

Art and Culture.

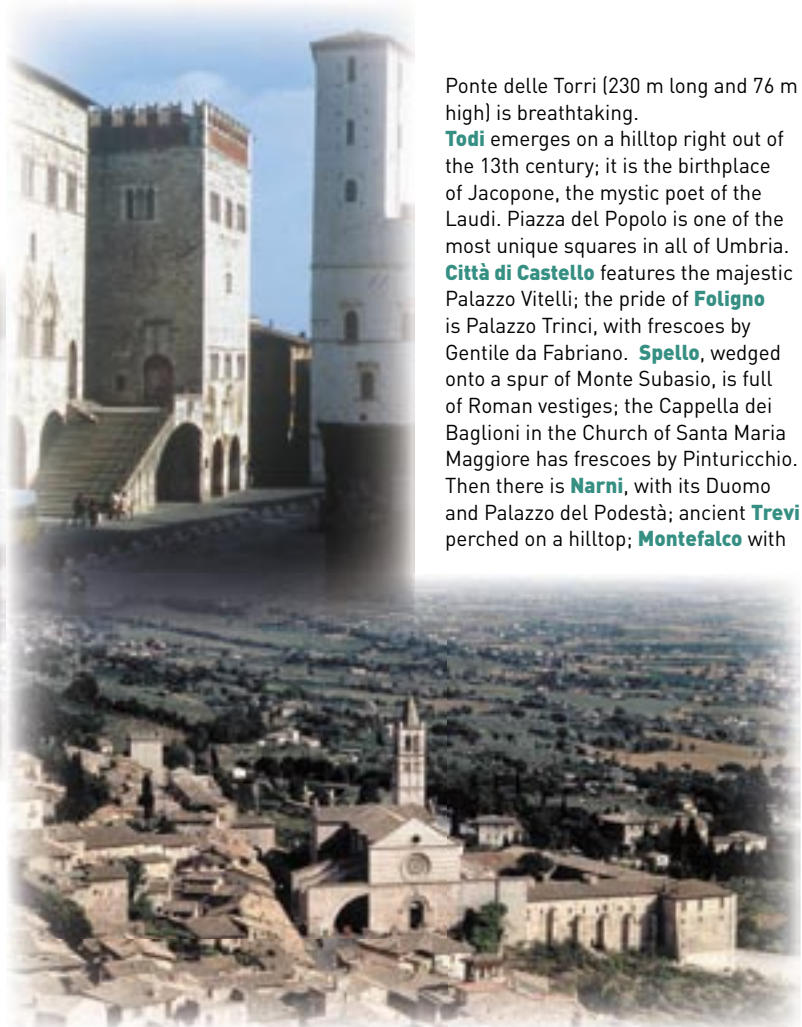
A journey amongst architectural splendours, masterpieces of art, and cultural events

The beauty of Umbria is seductive and at times seems quite perfect. The secret lies in the splendid balance between man and nature, in the bond that Umbrians have always had with their land and their rich past. In the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, it was a pulsating region at the heart of Italian historical, cultural, and religious events, and its cities flourished in an extraordinary manner, accumulating an enormous wealth of artistic jewels. So it is entirely natural that the cities of Umbria attract tourists and travellers who are thirsty for beauty.

Perugia, sitting atop an irregular hillside, is the region's largest city of art. Most of its treasures are enclosed in the historical nucleus, delineated by the Etruscan walls. Piazza IV Novembre is the fulcrum: in its centre lies the beautiful Fontana Maggiore, symbol of Perugia, and around it stand the Gothic cathedral and the magnificent Palazzo dei Priori, which houses the Collegio del Cambio, with frescoes by Perugino, and the National Gallery of Umbria, chock full of masterpieces (sculptures by Arnolfo di Cambio and paintings by Piero della Francesca, Duccio di Buonisegna, Fra Angelico, Pinturicchio, and more). Isolated at the top of a tufa cliff, **Orvieto** emanates a unique fascination and captivating beauty for the millions of tourists who visit the city each year. Its fame is mainly tied to the Duomo, one of the absolute masterpieces of Italian Gothic architecture. The façade with rose window and relief sculptures by Lorenzo Maitani is magnificent, and Luca Signorelli's fresco cycle *The Last Judgement* in the Cappella di San Brizio is unforgettable. The most important public buildings include Palazzo del Popolo, returned to its original splendour by a painstaking restoration. Also of particular interest



is the Pozzo di San Patrizio. Held tightly between its walls, **Assisi** is a magical place, and the fact that practically nothing has changed since the Middle Ages has kept its enchantment intact. One cannot help but admire the Basilica of San Francesco, one of the most famous sites of Christianity. It is composed of two churches one above the other: the lower church, which holds the tomb of the saint, is decorated with frescoes by Simone Martini, Cimabue, and Lorenzetti; the upper church features frescoes by Cimabue and in particular a cycle on the life of St. Francis, comprising twenty-eight paintings by Giotto or artists supervised by him. From the Basilica, Via al Santo leads to Piazza del Comune, which holds Palazzo dei Priori and the Temple of Minerva. Other important sites include the Basilica of Santa Chiara, the Cathedral of San Rufino, and the Rocca Maggiore. Visiting **Gubbio** is like stepping back in time. Noble and imposing, the city is situated at various heights on the slope of Monte Ingino, and is criss-



Ponte delle Torri (230 m long and 76 m high) is breathtaking.

Todi emerges on a hilltop right out of the 13th century; it is the birthplace of Jacopone, the mystic poet of the Laudi. Piazza del Popolo is one of the most unique squares in all of Umbria. **Città di Castello** features the majestic Palazzo Vitelli; the pride of **Foligno** is Palazzo Trinci, with frescoes by Gentile da Fabriano. **Spello**, wedged onto a spur of Monte Subasio, is full of Roman vestiges; the Cappella dei Baglioni in the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore has frescoes by Pinturicchio. Then there is **Narni**, with its Duomo and Palazzo del Podestà; ancient **Trevi** perched on a hilltop; **Montefalco** with

crossed by stairways and marvellous medieval streets. Palazzo Pretorio and the lovely Palazzo dei Consoli face onto Piazza Grande; climbing to the highest part of the city, you reach the Gothic Duomo and Palazzo Ducale, a fine example of Renaissance elegance. **Spoleto** is a dense agglomerate of grey stone set into the green surroundings. Its austere mass conceals charming views and numerous architectural treasures. In addition to the zone of the Roman Forum and certain notable churches, one of the most important sites is the Romanesque Duomo (13th c.), which sets off a lovely piazza. Its façade is truly a masterpiece. Outside the town centre, the colossal 14th-century

the Museo Civico di San Francesco and frescoes by Benozzo Gozzoli; **Bevagna** with Piazza Silvestri, a wonderful slice of the Middle Ages. But apart from the most well known cities, every town in Umbria holds wonderful surprises in store. Churches, palaces, museums, sculptures, bas-reliefs, frescoes, and paintings are all part of the history of Umbria. Another itinerary full of surprises and legends is to visit the many castles and fortresses. Arising from practical needs for defence, given the constant coming and going of armies through Umbria, these strongholds integrated perfectly with the landscape of cities and countryside alike, leaving an extraordinary

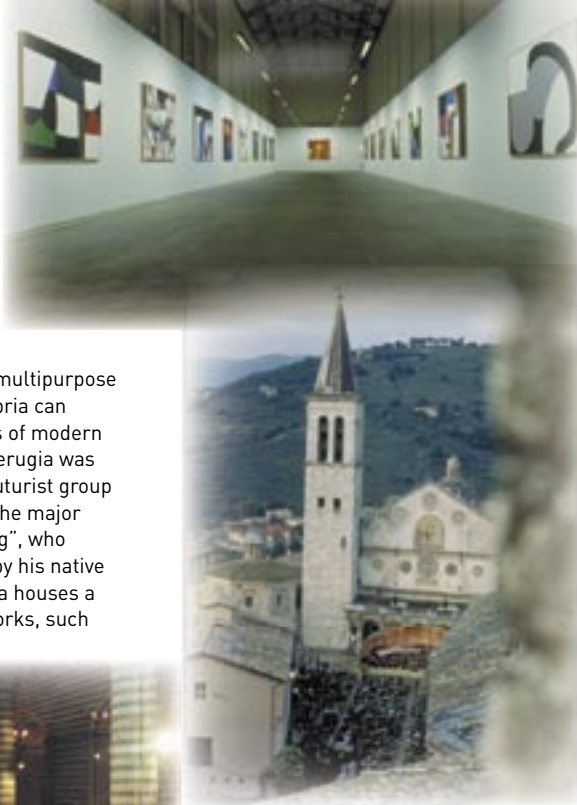
heritage. One of the most beautiful is the **Castle of Alviano**, guardian of the Tiber valley. Built in the late 15th century by the condottiere Bartolomeo d'Alviano, it has maintained its majesty over the centuries. The **Rocca di Assisi** was destroyed in 1198, rebuilt in the 14th century, and then underwent further modifications, without losing its austere appearance. Thanks to the latest restoration works, it has been opened to visitors and hosts cultural and artistic events. The huge complex of the **Rocca Albornoziata** characterises the city of Spoleto; the Parco della Rocca extends around it. Lake Trasimeno features the monumental **Rocca del Leone** that dominates Castiglione del Lago, the Rocca on Isola Polvese, and the **Castle of the Knights of Malta** at Magione: rebuilt in the 15th century, it is a delightful agglomerate of walls and towers, with a number of 16th-century frescoes inside. Città di Castello is protected by **Castello Bufalini**, transformed in the 16th century into a refined noble residence decorated with paintings (including a *Madonna* by Pinturicchio) and fine furnishings. At Umbertide rises the magnificent **Rocca**, the emblem of the city and now a lively cultural centre; in the environs, the spectacular fortress of **Civitella Ranieri** is immersed in an ancient forest. The **Castle of Petroia** (9th-10th c.), in the vicinity of Gubbio, is an enchanting medieval borgo enclosed by walls. Set in the landscape of the Valnerina, the mighty **Rocca di Narni** (14th c.) survived many a siege and has recently been completely restored. Another lovely site is the **Pieve del Vescovo** in Corciano, a solid fortification later adapted to become an elegant residence. But for those interested in castles, the selection does not stop here: the imposing **Castellina** (16th c.) at Norcia, the **Castle of Vallingegno** at Gubbio, the millenary **Rocca Flea** at Gualdo Tadino with its fascinating museum, the imposing **Rocca d'Aries**

at Pietralunga...

Making a leap forward in time, we reach the art of the 20th century, by which time the once cohesive local artistic tradition had crumbled but in which art continued to express an individuality worthy of respect. Between museums and multipurpose venues, a journey to Umbria can also satisfy connoisseurs of modern and contemporary art. Perugia is home to a well-known Futurist group led by **Gerardo Dottori**, the major exponent of "aeropainting", who was constantly inspired by his native land. Palazzo della Penna houses a number of his famous works, such



as the *Trittico della Velocità*, as well as a permanent exhibition of works by **Joseph Beuys**; the rest of the museum is dedicated to temporary shows. Trevi's **Flash Art Museum**, established in 1992 in the prestigious Palazzo Lucarini, proposes temporary shows often on an international scale. Terni has two venues of interest: the contemporary art section of the **Pinacoteca Comunale 'Orneore Metelli'** in Palazzo Gazzoli, with works by naïf artist **Metelli** and other local artists, but also by **Severini, Chagall, Mirò, Picasso, and Kandinsky**; and the **industrial archaeology area**, an extensive series of abandoned factories and plants that is currently undergoing a recovery project (the Papigno factory, for example, has



been converted into a film studio). Città di Castello celebrates its most illustrious artist, **Alberto Burri**, with the extensive exhibits of the Burri Collection, divided between the 15th-century Palazzo Albizzini and the spaces of the **Ex Seccatoi del Tabacco Tropicale**. The **Galleria di Arte Civica Moderna e Contemporanea** of Spoleto, housed in Palazzo Collicola, exhibits works by the sculptor **Leoncillo**, and by **Mario Ceroli, Pino Pascali**, and **Sol Le Witt**.

Umbrian artistic and cultural life is also enlivened each year by wide-reaching events. Above all, the **Festival of Two Worlds held in Spoleto**. Inaugurated in 1958, it has grown through the years to become an event not to be missed, hosting world class artists and performers. The programme includes concerts, opera, theatre, art exhibits, and dance. Since 1973, **Umbria Jazz** has brought the best artists of this musical genre to Perugia every summer, becoming one of the most important jazz festivals in the world. The music of **Jazz Winter**,

in the days leading up to the New Year, fills the streets of Orvieto and enters the Duomo, Teatro Mancinelli, and other historical buildings, transforming the city into a one-of-a-kind stage. **Todiarte Festival**, showcasing music, poetry, and theatre with foreign guests, enlivens the historic district of Todi. Summertime in Gubbio brings a festival of classical music and a theatre series that take advantage of the atmosphere of the Roman theatre. The **Festival of Nations** at Città di Castello has been held since 1968, each year hosting a foreign country, which presents its own musical production to the public. Lake Trasimeno, in turn, is the backdrop for the notes of **Trasimeno Blues**.

For those who prefer something more traditional, there are food and wine festivals and historical re-enactments throughout the region that combine the delights of the palate with the memory of old customs and local folklore. Worthy of mention are the **Palio dei Terzieri** held in Città della Pieve, with its procession in period costume and various events; the **Infiolata at Spello**, which on the day of Corpus Domini, following a night of feverish preparations, decorates the streets of the city with multicoloured floral compositions; the **Corsa all'Anello at Narni**, heir of the tradition of an ancient equestrian contest. A spectacular and much-loved event is the **Corsa dei Ceri at Gubbio**, where thousands of onlookers crowd the streets to witness the race between the three enormous "ceri" ("candles" weighing 400 kg each) carried by groups of contestants up to the Basilica of Sant'Ubaldo. Assisi celebrates the **Festa di San Francesco** in commemoration of the death of the saint, and the **Festa di Calendimaggio**, three days of games and contests between the two parts of the city, the 'Parte de Sopra' and the 'Parte de Sotto'. The renowned **Palio della Quintana at Foligno**, initiated in 1946, re-enacts a jousting tournament with knights on horseback that took place in the 17th century.