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Dipping a Toe into Lake Trasimeno

SPECIAL REPORT: UMBRIA DREAM OF ITALY®



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Dining the Umbrian Way

Like all of Italy's regions, Umbria has its own unique cuisine based on the bounty of the land and years of culinary traditions. The food of this land-locked, traditionally rural region stems from *la cucina contadina* (the farmer's kitchen). These peasant recipes focus on simple, fresh ingredients. Each region of Italy seems to have its own unique types of pasta and Umbria is no different. Key staples in Umbrian cuisine are olive oil, truffles, pasta and meat from lamb, pigeon and pigs.



foodista.flickr.com

roasted on a spit (*la porchetta*). Umbrian pork sausages (*capocollo*) and *prosciutto* are famous throughout Italy. Umbrians get their fresh fish from Lake Trasimeno.

Umbria's cuisine has deep roots. The tradition of pressing olives for oil started with the Etruscans, the ancient inhabitants of this land, and Umbrian oil can certainly give its famous Tuscan neighbors a run for their money. Many of Umbria's tantalizing sweets were developed in honor of religious celebrations. After all, this is the home of *St. Francis of Assisi*.

Ready to taste some authentic Umbrian food? The following restaurants offer four unique viewpoints and truly satisfying dining experiences.

Lago di Trasimeno, Central Italy's largest lake, lies between Rome and Florence. It could be right on your way — wherever you are going in *Tuscany* and *Umbria*. In fact, it is conveniently located between what I consider the two great gems of this part of Italy — the Tuscan hill town of *Cortona* and the Umbrian capital of *Perugia*.

Rome, Venice, Florence, *Lake Trasimeno*, I've had to talk friends out of seeing all of them. Because they were trying to see them all. In the same week. People! Get a grip. It's supposed to be a vacation — not an episode of *The Amazing Race*.

Take small bites. Savor. Look around. Enjoy that second cup of *cappuccino*. That's when it will all start coming together. For me, the "real Italy" of story and legend is often located at the ends of roads much less traveled.

Maybe that's why for the past 10 years, many of those roads for me personally have led to and from *Panicale*. In an impulsive moment after a long and happy vacation here, my wife and I bought a wobbly wreck and ruin of a house. We bought it because we couldn't imagine not having its view of this magnificent lake.

From our windows we can see the *Chiesa della Madonna della Sbarra*, (Church of the Barrier) built in 1625. Its name was due to the toll bar that was on the adjacent road where travelers in

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Umbria is called "the green and sacred land."

Rent a Home Away

Fattoria del Gelso

As the owners of *Bella Italia*, a successful Italian gourmet and ceramics store in Bethesda, Maryland, Suzy and Bill Menard found themselves spending plenty of time in *Deruta*, Umbria's ceramics capital, sourcing imports for their store. In time it made sense to look for an Umbrian villa to use for both their own frequent visits and as the centerpiece for the travel services they hoped to add to their store's offerings.

They settled on *Fattoria del Gelso*, a former *agriturismo* on 90 acres in the town of the *Cannara*, just a few minutes from *Assisi*. For the Menards, its location and size were key selling points. While the fattoria is part of a small farm (growing the famous Cannara onions, which are protected by the Slow Food organization), it is also within walking distance of the charming town center. Plus it is perfectly situated for an easy and quick drive to a number of towns including *Perugia*, *Spello*, *Bevagna* and more.

On the first floor of Fattoria del Gelso, there's a large main living and dining room as well as a commercial kitchen, laundry facilities and a TV room. With eight bedrooms, this villa can easily accommodate 16 people, but the layout works well to give everyone privacy. Most of the bedrooms are upstairs via an outdoor staircase. This means that wine drinking and merriment can take place in the



living room long into the night without disturbing anyone's sleep.



There's always someone available to call 24 hours a day and if guests would

like meals prepared at the villa, for an additional fee, their incredible cook *Teresa* can whip up Umbrian meals not to be forgotten (in fact, guests *should* partake in at least one of Teresa's meals).

Those who want a truly unforgettable Umbrian experience should join one of Suzy and Bill's small group tours, which are based at Fattoria del Gelso. Their Umbria Jazz and Umbria Food and Wine tours are well-priced, packed with authentic regional experiences and led by two of the most gracious hosts to be found in Umbria.

While Fattoria del Gelso offers an ideal location and warm and welcoming décor (the *Deruta* ceramics throughout the house and around the pool are particularly lovely), even better, it comes with a network of wonderful people, starting with its vivacious owners. For Suzy and Bill, introducing people to the wonders of Umbria isn't a business, it truly is a passion. Through their vast network of Umbrian contacts, they can help their guests arrange every aspect of their visits from vineyard visits to restaurant reservations to private guides.

Fattoria del Gelso



Cannara (10 minutes from Assisi, 20 minutes from Perugia)
(202) 957-3811
www.experienceumbria.com

Rates: 2,500 to 4,000 € per week, depending on the season.

Features: Eight bedrooms, six full bathrooms, two half-bathrooms, screened windows, swimming pool, bicycles, washing machine, satellite television, desktop computer for guest use, free Wi-Fi.

Experience Umbria Tours

Umbria Jazz

This tour focuses on the Umbrian music event of the year and includes four nights' accommodations at Fattoria del Gelso, tickets to three concerts, transportation to concerts, two city tours, daily breakfast and either lunch or dinner daily. 1,500€ per person, based on double occupancy

July 10 to 15 or July 15 to 20, 2009
(2010 dates coming soon)

Umbria Food and Wine

This eating and drinking extravaganza includes six nights' accommodations at Fattoria del Gelso, all meals and transportation. The itinerary includes visits to vineyards, an olive oil harvest, truffle hunting, a visit to Perugia's Eurochocolate festival, trip to Norcia and several cooking classes. Note that many of the restaurants and vineyards in this special report are featured in this tour. 1,500€ per person, based on double occupancy

October 24 to 30, 2009

Umbria is named for the Umbri tribe w

From Home in Umbria

Il Casale di Mele Rosse

Canadians Deborah and Luigi Mele fell in love with Umbria 15 years ago when they were living in Milan. Like many others they found the region to have all of the beauty and charm of Tuscany without the crowds of tourists. When Luigi retired last year, the couple decided the time was right to build their own villa in Umbria and focused on an area between *Todi* and *Perugia*.

"While touring with our builder last summer looking at lots to build on, he happened to mention that the two farmhouses across the street from the lot we were looking at were for sale," explains Deborah. "At the time, we were not looking to buy two houses but they looked great so we made an appointment to walk through them. As soon as we saw the inside and the property around we knew we were meant to own them."

Now the Meles spend half of the year in Florida and the other half at their new Umbrian home, offering for rent the twin three-bedroom farmhouse 150 feet away.

"At this time we are only renting when we are in Italy as we want to help the guests' stay at our farmhouse to be as complete as possible. We have rented many vacation places in Italy ourselves in the past, and most often we were handed a key and left to completely fend for ourselves," Deborah says.



The Meles like to welcome their guests with a tasting of Umbrian wines by the pool. They've tried to cover every detail when it comes to helping guests enjoy their stay, the most helpful of which may be the pre-programmed Tom-Tom GPS navigational device they lend to their renters. It is pre-coded with directions to local sites, grocery stores, restaurants, gas stations and much more.

"My husband is fluent in Italian so will be available to help with anything that

comes up like making restaurant reservations, or helping guests find a medical clinic. Although we will give our guests their privacy, we will be right next door if they need us for anything."

Though constructed just a few years ago, *Il Casale di Mele Rosse* incorporates traditional regional design and materials including antique doors, heavy chestnut beams and hand-forged ironwork and antique stone fireplaces. The large open living room, featuring both a fireplace and flat-screen television, is connected to the lovely kitchen through a broad archway.

Those with dreams of scouring local markets for fresh ingredients and returning to

the farmhouse to whip up an amazing meal will not be disappointed with the tools provided in the kitchen. There's a high-end gas cooktop, wall oven, microwave oven, dishwasher and a commercial size refrigerator/freezer.

Those who like to do their cooking and dining *al fresco*, will find a barbeque on the large stone-covered terrace just through the French-style kitchen doors. There's an outdoor table offering seating for eight as well as proximity to the sweet-smelling jasmine and ample olive trees.

Deborah, who is an accomplished cook and runs the wonderful recipe Web site www.italianfoodforever.com, plans to make her culinary talents available to

rental guests. She will soon offer cooking classes and prepare meals for renters for an extra fee.

Il Casale di Mele Rosse sleeps seven in three bedrooms and a pull-out couch in the study. Two of the three bedrooms have en-suite bathrooms with something not always found in Italian rentals – large bath tubs. So grab a glass of wine and some bubble bath, throw open the villa windows to smell the lavender and rosemary outside and soak in all Umbria and *Mele Rosse* have to offer.

—K.M.

Read about our third villa choice on page 12

Il Casale di Mele Rosse



Piedicolle (15 minutes from Deruta, 20 minutes from Todi and Perugia, respectively) www.umbrian-farmhouse.com
Available May through October.

Rates: Range from 2,400 to 2,700€ per week, depending on the season.

Features: Three bedrooms, three bathrooms, study with pull-out couch, swimming pool, satellite television, DVD player, free Wi-Fi, screened windows, pre-programmed GPS device, washing machine, welcome gift basket, Umbrian wine tasting.

ho settled here in the 6th century B.C.

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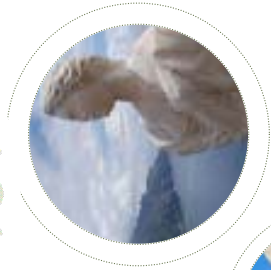
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