

AN
ITALIAN
FAMILY WEEKEND

DAVID AND CHRISSIE LANG, who offer authentic agriturismo experiences in 16th century farmhouses on their property, the Casa San Gabriel, share their favorite spots in Italy's Umbria region



SIGHTS

The **MOST STUNNING LANDMARK** is the **Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2000. Assisi is where St. Francis lived and died, and it's one of the most important places of pilgrimage in the Christian world.

The **MOST AWESOME SIGHT** is the large plain behind the town of Castelluccio, aflame with thousands of different varieties of wild flowers in bloom every year between the end of May and the beginning of July.

Some of the **BEST ITALIAN ART** can be seen at the **Baglioni chapel** in the Collegiate Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Spello, which is famous for its renaissance frescoes executed by Pinturicchio in 1500.

The **MOST BREATHTAKING SIGHT** are the fireflies in our valley in the spring. They are only found in the most pristine of environments and the most beautiful sight as they light up the night sky. We have told our children they are fairies that must be protected.

For **A TASTE OF SMALL TOWN CHARM**, head to **Montone**. This hill town was voted one of Italy's 10 most stunning hill towns. It has its own film festival hosted by local Terry Gilliam of "Monty Python" fame and has international film stars who live locally such as Ralph Fiennes and Colin Firth. This town has four fantastic restaurants and if la dolce vita could be epitomized by a place, this would be it.

A RACE TO REMEMBER

Gubbio, at the northeastern part of Umbria, is home to the Festa dei Ceri, one of Italy's great festivals held every May 15th. This festival celebrates the city's patron saint, Saint Ubaldo, who died in 1160, and it has to be seen to be believed.

The entire town is involved in the racing of three tall, heavy artefacts weighing 300 or 400 kilos each. The townspeople run with these on their shoulders through the cobbled streets of the city while being boisterously cheered on by their supporters, all the way up to the summit of Mount Ingino which sits above the city of Gubbio.



Great Steaks with Truffles

Our family enjoys eating at **L'Antica Osteria** (www.lanticaosteria.it) in the central square of Montone. Our favorite dishes are so numerous we now request a selection of starters and pasta courses, and then some high quality beef cooked on the salt platters – this could be Italian chianina, Japanese Kobe, or Aberdeen angus with lashings of Umbrian Sagrantino red wine.

By the time we finish this, we are all screaming for mercy. The owner of this restaurant juggles this work with his truffle hunting which makes this the best place to enjoy white and black truffle dishes in all of Umbria.



Casa San Gabriel

FOOD & WINE

The **BEST LOCAL DISH** we've tried is scrambled eggs with shavings of black truffles at **L'Antica Osteria** (www.lanticaosteria.it) in Montone, matched with a fragrant Umbrian Trebbiano Spoletino white wine. This is the perfect way to start your Italian meal while sitting in the square. In fact, it's so perfect you will feel you are on a film set.

For **A HEALTHY DOSE OF GREAT COUNTRY COOKING**, we recommend **Borgomela Ristorante** (www.borgomela.com) in Tavernacce where you should have the aged Chianina tenderloin served with slivers of Umbria summer truffles and vegetables sourced from the family garden.

The **BEST PLACE TO ENJOY A GLASS OF LOCAL WINE** is at the **Enoteca Properzio** (int.enoteche.it) in Spello. It's the best wine shop with the most knowledgeable of owners and a fantastic restaurant attached.

FOR A WONDERFUL WINE TOUR, we highly recommend **Locanda Palazzone winery** (www.locandapalazzone.it) in Orvieto, one of Italy's most celebrated Orvieto Classico winemakers with a fantastically informative host, Giovanni Dubini. After your tour and tasting of some of central Italy's most impressive wines, relax over an al fresco lunch on the terrace in front of the beautiful 12th century estate with views over the vineyards and hills.

MEAT LOVERS VISITING MUST TRY the wild goose sauce that accompanies the lightest, most delicate gnocchi you will have ever tasted. This quintessential Umbrian dish should be on people's bucket list.

To **SATISFY OUR SWEET TOOTH**, we love the world famous **Baci chocolate** from the **Perugina chocolate factory** (www.perugina.it) in Perugia. The tours of the chocolate factory are great fun for the whole family, and lots of interesting history as well as tastings along the way.

A SWEET ENDING, Umbria-style, is by dipping delicious hazelnut biscuits called **tozzetti in passito wine**, and the **passito di Sagrantino** is the best for this.

ACTIVITIES

An **IDEAL SPOT FOR A ROMANTIC PICNIC** is the top of **Mt. Tezio** with views over Lake Trasimeno in one direction and the Apennine mountain range in the other. Make sure to bring binoculars, a bottle of chilled *prosecco* and some olives, *grissini* and cured Umbrian meats for a light snack. If you look hard, you can make out **Casa San Gabriel** (www.casasangabriel.com) in the distance.

SEARCH FOR TRUFFLES in the woodlands with a truffle hunter and his trusty dog. After this adventure – and if you are successful – you can take your truffles to a local restaurant where they can prepare a degustation of Umbrian black gold with its signature dishes, eggs, *taglierini* pasta, *risotto bianco* or shaved over your steak.

“The best way to explore Umbria is slowly, soaking up the atmosphere of the hill towns, slowing down, drinking coffee in the town square while your children chase the pigeons around and the old men play cards and put the world to right,” they say.

The **BEST THINGS TO DO IN SUMMER** is to visit **Acquadolce** (www.acquadolcesailing.it) at San Feliciano on the bank of Lake Trasimeno and hire a speed boat (low horsepower, so very safe) or a sailing boat for a tour of the islands on the lake. Take turns jumping off the boat for a refreshing dip in the lake before heading onto the next island to grab some gelato for the children and an aperitivo for the adults.

SPEND A GREAT FAMILY VACATION IN UMBRIA at the **Casa San Gabriel** (www.casasangabriel.com). You can swim in the pool while soaking up the views over ancient olive groves, vineyards, woodlands and reaching as far as the Basilica of Assisi. You can also make day trips to Umbria’s hill towns for gelato and great coffee or head out in the evenings for events like **Umbria Jazz** (www.umbriajazz.com), where we are going to see Mika this year, or the kite festival on the banks of Lake Trasimeno.

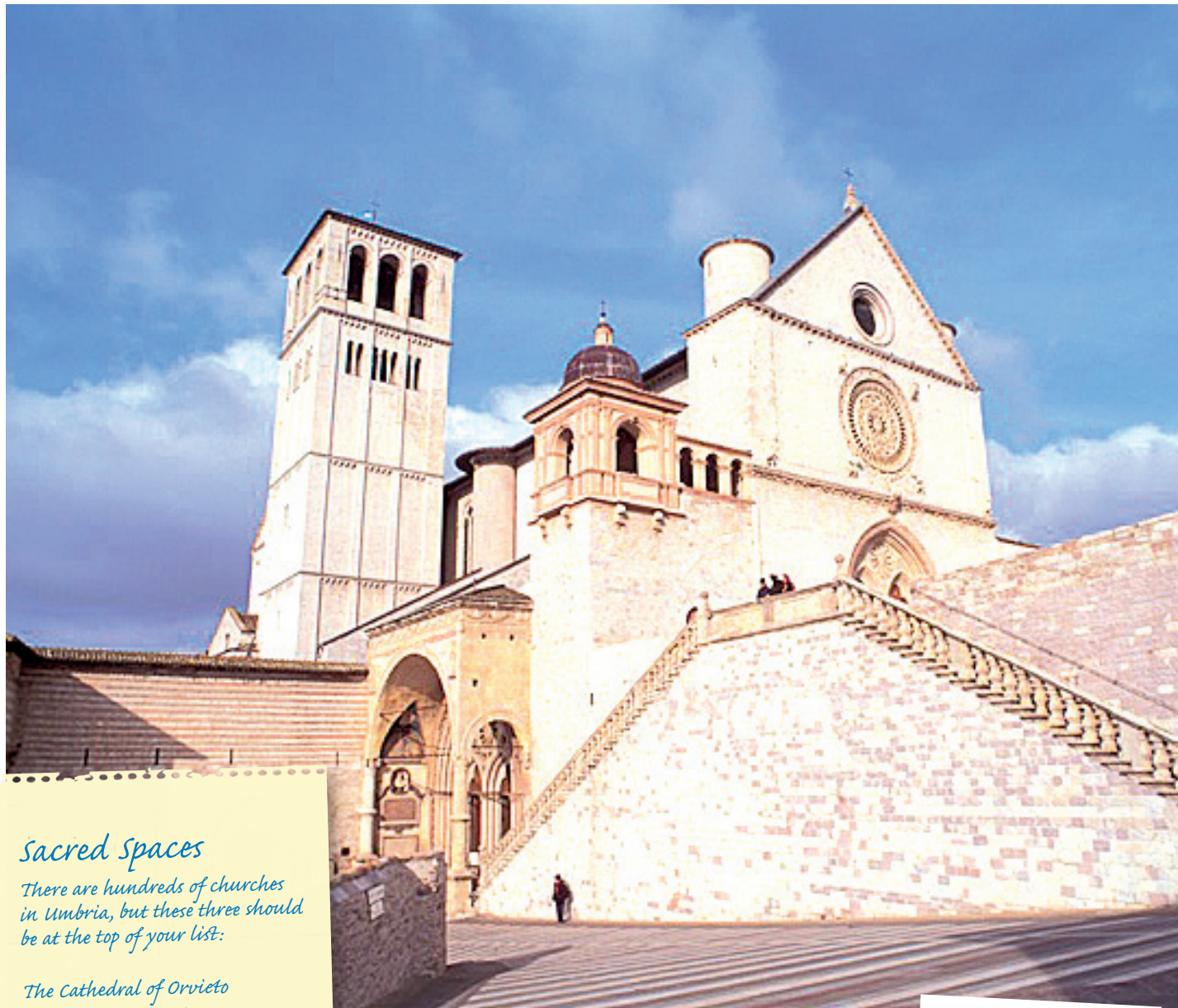


FUN AT CASA SAN GABRIEL

“We like dining al fresco at home with our guests during the weekly pizza nights. We teach our guests how to roll out the pizza dough and add their own toppings and then we cook the pizzas in our 16th century wood-fired oven.

My daughters show everyone how to make *calzone*, and as it gets dark, we turn the lights on in the pool and all the children head up for a swim while the parents relax and chat or enjoy a glass of my homemade *orangecello*.”





Sacred Spaces

There are hundreds of churches in Umbria, but these three should be at the top of your list:

The Cathedral of Orvieto
The Basilica of Assisi
Duomo in Perugia

EXPERIENCE UMBRIA'S OLIVE CULTURE during the first week of November when all the olive mills open. The hills are alive with people scrambling up ladders and putting down nets to harvest their precious olives. Don't miss visiting one of the mills to try extra virgin oil straight from the press – simple is best – with a piece of toasted bread, a drizzle of vibrantly green oil that is so peppery it almost takes your breath away, a garlic clove rubbed on the crust and a sprinkle of sea salt. This is one of life's seminal food experiences and it is a flavor you will remember to your dying day. ■

WHERE TO BUY POTTERY

Deruta, a small town south of Perugia, produces pottery that is so renowned that the Queen of England buys hers there. There are so many beautiful things to choose from in the artisan shops that you may want to take advantage of the shipping services many shops offer.



MARKET DAY IN UMBRIA

The **Umbertide market** is a must visit every Wednesday morning. Queue up at one of the *porchettas* vans for some of the simplest yet most delicious Italian fastfood: whole pigs are cooked in fennel, rosemary, and garlic and then served in a fresh bread roll with a few flakes of sea salt and some pork crackling.

Or buy your porcini mushrooms, cheeses, salamis and vegetables here and then relax at one of the many cafes for a restorative cappuccino and pastry.