

Duncan Campbell



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# DREAM OF ITALY®

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## LE MARCHE: *Italy in One Region*



ut in the rolling hills of central Italy is a tunnel – fairly innocuous at first sight – that saves the country road from having to circumvent a rocky spur in the landscape. Look a little closer, though, and you’ll notice that the roof and walls are not smooth; they’re grooved, as if hewn by hand. As it turns out, it was – manually chiseled by the agents of *Emperor Vespasian* in 76 A.D. It’s a remarkable feat of Roman engineering, and yet it simply stands out there, unannounced – no signs, just a tunnel.

Continue through it to the road’s terminus at *Fano* on the Adriatic, and you’ll find another marvel of Roman heritage, this one more prominently signposted – a stone arch built

by Augustus in 2 A.D., standing triumphant just as it has for more than two millennia.

Pass through the arch and you’ll find a bustling seaport and beach resort where you can wander into the past through the *centro storico’s* ancient alleys ... laze on the ocean’s sandy shore ... join the locals on their unhurried evening *passeggiata* ... and finish off the day dining in leisure on a sumptuous plate of today’s catch. Not bad for a place that doesn’t feature on many tourist maps.

Better still, it’s just one of a host of attractions in one of Italy’s most diverse, beguiling and unsung regions  
*continued on page 2*



Conero Riviera

## *Buy a Share of Tuscany*

Whether you dream of living like Renaissance nobility in *Florence* or living the rustic life of an agricultural community in the Tuscan countryside, you can buy a piece of your dream life in Italy. While everyone enjoys reading about buying and restoring wonderful old stone houses, not everyone has the patience, not to mention the cash flow, to buy her own *palazzo*. And no matter how much you love Italy, you may not spend enough time there each year to justify owning a large house that will sit empty most of the time.



Tornabuoni

Now there is a way to have your *tiramisu* and eat it too. Innovative plans that restore historic properties and then sell shares, allow you to choose between owning a deed to, say, one-eighth of an apartment in *Florence* or owning a share in a club that allows you all the privileges of luxury surroundings for a few weeks each year.

The first choice, purchase of fractional real estate, gives you a deed for your share (often one-eighth to one-tenth), so you can sell the real estate or leave it to your children and grandchildren. Someone else takes care of decorating and maintenance and provides amenities like personal shoppers, transportation, spas and concierge service. Family members and friends can use the property just as they could stay in your home – because it *is* your home.

Fractional real estate accompanied by  
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# The Le Marche town of Caudino has only one inhabitant.

— *Le Marche* (pronounced ‘Lay Markay’).

### A Distillation of Italy

The Italians have known about Le Marche for years, particularly its sun-kissed Adriatic waters, which they swarm to every July and August. But beyond that, it remains off the tourist radar, although that’s been changing recently.

Bordered to the west by the Apennine mountains and *Umbria*, to the north by *Emilia Romagna* and the independent state of *San Marino*, to the south by *Abruzzo*, and to the east by the Adriatic, Le Marche boasts a diversity that few other regions can match. In his 1957 book *Viaggio in Italia*, *Guido Piovene* had this to say: “Italy, with its range of landscapes, is a distillation of the world; the Marche is a distillation of Italy.”

There’s surprise and delight around each corner. In between the pebble and sand beaches on its 112-mile coastline and the peaks of the *Sibillini* range lies a variety of character, culture, and cuisine that turns each day’s experiences into a journey of discovery.

### Le Marche’s Heartland

From the rugged environs of its highest elevations in the Apennines, you look out over a panorama sculpted for an artist’s easel — wave upon wave of green and on virtually every hill a town of tradition, charm, and antiquity: the centro storico with its narrow, winding, brick-and-cobble

streets ... churches with priceless paintings and frescoes left for posterity by hallowed and unknown artists alike ... unassuming *ristoranti* serving hearty country fare just like *nonna* (granny) makes it ... and its center of life, the piazza, with its ubiquitous *Bar Centrale* where old men meet to drink espresso,

play cards, and pass their days in smoky conversation.

The region’s jewel in the crown is *Urbino*, northern university town and birthplace of

Renaissance master, *Raphael*. The fairytale twin towers of the *Palazzo Ducale* provide the approaching visitor with a mesmerizing taste of what’s to come, not only in the palace — one of the most beautiful of its kind in Italy — but also in its animated piazzas, its steep warren of streets, and its hidden pearls of art and history.

The town owes its World Heritage status to its most prominent patrician, *Duke Federico da Montefeltro*

who, in the 15th century, surrounded himself with the leading artists of the day, conducting one of the most illustrious courts in all of Europe. In the *Galleria Nazionale delle Marche*, you’ll find works by *Piero della Francesca* (the inscrutable *Flagellation of Christ* among them), *Raphael* (*La Muta – The Silent One*), and the alluring and unattributed *Ideal City*.

At the opposite end of the region lies *Ascoli Piceno*, capital of the southernmost province of the same name. A city of quiet elegance and style, it boasts one of the most breathtaking piazzas in all of Italy. Every August, its travertine flagstones play host to an authentic medieval jousting festival. Arcaded courtyards, the imposing Gothic church of *San Francesco*, and works by *Carlo Crivelli* (look for the *Madonna and Saints* in the *Duomo*) give further impetus for exploration.

The appeal of the heartland of Marche isn’t all art, history, and tradition. Out in the countryside of central Marche is Europe’s largest single cavern, the *Grotta Grande del Vento* (the Great Cave of the Wind) — with a height of 787 feet, it would comfortably accommodate Milan’s towering cathedral. It is part of the *Frasassi* network of caves, one of the largest on the continent, estimated to extend some 22 miles. You can see about a mile of it, with an impressive light show highlighting some of the most spectacular stalagmites and stalactites you’re likely to see anywhere.

Changing gears again back into the cultural realm, one of the world’s leading opera festivals takes place in *Macerata*, capital of the central province of the same name. Each summer dazzling productions are put on in one of Italy’s most stunning outdoor theaters, the *Sferisterio*. Funded by private subscription in the 1820s, the



Italian Government Tourism Board

Urbino

## LE MARCHE



Le Marche has 115 theaters, one

in the Apennines, you look out over a panorama sculpted for an artist's easel..."

7,000-capacity neoclassical arena is built into the walls of the centro storico, itself a reason to visit with its Renaissance arcades and palaces of refined dignity.

### Sea, Sun, Sand and History

The northern coastal city of *Pesaro* plays host to another of Le Marche's world-renowned opera festivals, this one in honor of the city's most famous son, *Gioachino Rossini*. Each August works from his legendary repertoire, among them *The Barber of Seville* and *William Tell*, are performed to sell-out audiences. But there's a lot more to Pesaro than opera. With its origins dating back to a thriving Roman colony in the 2nd century B.C., today you can find remnants of the reign of the powerful *Sforza* family, among them

Bellini's *Coronation of the Virgin*. Like its neighbor Fano to the south, Pesaro is also a popular seaside resort — though its attractive beaches rarely get overcrowded — and a thriving fishing port.

Further down the coast, midway between Pesaro and the region's capital, Ancona, lies the famous "Velvet Beach" of Senigallia, its eight miles of fine, golden sands attracting sun-seekers ever since sea bathing came into vogue among the middle-upper classes in the mid-19th century.

Porticoes housing the famous "Fiery Franca," and the daily fish and veg-



Ascoli Piceno



Sarnano

etable market dating back to the 19th century, its primary draw is the beach.

While much of Le Marche's coastline is flat and sedate, one stretch stands out as a bold and dramatic departure from the

norm. Just south of Ancona, the chalky-white cliffs of *Monte Conero* plunge precipitously down into turquoise waters, their forest-clad slopes sheltering isolated coves and sparkling sands unique

along the entire eastern shoreline of the Adriatic.

*Puortonuovo*, *Sirolo* and *Numana* are all names that Italian lovers of idyllic

*continued on page 4*

## Where to Stay

### Ascoli Piceno

The plush rooms of the 4-star *Residenza 100 Torri* (Via C. Mazzoni, 6; 39-0736-255123; www.centotorri.com) are the refurbished stables and workshops of a 13th-century mansion that belongs to a family of Ascoli nobility.

Located in the historic district, it has a glassed-in winter garden with marble fountains, providing welcome comfort after a healthy walk through the city's historic alleys.

### Macerata

Within earshot of the city's famous Sferisterio arena is the 3-star *Albergo Arena* (Vicolo Sferisterio, 16; 39-0733-230931; www.albergoarena.com). Built within the city walls, a double room will cost 55 to 85€, with breakfast.

### Pesaro

The 17th Century *Villa Cattani Stuart* (Via Trebbiantico, 67; 39-0721-55782; www.villacattani.it) sits amidst verdant gardens adorned with fountains, statuary, and colorful flowerbeds. Bed and breakfast at this 4-star property ranges from 55 to 130€/per person.

### Sirolo

At the heart of the Conero Riviera, Sirolo is a popular summer town with a balcony piazza providing stunning views up and down the coast. Here the small, comfortable 2-star *Hotel il Parco* (Via Giuiletti, 58; 39-071-9330733; www.hotelilparco.it) will run you 35 to 60€ for bed and breakfast or 55 to 80€ (half-board) per person.

### Sarnano

Connected to the Novidra Health and Beauty Centre through a heated tunnel, the 3-star *Eden Hotel* (39-0733.657197; www.hoteleden.3000.it) is located in a pine forest overlooking the old medieval town. You'll pay 55 to 85€ for a double room with breakfast.

### Urbino

The 4-star *Albergo San Domenico* (Piazza Rinascimento 3, tel: 39.(0)722.2626, www.viphotels.it) offers rooms in a refurbished 14th-century monastery in the town's main square. A double room costs from 112 to 194€/per night. A more economic choice is the 3-star *Albergo Italia* (Corso Garibaldi, 31; 39-0722-2701; www.albergo-italia-urbino.it) at 65 to 115€ for a double, breakfast included.

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# for every 15,000 inhabitants.

beach locales will know instantly, and yet at the height of the season, you'll easily find a decent patch to pitch your beach towel and your parasol. Knowing that traces of the region's earliest human settlements, dating back 100,000 years, were found atop Monte Conero, and that the origins of the port at Numana go back to the 8th century B.C., will add another dimension to the place as you contemplate life's challenges from the strategic vantage of your beach towel.



Piano Grande



Sibillini Mountains

### Magical, Mystical Mountains

Going back inland, the Sibillini mountains of the central Apennines offer a wide range of alpine activity, from hiking and cycling, to fishing and skiing. Hardwoods cling to the steep slopes, giving way above the tree line to windswept, elemental ridges affording views into forever. It's also a place of mystique, with legends of fairies, fauns, and magic permeating its ravines with lore that still lives strongly in the mountain villages today.

The mountains supposedly get their name from the *Cumean Sibyl*, priestess and guide to the underworld, who according to legend took refuge here in the Cave of the Furies with its hundred mouths. It is said that her whispers will echo for all eternity. There are many variants to these tales, giving rise to some celebrated works, most notable among them Wagner's *Tannhäuser*.

Another legend involves an innocuous-looking tarn, steel blue in its stark surroundings, nestled in a bowl deep in the craggy reaches of the Apennine

peaks. It's called *Lago di Pilato*, and it's claimed that the lifeless body of *Pontius Pilate* was, in fulfillment of his last living request, dragged on a cart by buffaloes into its "demoniac" waters. Another version claims that a lake of blood-red water formed here at the precise moment of the Crucifixion. Whatever the case, it'll take about four hours hiking from the village of Foce, and it is well worth the effort.

Not far from Pilate's lake is

a canyon that splits the mountains, an awesome creation of the River *Tenna*. Within it runs a path that at one time was *the* road to Rome. Today it's the home of a hermit monk living in a church that he built by hand, perhaps a fitting fixture in a chasm that goes by the name *Gola de Infernaccio* (Hell's Gorge). Just over the ridge lies the almost surreal *Piano Grande*, an awesome alpine plain famous for its thin-skinned lentil.

Perhaps the best base from which to explore the mountains is *Sarnano*, a lively town midway between Macerata and Ascoli Piceno. In addition to a medieval section that crawls up the steep hill to its high point at the enchanting *Piazza Alta*, Sarnano is also a spa town.

### Carve Your Own Trail of Discovery

The best way to see Le Marche is to rent a car and take to its serpentine roads. On your travels between the major attractions, you'll create stories of your own that will, as promised, surprise and delight you. If you're truly serious about Italy, you need to get serious about Le Marche.

—Duncan Campbell

*Duncan Campbell is a freelance writer who heralds from South Africa, and now lives in rural Le Marche with his German wife and American-born son. He chronicles their adventures at [duncanc.blogspot.com](http://duncanc.blogspot.com).*

### Where to Eat

#### On the Coast

##### Ancona

Osteria del Pozzo  
Via Bonda, 2  
(39) 071 2073996  
Closed Sunday.  
Great value in a town known for its seafood.

##### Fano

Al Pesce Azzurro  
Viale Adriatico, 48  
(39) 0721 803165  
[www.pesceazzurro.com](http://www.pesceazzurro.com)  
Open April through October, noon to 2 p.m. and 7:30 to 10 p.m. Closed Monday in April, May, September and October.  
A superb-value, self-service restaurant in the harbor run by a cooperative of fishermen's wives.

##### San Benedetto del Tronto.

Da Vittorio  
Via Manara, 102  
(39) 0735 583344  
[www.davittorio.net](http://www.davittorio.net)  
Fabulous *brodetto* — a specialty of the area, it's a soup consisting of precisely 13 species of fish.

#### Inland

##### Ascoli Piceno

Cantina dell'Arte  
Rua della Lupa, 8  
(39) 0736 251135  
[www.cantinadellarte.it](http://www.cantinadellarte.it)  
Closed Wednesday.  
Large portions served in an old palace in the historic district.

##### Macerata

Da Secondo  
Via Pescheria Vecchia  
(39) 0733 260912  
An integral part of the city's fabric serving regional specialties.

##### Sarnano

La Marchigiana  
Via Camponotico  
(39) 0733 657314  
[www.la-marchigiana.com](http://www.la-marchigiana.com)  
Justifiably popular, with a traditional open fire for grilling meats.

##### Urbino

Taverna degli Artisti  
Via Bramante, 52  
(39) 0722 2676  
Creative menu of tasty local dishes and pizza.