



LODGING IN UMBRIA

Umbria is a compact region in the heart of Italy with many small hill towns, two provincial capital cities, Perugia and Terni, and lots of rolling countryside in between. Before deciding where to stay, a decision should be made about how one plans to travel. The choice is between traveling by car, or using public transport. For visitors to the major Italian cities of Rome, Florence and Venice we definitely advise public transport, as cars are useless in those cities. Public transport also works in Umbria but it does work best with a stay at a hotel in Perugia or one of the other major towns from which there is bus or train service. Cars allow one to wander about the region easily, and Perugia, the largest city, is well equipped with parking lots around the perimeter of the pedestrian-friendly city center. You may view driving in Italy as a rare pleasure, or you may see it as a challenge you don't need, especially if your driving has been limited to going to suburban shopping malls or cruising the American interstate highways in a huge vehicle with automatic transmission. Roads in Umbria are hilly and curvy and the streets in the medieval hill towns are often very, very narrow. We see this as fun, but understand that we're not all alike.

With the car option, there are a number of different types of lodging possibilities:

- House rentals
- Agriturismo places and country hotels
- Hotels in town
- Monasteries

There is a rapidly expanding number of houses and villas for rent throughout Umbria and Tuscany. They vary in size and quality and some can be rather expensive. We know a villa near Todi which rents for \$2000. a day, but it sleeps 24 or 26 people. That's a lot of money, but for a large family or group of friends, the house, with its ample kitchen, swimming pool, etc, is not an unreasonable alternative to moving around among high quality hotels and eating every meal in a restaurant. Most villas are smaller, but the

majority of them on the rental market today seem to be equipped with a swimming pool. It's not a bad way to vacation for groups of 6 or 8, taking it easy around the pool some days, and taking day trips to the many Umbrian hill towns on others. We know of two agencies which specialize in such places: *Homes Away*, and *Villas and Apartments Abroad*. There are others. They all take a generous commission but they offer some guarantees as to the condition and appropriateness of the properties they offer. You can also shop around on the internet, where you may be able to save some money, but without the same assurances of quality.

Over the past few decades the Italian Government has encouraged the growth of *agriturismo*. This was supposed to involve getting the city folk out to the farm to vacation among the animals, in the fresh air, at modest cost. It doesn't always work out exactly as the government intended, but it's not too far off the mark. Some of these places have become elegant-rustic and the prices often are higher than those of reasonable hotels in town, but for those who prefer sleeping in the country, there are some pleasant possibilities. The animals are more often than not well out of sight and the farm connection mostly a matter of selling and/or serving their own wine, olive oil and jams. There are also a number of small, elegant country hotels for those wishing quiet luxury.

Every small city has a number of hotels. Some on the outskirts are filled by buses full of tourists and traveling salesmen, while those in the town centers usually get more individual bookings. By now, virtually all hotels either have their own web site, or are featured in web sites devoted to finding a hotel. Decide on a town where you think you might like to stay and just search under "hotels Assisi" for example. Some sites feature comments of past users. If you read enough of them you can sort of filter through the quirks of the individual clients to get an idea of what the place is like. We are decidedly prejudiced toward Todi and Orvieto, but some other towns to consider are Amelia, Bevagna, Spoleto, Assisi, Gubbio, and of course, Perugia.

Most Umbrian towns have a monastery or two. There aren't many monks or nuns left to inhabit them, so the ones in the countryside have often been turned into isolated drug rehabilitation centers, while those in town offer low cost, quiet lodging in impressive old buildings. If Los Vegas is your ideal, these may not be the places for you, but then, what are you doing in Umbria in the first place? If you can live without a bar, or a mini-bar in your room, you may find these to your liking.

We won't even try to list all the potential places to stay in Umbria, but we can suggest a few that we know in each category, in the Todi-Orvieto area. We have already mentioned two agencies for house rentals. In Acqualoreto there is a woman who rents her house, Il Capricorno, through the internet. (www.ilcapricorno.it) Many other people in this area rent houses, but most often through agencies in London.

Among country hotels in the area, we can recommend three:

- Hotel Relais Todini, east of Todi is a very elegant country villa, turned hotel. Its restaurant is excellent and the setting is gorgeous. Just 12 guest rooms so reservations must be made well ahead.
- La Badia, originally a medieval monastery, has been a 28 room hotel overlooking Orvieto since 1968. If you like medieval, you have to love La Badia.
- La Penisula at Villa Bellago was a farmhouse around which the Festa dell'Unità was held back in the 70's. It was renovated and expanded into an attractive small hotel, surrounded by water on three sides. It's very close to the Corbara Dam on the Tiber, which forms Lake Corbara. See www.albergolapenisula.it

There are a number of agriturismo places in the area. One is the Capricorno, mentioned above. Another is Pomurlo Vecchio, a small complex of apartments and a main farmhouse on a hill just across the road from La Penisula,. It's a pretty spot, overlooking the lake, and only about 15 km from the autostrada taking you north to Florence or south to Rome. There are many others in the Orvieto area.

Todi has a number of hotels, three of which we'll describe briefly.

- Hotel Fonte Cesia is the most expensive and is right in the center of town, just off the main piazza. Relatively new but decorated in a very conservative and old world style.
- Hotel Bramante- down the hill and across the road from the Bramante-designed Tempio della Consolazione, at the entrance to Todi. The grounds, the lobby, the pool, and the view are all delightful in this hillside hotel. The rooms (50 of them)and the restaurant are less appealing, but overall, it's a pleasant and convenient place to stay. www.hotelbramante.it
- Hotel VillaLuisa- A simple, unpretentious 37 room hotel and restaurant in the newer part of town, i.e. a bit removed from the town center. It has a pool, nice views and generally friendly personnel. Many of our friends and family members have stayed here, and all were very happy with it. www.villaluisa.it

There are two monasteries in Todi which rent rooms. One is slightly out of town. The other is right inside the walls, only a few hundred meters from the main piazza, although significantly down the hill. The ceilings are high, the rooms are attractive, and it provides a peaceful and quiet place to stay. Monastero SS. Annunziata. Check out their website at www.monasterosmr.com

As for other places further afield, we can offer a few suggestions, but the possibilities are many. You might want to look into the following:

- Locanda dell'Amorosa at Sinalunga- This is a very beautiful country hotel outside a small town about 45 km. southeast of Siena and about 15 km. north of Montepulciano in the Chianti region of Tuscany near the Umbrian border.
- Le Tre Vaselle- The Lungarotti owned hotel in Torgiano, a few km. south of Perugia, is probably better known for its restaurant, and its proximity to the Lungarotti Wine Museum.
- La Locanda del Prete- Saragano- four apartments and a restaurant in a tiny village off the beaten track in central Umbria. www.lalocandadelpretesaragano.com

- La Leccia- A hilltop Tuscan estate, north of Siena near Castellina in Chianti, which produces wine and oil, is opening up newly renovated rooms to vacationers. It's a panoramic spot, commandeered during WWII by the Germans as an observation post, and heavily damaged as a result. The repairs are nearly complete after sixty years.
