



A dream escape in the heart of Umbria, Italy

The 16th century cottages at Casa San Gabriel provide a tranquil stay amongst beautiful surroundings

BY BEN WEST

In 2004 UK-based David and Chrissie Lang discovered a 16th century rural farmstead near Umbertide, in Umbria, fell in love with it, moved there and began painstakingly restoring the dilapidated buildings into *anagriturismo* with three comfortable, characterful holiday cottages set amongst stunning Umbrian vistas of olive groves, vineyards and ancient woodlands, with the Apennine mountain range and the historic hill town of Assisi beyond.

Many travellers overlook Umbria and instead head for Tuscany next door, which has a much-more developed tourism industry. Yet Umbria's more off-the-beaten-track status means it has many unspoiled landscapes, down-to-earth hill towns and villages, and a feeling you are in the 'real' Italy rather than a touristy version.

Location

Situated down a one mile (1.5km) steep gravel country road, 2.5 miles (4 km) from the village of Pierantonio (where there's a few shops and a supermarket), you'll ideally have your own car. Perugia and its airport are a 20-minute drive away north of the property, the E45 highway is just five minutes away, and Casa San Gabriel is also a good base for exploring Gubbio, Assisi, Todi, Cortona and other Umbrian and Tuscan hill towns.

The accommodation

The three self-contained properties are of varying size, sleeping from two to four, and each have good wifi, a tv, kitchenette with a hob and mini-oven, air conditioning, a



terrace, covered pergola and lovely views, the only sound being birdsong.

Decked on the exterior with creepers, the interiors are unpretentious and have character, with features like exposed stone walls, beams and terracotta tiles.

Il Fienile, the former hayloft, is the largest of the cottages, and has *amezzanine*. *La Cantina*, previously a wine cellar, has a centuries-old staircase to the bedroom above. *La Stalla*, the old stables, has a wide panoramic terrace.

Facilities and activities

Facilities include an outdoor unheated swimming pool and gardens that include a vegetable and herb garden and a communal barbecue area with wood provided that guests are welcome to use. In the main house is a lounge with books and board games. There is a pizza oven that guests can use, and regular pizza evenings.

Activities in the area include hang-gliding from Mount Subasio, hiking in the Monte Subasio Natural Park, cycling, nordic skiing, mountain biking and fishing. Antognolla golf course is under a mile away (1.6km) and a tennis court a 15-minute walk. Bike hire can be arranged.

The winery and restaurant

There is a winery and restaurant, *Vineria del Carmine*, a 20-minute walk from the property, that's lovely, if hilly on the way back.

"From late April is when the fireflies come out, and when you walk back from the restaurant in the dark they flit around you and illuminate your way," says David.

The excellent restaurant creates dishes so beautiful to look at it seems a sacrilege to eat them. Focusing on Umbrian cuisine, examples of the tasty dishes include slow-cooked pork belly with saffron foam, and an unusual sweet and savoury beetroot



TRAVEL

risotto with Gorgonzola and walnut.

As well as meals, the winery offers wine and olive oil tastings, vineyard tours, truffle hunting and pizza-making classes.

Are children welcome?

Babies and children are welcome, and there is a playground with a playhouse, infant and child swings, a slide, roundabout and lots of toys. They will also love the resident alpaca and goats.

Nearby, Lake Trasimeno offers child-friendly beaches, water sports and other activities and water parks Oasi del Tezio, Laguna Park Trasimeno, Tavernelle Water Park, Sansepolcro Water Park and Umbertide Swimming Pools are all easily accessed. In addition there are activity parks (Activo Park and Pinocchio Park), wildlife parks (Citta Della Domenica Park and Parco del Sole) as well as horse riding.

Are pets welcome?

Yes.

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