



Art in Le Marche

A wealth of lesser-known fine art & architecture

7–14 September 2025 (ML 783)

8 days • £3,220

Lecturer: Dr Michael Douglas-Scott

Explores the small cities in the hills and valleys of Le Marche.

Paintings by Crivelli and Lotto provide pegs around which the tour is planned.

Wonderful landscape and streetscape

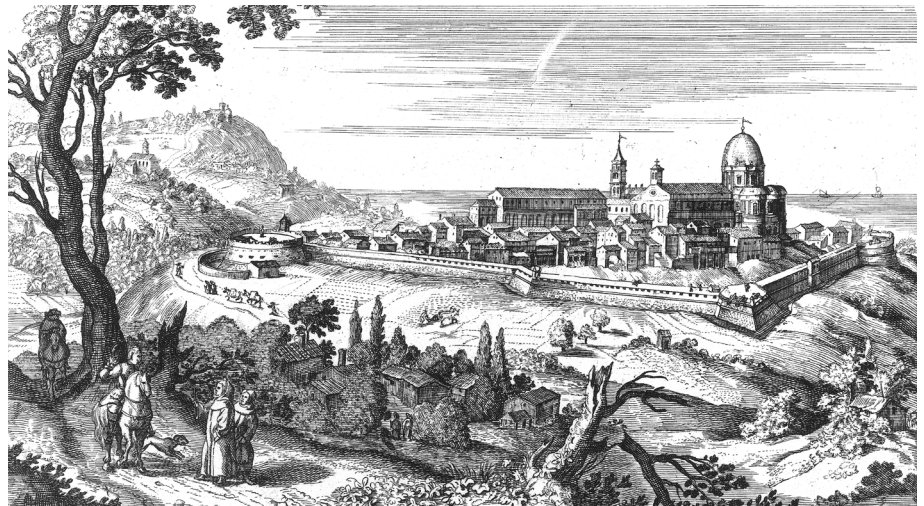
Nearly everywhere hilly and in some parts mountainous, the Italian Marches have always been difficult of access. Even now, away from the coast the roads are slow, as is the pace of life. The Marches look and feel much like the Italy of a generation ago, and compared with Tuscany and Umbria there are few tourists.

For some travellers these are sufficient reasons for going there immediately, and that is without citing the captivating landscape and the innumerable unspoilt hilltop towns. Ragged hills are spattered untidily with pasturage, fruit trees, vineyards and woods, and each peak is crowned with a pink-grey clump of walls and towers. The topography did not lead to poverty or cultural backwardness, however, and tucked away in churches and museums are many gems of medieval and Renaissance art.

If you seek a succession of mainstream masterpieces which provide the shock of recognition, the Marches should not be a priority for you. For the adventurous aesthete, however, the region has plenty to delight and much of great merit. Two painters in particular are associated with the area, Carlo Crivelli and Lorenzo Lotto, and the best of the pictures by these wayward geniuses are pegs around which this tour has been designed.

Carlo Crivelli (c. 1435–1494) was one of the greatest artists of the Early Renaissance. Avidly collected in the nineteenth century, he became an embarrassment to art historians in the twentieth because he didn't fit into the received schemes of stylistic development. He persevered with gold backgrounds, low relief ornament and elaborate framing long after they were abandoned elsewhere in Italy. But within these conservative conventions he created an emotionally charged use of line, powerfully tactile detail, virtuosic use of perspective and intensity of expression.

Lorenzo Lotto (c. 1480–1557) was similarly individualistic, and his works evince similar emotional power. Also born in Venice, most of his long and peripatetic career was spent in



Loreto, engraving 1700

small cities in the Venetian Empire and the Marches. While the major figures of Italian painting – Bellini, Raphael and Titian – provided the foundations of his style, he was also influenced by the angular expressiveness of German painting.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 10.45am (British Airways) from London Heathrow to Rome. Drive to Ascoli Piceno, an exceedingly attractive little city, ringed by rivers and wooded hills, where the first three nights are spent.

Day 2: Ascoli Piceno, Offida. Explore the centre of Ascoli, an unspoilt agglomeration of medieval, Renaissance and Baroque buildings around arcaded squares and narrow streets. One of Crivelli's finest altarpieces is in the cathedral. In the afternoon, visit Offida: on a spur and ringed by walls, this little town has 13th-century church at its apex and a delightful 18th-century theatre in the main square.

Day 3: Monte S. Martino, Ascoli Piceno. Drive through the foothills of the Monti Sibillini, among the most dramatic ranges in the Apennines, to the village of Monte San Martino. Here, there is a little church with excellent 15th-century polyptychs, by Carlo Crivelli, his brother Vittore and two 'Crivelleschi'. Return to Ascoli Piceno to visit the diocesan and municipal museums, housing paintings by Crivelli and others in his circle.

Day 4: Montefiore dell'Aso, Monte S. Giusto. Drive through the hills and along the coast, first stopping in Montefiore dell'Aso, where a Crivelli is preserved in the museum of San Francesco. At Monte San Giusto see the great *Crucifixion* by Lorenzo Lotto, described by Berenson as the finest of the 16th century. Continue to our hotel in Montecassiano, just outside Macerata, where the next three nights are spent.

Day 5: Recanati, Loreto. A charming town, Recanati spreads along the ridge of a neighbouring hill; four of Lotto's paintings are in the museum, including the famous *Annunciation*. Then spend the afternoon in Loreto, another great pilgrimage centre, where some of the finest artists and architects of Renaissance Italy worked, including Bramante, Signorelli, Melozzo da Forlì and Lotto, several of whose last works are here.

Day 6: Cingoli, Jesi. From the perimeter of the hilltop town of Cingoli there are magnificent views over vast tracts of rolling landscape. The town hall contains a masterpiece by Lotto, the *Rosary Madonna*. Continue on to Jesi, a handsome little city with a Renaissance town hall and a superb Rococo palace, now an art gallery.

Day 7: Ancona, Pesaro. The ancient port of Ancona clings to the cliffs around a busy harbour with the beautiful pre-Romanesque cathedral of S. Ciriaco at the summit. Other churches contain an *Assumption* by Lotto and a *Crucifixion* by Titian. From here drive along

Art in Le Marche
continued

the coast to Pesaro to visit the civic museum containing works by Bellini and Guido Reni. Continue to Urbino, Duke Federico da Montefeltro's principal residence and one of Italy's loveliest towns. Overnight Urbino.

Day 8: Urbino. Unravel the building history and examine the interior of the finest Renaissance palace in Italy, built over half a century from the 1450s for the dukes of Urbino, with the loveliest of all arcaded courtyards, serene halls of state, beautifully carved ornament and exquisite study. The art collection includes paintings by Piero della Francesca, Raphael and Titian. See also the outstanding International Gothic frescoes by the Salimbeni brothers. Fly from Bologna, arriving at London Heathrow at c. 9.15pm.

There is a possibility that not all of the works mentioned above will be seen; sometimes galleries and churches loan them at short notice.

Lecturer

Dr Michael Douglas-Scott mixes scholarship with accessible discourse, wit with reasoned opinion, and is highly sought-after as an art history lecturer. He has lectured for York University (London campus) and Birkbeck College, University of London, specialising primarily in 16th-century Italian art and architecture. He studied at the Courtauld and Birkbeck College and lived in Rome for several years. He has written articles for *Arte Veneta*, *Burlington Magazine* and the *Journal of the Warburg & Courtauld Institutes*.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,220 or £3,010 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,540 or £3,330 without flights.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Airbus 319); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation; breakfasts and 5 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips for waiters, drivers and guides; all taxes; the services of the lecturer.

Accommodation. Palazzo Guiderocchi, Ascoli Piceno (palazzoguiderocchi.com): a converted Renaissance palace in the heart of the city, which retains many original features. **Villa Quiete, Montecassiano** (villaquiete.it): 18th-century mansion, now a country hotel & spa, the rooms are furnished and decorated in a contemporary style. **Albergo San Domenico, Urbino** (viphotels.it): converted from a monastery building and the most centrally located hotel, opposite the Ducal Palace. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use throughout.*

All three hotels are small and more rustic than their 4-star rating would suggest, and despite being the best available in each town, standards of decor and maintenance are lower than hotels in major cities.

How strenuous? This tour involves a lot of walking in town centres on steep cobbled streets. Therefore it should not be attempted by anyone who has difficulty with everyday walking and stair-climbing. Taxis may not be an option as there is restricted access in some of the towns. Some days involve a lot of driving, including through hilly terrain.

Average distance by coach per day: 75 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.