



Umbrian Christmas

Perugia, Assisi, Arezzo, Gubbio, Spello and elsewhere

21–28 December 2022 (MI 596)

8 days • £3,320

Lecturer: Dr Michael Douglas-Scott

Based in Perugia, one of the largest, loveliest and artistically well-stocked of Italian hill towns – without the high-season crowds.

Also Assisi, Arezzo, Gubbio, Spello and other attractive mediaeval towns.

Art and architecture of the utmost importance and of memorable beauty, particularly from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Led by Dr Michael Douglas-Scott, specialist in the Italian Renaissance.

Perugia encapsulates everything that is best about ancient urban Umbria. It combines mediaeval and Renaissance architecture and art of the first rank with magically attractive streets, alleys and squares. Archetypical, age-old landscape can be glimpsed through alleys or surveyed from ramparts, a marriage of man-made and natural aesthetics that is enhanced around Christmas by the relative absence of non-residents. The little hilltop city remains a living, vibrant community.

On the whole, the region is not as popular with visitors as Italy's big-name cities and yet the artworks and buildings are among the most memorable and important in all Italy. Whoever it was who painted the major fresco cycle at Assisi (the Italian scholarly community now stands largely alone in insisting it was Giotto), it has been seen since Vasari as heralding a new millennium in the history of art. The Pisano family, Perugino, Pinturicchio and Piero della Francesca (though we pop over the border to Tuscany to see his greatest work) are among the other outstanding artists brilliantly represented here.

There are visits to the most attractive of the smaller towns in the region. Their compactness makes their cultural magnificence all the more striking, and intensifies the experience by providing glimpses between the buildings of the evocative countryside, with its hills, forests and solitary churches.



Perugia, Arco della Conca, etching by Albany Howarth c. 1910.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 12.45pm (British Airways) from London Heathrow to Rome Fiumicino and drive (3 hours) to Perugia.

Day 2: Perugia. Painting and sculpture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance dominate the morning. The civic fountain (1277–78) by Nicola and Giovanni Pisano is one of the masterpieces of mediaeval sculpture, while the otherworldly repose of Perugino's paintings can be well appreciated in his home town. The National Gallery of Umbria is housed in one of the most impressive mediaeval town halls in all Italy. An afternoon walk includes a rare Etruscan gateway (c. 200 BC), mediaeval city walls and the richly embellished Renaissance façade of the church of S. Bernardino.

Day 3: Gubbio. Spilling down a hillside and offering sensational views across the Umbrian countryside, Gubbio is one of the most beautiful and well preserved ancient towns in Italy. The Palazzo dei Consoli is an austere magnificent mediaeval town hall located beside a square with one side open to the view; it houses the art gallery of the Museo Civico. Higher up, the Palazzo Ducale was built by warlord Federico da Montefeltro, one of the greatest patrons of the arts in the Early Renaissance.

Day 4: Foligno, Montefalco. Known to the Romans as Fulginium, Foligno lies on the banks of the river Topino. It offers a range of exceptional attractions and yet is little known to tourists. See the restored palace of the Trinci family, lords of Foligno, and home to extensive frescoes now known to be the work of the greatest Italian master of International Gothic, Gentile da Fabriano. Continue to Montefalco, an even smaller hilltop community with magnificent views of the valley below and hills around. The Renaissance treat here is the fresco cycle by Benozzo Gozzoli in S. Francesco.

Day 5, Christmas Day: Perugia. The morning is free morning. After lunch, there is a meandering walk through some of Perugia's most beguiling streets and squares.

Day 6: Arezzo. Venture onto the plain of the River Arno in Tuscany to visit Arezzo, which once rivalled Florence for power and influence. Here in S. Francesco is Piero's greatest work, *The Legend of the True Cross* fresco cycle which was twenty years in the making. The capacious cathedral contains his *Mary Magdalen*. Other major sights include the Romanesque church of S. Maria della Pieve, location of an altarpiece by Pietro Lorenzetti (1320) and the house of the 16th-century artist and art historian Giorgio Vasari.

Umbrian Christmas
continued

Day 7: Assisi. Of austere beauty, Assisi is one of the most consistently mediaeval and captivatingly lovely of Italian hilltop towns. It was the birthplace of St Francis, who in the early 13th century transformed the nature of Christian piety (his legacy includes the Christmas crib). Mother church of the Franciscan Order, S. Francesco, contains the greatest assembly of mediaeval fresco painting in the world. The churches of S. Chiara and the cathedral are both of noble simplicity.

Day 8: Perugia. Some free time in Perugia before leaving around noon for the drive to Rome Airport. Return to Heathrow c. 7.00pm.

Lecturer

Dr Michael Douglas-Scott. Associate Lecturer in History of Art at Birkbeck College, specialising in 16th-century Italian art and architecture. He studied at the Courtauld and Birkbeck College, University of London and lived in Rome for several years. He has written articles for *Arte Veneta*, *Burlington Magazine* and the *Journal of the Warburg & Courtauld Institutes*.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,320 or £3,040 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,630 or £3,350 without flights.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Airbus 320); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation; breakfasts; 2 lunches and 4 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer.

Accommodation. Hotel Brufani Palace, Perugia (brufanipalace.com): all nights are spent at the Hotel Brufani Palace, a grand 5-star hotel five minutes' walk from the main square in Perugia. Situated on the edge of the hill-top historical centre, it has spectacular views down over the surrounding countryside. There is a good restaurant, small indoor pool and roof terrace. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? Many visits take place in hill towns, with very steep, uneven inclines leading from the coach park. Agility and sure-footedness are particularly essential. There is a lot of coach travel. Average distance by coach per day: 65 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.