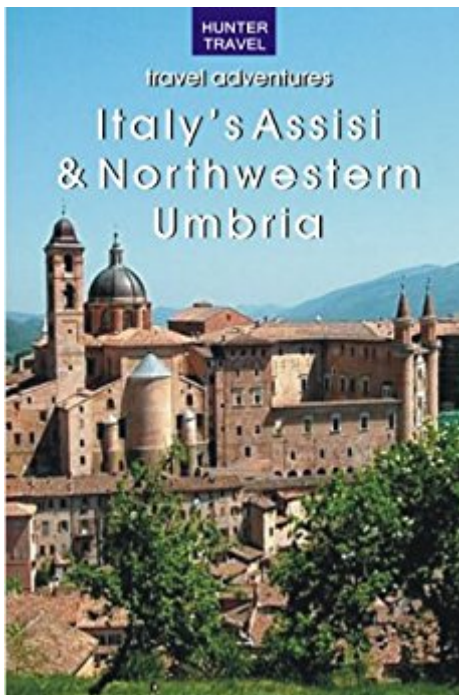


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Italy's Assisi & Northwestern Umbria



Synopsis

Beautifully situated in the medieval heart of Umbria, Assisi is one of the most popular sightseeing and pilgrimage destinations in Italy. Not only does it have an historical center of distinguished monuments, collections of art and breathtaking views of the surrounding countryside, but it sits on the doorstep of the Parco Regionale Monte Subasio (Mt Subasio Regional Park). It is also tied with the legacy of its best-known son, St Francis. While the ancient Umbrian city of Asisum left a priceless legacy of Etruscan and Roman structures, it was the town's most famous monk who transformed Assisi into a site of immense architectural and artistic importance. Many of the greats of the high Middle Ages and the Renaissance were drawn to Assisi from all over Italy, and outstanding works of Umbrian painting and sculpture adorn every church, cathedral and palace. Basilica di San Francesco e Sacro Convento is the city's undisputed jewel, located west of the historical center. Built just after the death of St Francis in 1228, it comprises two churches - one built above the other - and a crypt dug in 1818 to house the Saint's tomb. Entered via a courtyard built by Pope Sixtus IV with magnificent views over the surrounding countryside, the dark lower church has striking late Romanesque vaulting and frescoes by some of the greatest painters of the 13th and 14th centuries, including Cimabue, the Lorenzetti brothers and Simone Martini; the upper church is Italy's earliest Gothic church, and is decorated with Giotto's famous cycle of 28 frescoes telling the stories and legends of the life of St Francis. Just outside of Assisi, one of the most picturesque towns in Umbria, Gubbio conserves an almost intact medieval historical center and a fabulous natural location, at the foot of Mt Ingino. On its doorstep is the Parco Regionale Monte Cucco, a range of limestone massif popular with hikers, cavers and hang-gliders, and the lower-lying fertile river valley of the Alto Chiascio. Part of the Apennine mountain range, the 25,000-acre Mt Cucco Regional Park occupies the northeast part of the region. Crossed by the Via Flaminia and the Sentino and Chiascio rivers, the rocky slopes peak with Mt Cucco - one of the highest points in Umbria. The land is rich with wildlife. Mt Cucco offers some of the loveliest mountain walking in the province, with medium-level trails taking you through woods and meadows, and up the rounded summits of the Apennine ridge. There are over 30 trails marked in the district, many of which depart from Costacciaro. Near the border between Umbria and Mare, the town of Gualdo Tadino sits at the foot of the Central Apennines just above the foundations of the original Umbrian, then Roman, town of Tadinum. This town of rich history was razed to the ground by Hannibal in 217 BC, sacked by the troops of Julius Caesar in 49 BC, suffered various barbarian invasions and was the site where the Byzantine army defeated Goth King Totila, bringing the Gothic-Byzantine war to an end (552). What survived all of that was finally destroyed by fire, and the whole town was moved up the hill and rebuilt in 1273. A

walk around town will take you past the Romanesque-Gothic facade of the Cattedrale di San Benedetto, with three arched portals and double rose window on the exterior, a 14th-century Crucifix, a fresco by Matteo da Gualdo, and the relics of patron saint, Beato Angelico, in the interior. This is just a tiny fraction of the sites and activities that are detailed in this guide. All the places to stay and eat are covered, how to get around, what to see and do, and much more.

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