



The Heart of Italy

Umbria's finest art and architecture

20–27 April 2026 (MM 928)

8 days

Lecturer: Dr Michael Douglas-Scott

28 September–5 October 2026

(MM 185)

8 days

Lecturer: Leslie Primo

An excellent survey of the art and architecture of Umbria, heartland of the Renaissance.

Based in Perugia, one of the largest, loveliest and artistically well-stocked of Italian hill towns.

Led by Dr Michael Douglas-Scott or Leslie Primo, both specialists in Renaissance Italian art and architecture.

Orvieto, Spoleto, Assisi and significant smaller towns away from the main tourist centres.

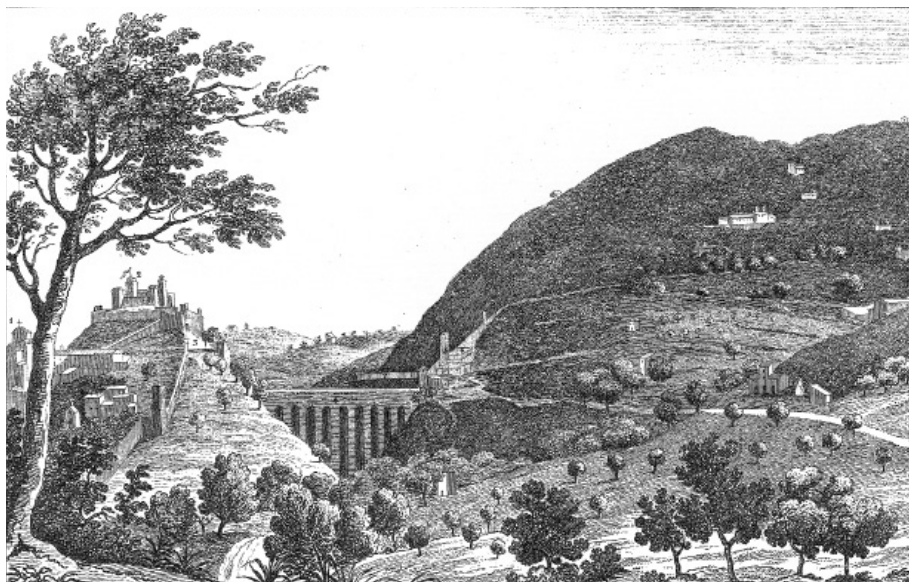
Also known as the 'green heart of Italy', Umbria contains a vast and varied array of what visitors most love about central Italy: ancient streetscapes crammed onto hilltops, exquisitely undulating countryside of olive, cypress and vine, and an abundance of wonderful art.

Rarely can the spirit of the Middle Ages be so potently felt as in the hill towns of central Italy. That such small communities could have built each dwelling so massively, raised churches and public buildings of such magnificence and created works of art of such monumentality inspires awe bordering on disbelief among today's visitors.

This is also the heartland of the Renaissance, and several of the leading artists of the era were natives who worked here before being inveigled to the great metropolises of Florence and Rome.

Many of the most important and beautiful of Italy's incomparable patrimony of paintings and frescoes are included on this tour. The great Giottoesque cycle at Assisi stands at the beginning of the modern era of art, and the *Last Judgement* frescoes by Signorelli in Orvieto are on the cusp of the High Renaissance. While in the field of architecture Romanesque and Gothic predominate, there are many major Renaissance buildings, including the centrally planned church at Todi.

The man-made environment melds with the natural in a picturesque union of intense beauty. It is a landscape of rumpled hills,



Spoleto

sometimes rugged and forested, sometimes tamed in the struggle to cultivate, always speckled with ancient farmsteads, fortified villages and isolated churches. Even from the central *piazze* of many of these towns there are views of countryside which seems scarcely to have changed for centuries.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 10.45am (*April departure*) or c. 11.30am (*September departure*) with British Airways from London Heathrow to Rome Fiumicino and drive (3 hours) to Perugia, where all seven nights are spent.

Day 2: Perugia, capital of Umbria, is one of the largest and loveliest of Italian hill towns and has both major works of art and architecture and the authentic, age-old liveliness of a prosperous market town. Morning visits include the Palazzo dei Priori, the medieval town hall now housing the National Gallery of Umbria, and a merchants' hall. An afternoon walk includes an impressive Etruscan city gateway, the medieval walls and the richly carved façade of the Renaissance church of S. Bernardino.

Day 3: Assisi. Drive to Assisi and spend much of the morning at S. Francesco, mother church of the Franciscan Order. Here is one of the greatest assemblages of medieval fresco painting, including the controversial cycle of

the *Life of St Francis*. In the afternoon, walk through the austere medieval streets and visit the church of Sta. Chiara and the Romanesque cathedral.

Day 4: Montefalco, Foligno, Spello. Drive to Montefalco, a delightful hilltop community with magnificent views of the valley below and hills around. In the deconsecrated church of S. Francesco are frescoes by Benozzo Gozzoli. Known to the Romans as Fulginium, Foligno lies on the banks of the river Topino. It offers a range of exceptional attractions and yet is little known to tourists. See the restored palace of the Trinci family, lords of Foligno, and home to extensive frescoes now known to be the work of the greatest Italian master of International Gothic, Gentile da Fabriano. Return via Spello, which has fine Roman remains.

Day 5: Todi. Visit Sta. Maria della Consolazione in Todi, a centrally planned Renaissance church influenced by Bramante's ideas. Walk through the town, seeing the cathedral and the church of S. Fortunato, with its richly decorated central doorway and frescoes by Masolino. Return to Perugia at c. 3.00pm for some free time.

Day 6: Gubbio. Spilling down a hillside and offering sensational views across Umbrian countryside, Gubbio is one of the most beautiful and well-preserved ancient towns in Italy. The Palazzo dei Consoli is an austere magnificent medieval town hall located beside a

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square with one side open to the view; it houses the art gallery of the Museo Civico. Higher up, the Palazzo Ducale was built by warlord Federico da Montefeltro, one of the greatest patrons of the arts in the Early Renaissance.

Day 7: Orvieto. Spend the day in this entrancing hilltop town, with its glistening marble Gothic cathedral. Among its treasures are the low relief sculptures by Maitani and the apocalyptic *Last Judgement* frescoes by Signorelli (1505). Visit also the cathedral museum, richly endowed with art, sculpture and religious artefacts.

Day 8: Spoleto. A morning walk in Spoleto includes the Ponte delle Torri, a medieval aqueduct famously painted by Turner, and finishes at the cathedral square. One of the most imposing in Italy, it slopes like an auditorium towards the cathedral façade with its mosaics and rose windows; inside there are frescoes by Pinturicchio and Filippo Lippi. Continue to Rome Fiumicino airport for an late afternoon flight arriving at Heathrow c. 6.30pm.

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 New 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*.

Leslie Primo. Art historian, lecturer and broadcaster. Leslie Primo is a graduate of Birkbeck, University College, London with an MA in Renaissance studies. He has taught courses at Reading University and in London at the Courtauld Institute, the Bishopsgate Institute and Imperial College. He worked at the National Gallery, London, and the National Portrait Gallery for 18 years. He has broadcast for BBC TV and Radio 4 and was a contributor to the *Oxford Companion Guide to Black British History* and an art history consultant for the Getty publication, *Balthazar: A Black African King in Medieval and Renaissance Art*. His new book *'The Foreign Invention of British Art'* is published

by Thames & Hudson in 2025.

Practicalities

Included: travel by private coach throughout; hotel accommodation; breakfasts; 1 lunch and 4 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Hotel Sina Brufani Palace, Perugia (sinahotels.com): a grand 5-star hotel 5 minutes' walk from the main square in Perugia. There is a good restaurant, small indoor pool and roof terrace. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? Many visits take place in hill towns, with very steep, uneven inclines leading from the coach park. Agility and sure-footedness are particularly essential. There is a lot of coach travel. Average distance by coach per day: 82 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.