurants tucked away in the charming backstreets that would be the envy of far larger towns.

Contact: prolocobevagna.it



The tranquility and location of Bevagna may be the major lures, but don't miss two lovely churches – San Silvestro and San Michele – just off the main square Credit: FRANCESCO IACOBELLI

Watch performance art in a piazza

Spoleto is one of the most charming Umbrian hill-towns, with plenty of medieval and Roman monuments, but aim to combine them with one of Italy's most magical cultural experiences: an outdoor opera, ballet or music recital under the stars in the magnificent Piazza del Duomo as part of the annual [Spoleto Festival](#), one of Italy's landmark cultural events each June and July.

Insider tip: Don't just admire the Ponte delle Torri, a huge medieval aqueduct on the edge of town, but walk across it and turn left on the easy trail through the woods. You'll come to fine views and peaceful olive groves in a matter of minutes.

Contact: umbriatourism.it



The annual Spoleto Festival, which offers opera, ballet and more, is one of the country's most impressive cultural occasions

Hike until you're hungry

Remote, mountain-ringed **Norcia** offers two out-of-the ordinary Umbrian experiences: some remarkable food – it is one of Italy's leading gastronomic centres, renowned for its truffles, ham, salamis, lentils, and cheeses – but also the chance for superlative hiking in the Sibillini mountains to the east. Maps are available in town and trails are well-marked and well-worn.

Insider tip: Come in late May or early June to see the celebrated wildflowers – poppies, narcissi, peonies and more – that cover the Piano Grande, a vast upland plain above Norcia. Note, though, that earthquake damage means facilities are limited in the nearby village of Castelluccio.

Contact: umbriatourism.it



From Norcia you can head east and hike through wildflowers to reach the Sibillini Mountains, where most peaks stand at more than 2,000 metres Credit: LUIGI ALESI

Ride a funicular for fabulous views

Gubbio's medieval appearance and the lovely mountainous backdrop, plus the relative lack of visitors, make this one of Umbria's most pleasing towns. Visit the imposing [Palazzo dei Consoli](#) and its gallery and adjoining Piazza Grande; the [Palazzo Ducale](#), built by Federigo da Montefeltro, the renowned Duke of Urbino; and take the exciting funicular ride to Mount Ingino above the town for fine views.

Insider tip: Walkers and outdoor enthusiasts, or drivers wanting a scenic hour or so, should head for the [Parco Regionale del Monte Cucco](#), which protects a portion of the high Apennines near Gubbio on the border with the Marche.

Contact: comune.gubbio.pg.it



Wander the lovely palazzi in Gubbio before heading high up on Mount Ingino for stunning views
Credit: MARGARET GARROU

Wander a tiny town's piazza

Tiny **Todi** sits atop a perfect pyramid of a hill and gathers around a perfect early medieval piazza. Cafés line the piazza's flanks, with the Duomo at one end and two palaces on its eastern side that house the excellent [Museo e Pinacoteca di Todi](#), with displays that trace the town's history from its Etruscan origins.

Insider tip: Most visitors walk past the church of San Fortunato – a mistake, because the interior is airy and pleasing, and you can climb the church bell tower for views over the town's rooftops and what seems like half of Umbria stretching to the horizon.

Contact: visitodi.eu



Cafés line the edge of Todi's piazza, with two palaces at one end with a museum inside
Credit: MARKUS LANGE / ROBERT HARDING

Admire a duomo's dazzling facade

Orvieto is perched spectacularly on an immense volcanic outcrop, its medieval skyline dominated by the magnificent [Duomo](#). This is one of Italy's most important historic buildings, thanks in part to its dazzling façade (300 years in the making), and partly because of Luca Signorelli's graphic frescoes (1499-1504) of The Last Judgement in the interior.

Insider tip: Orvieto's crag is riddled with 1200 caves, and tunnels that date back 3000 years to Etruscan times. Be sure to join one of the [guided tours](#) that take you on a fascinating odyssey through part of this labyrinth.

Contact: inorvieto.it



The 14th-century cathedral in Orvieto has a spectacular facade as well as two chapels adorned with frescoes depicting Judgment Day Credit: PAUL BOYDEN