

Travel Guide to Perugia, Italy

Jan 28, 2025 Written By Stephen Brewer

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Perugia, the capital of Italy's Umbria region, is a city divided - the modern lower city sprawls across the Tiber River valley, while the proud old medieval town, what you're undoubtedly coming here to see, is draped across ridges of the foothills of the Apennine mountains.

The beautiful medieval center is not totally undiscovered, but Perugia is a still bit off the well-



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While you can see the sights in a day, Perugia is also an excellent jumping off point for excursions to the countryside - Lago Trasimeno glistens just beyond the outskirts - and to a clutch of smaller hill towns. So, you may want to settle in for at least a few days, and there are many pleasant places to do so.

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Where is Perugia?



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Perugia marked by a red dot on the map. Photo: [Idéfix~commonswiki](#), [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Perugia is centrally located in Umbria, in central Italy, and sits 150km (90 miles) south of Florence and 170km (105 miles) north of Rome.

A busy, cosmopolitan city of 160,000 residents, this is Umbria's main urban center. Although decently large, immediately around the city begin the tranquil valleys and forested hillsides that characterize Umbria and give rise to the region's nickname - the Green Heart of Italy.

Perugia is close to many of the other places you'll want to visit in Umbria. **Assisi**, the birthplace of Saint Francis, and Lago Trasimeno, the fourth largest lake in Italy, are only half an hour away. It's also an easy drive to Gubbio, Spello, Montefalco, Spoleto, and many of Umbria's other atmospheric and historic hill towns.

Perugia is just south of the border with **Tuscany**, and **Cortona** and other beautiful Tuscan towns are also within easy reach. It's just 45 minutes from Perugia to Cortona, and an hour to **Montepulciano**.

How to get here



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With that covered, here's how to reach the city.

Arriving by train or bus

Perugia is not served by Italy's high-speed rail network, but rail connections to other parts of Italy are still pretty good.

From Florence, there's a direct train that makes the journey to Perugia in 2 hours.

From Rome, the trip also takes two hours, but requires making a change in the town of Foligno.

Arriving by air

Perugia's small San Francisco d'Assisi airport is served by British Airways and Ryanair, with limited service to and from London and a few other European cities.

Arriving by car

By car, Perugia is about two hours north of Rome and the same travel time south of Florence. The A1, Italy's main north-south highway, runs just a little ways west of the city, making it an easy journey.

Another fast road, the Raccordo Strada, connects Perugia with Siena, and that drive takes about an hour and 20 minutes.

If you'll be renting a car for your visit, I always recommend checking prices on [DiscoverCars](#). It's a car rental website that includes offerings from all the major international rental companies as well as lots of smaller local agencies, which often have *much* better pricing. You can often find really good deals.

Parking

Well-marked parking areas surround the old town, and are connected to the center by a series of elevators and escalators. One of the most convenient is the large facility in Piazza Partigiani, and parking here comes with an escalator ride up to the center through the subterranean ruins of the medieval city. Intercity buses also arrive at Piazza Partigiani.

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A view over Perugia



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The view from the path atop the city's aqueduct



Palazzo dei Priori



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A busy street in the center

Reason enough to visit Perugia is to enjoy a beautiful and remarkably well preserved medieval city. Perugia is no museum piece, though - the city is also lively and cosmopolitan, the capital of the region and home to two universities and many young people, with bars, cafes, and restaurants to cater to them.

Crowds descend on the Perugia twice a year, and you may or may not want to join them, for Umbria Jazz in July and the EuroChocolate Festival events in March and November. At other times the city is much less visited than Rome, Florence, Venice, and other stops on Italian itineraries. That means you can spend relaxed time in the museums and churches, filled with some of the masterpieces of Umbrian art and local Etruscan finds, and enjoy wandering through the enticing lanes and squares.

It's also easy to venture into the Umbrian countryside and nearby hill towns, of which there are many. Lovely medieval towns like Assisi, Spello, Montefalco, Spoleto, and Gubbio, are all within an easy hour's drive, making Perugia a great base from which to explore the wider region.

You'll eat well in Perugia too (and everywhere in Umbria): Perugia's own chocolate. prosciutto



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When to visit

The only times Perugia is uncomfortably crowded are the weeks of the Umbria Jazz festival in July and the EuroChocolate Festival in March and November. If you want to attend those festivals, reserve a hotel room well in advance. At other times, you're unlikely to encounter a lot of people other than locals going about their daily business.

The surrounding countryside is especially pleasant in the spring, when temperatures are mild (often around 21°C - 70°F), days are long, and wildflowers are in bloom across the green landscapes.

Early fall is also nice, with lots of sunshine, and October temperatures are still around 19°C (66°F).

Summers can get fairly hot, but not typically enough that sightseeing or outdoor activities become unpleasant.

November and December can be dark and rainy, but the city is moodily atmospheric at these times. Winters are milder here than they are in more northerly climes, with daytime highs even in January and February around 10°C (50°F).

Truly, there's no bad time to come.

How long to spend

You can pretty easily see the main sights of Perugia in a day. That's plenty of time to check out the main landmarks, visit a couple of museums/galleries, wander the old town (and the subterranean part!), and join locals for an evening passeggiata up and down the pedestrian Corso Vannucci.

Evenings in Perugia are quite lively and pleasant, so I always recommend at least spending one night in the city.

If you're planning a longer trip in Umbria, Perugia also makes for a very convenient base from which to explore the surrounding area. A stay of three days would let you settle in and dedicate



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What to see & do

1. See the treasures of Umbrian art

The somber **Palazzo dei Priori** palace was the seat of Perugia's medieval governors and still houses city offices. On its top floors, it's home to **The National Gallery of Umbria** which showcases seven centuries of Umbrian art and is filled with works by Perugino, Pinturicchio, Piero della Francesca, and other medieval Renaissance painters and sculptors, many of whom mastered their craft here in Perugia.

Among the many painters who worked in Perugia is Raphael, whose frescoes once covered all the walls of the **Cappella di San Severo**. Only a portion survive, and those are damaged, but in them you can see the talent and vision that propelled the artist to join Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci in the triumvirate of the great Renaissance masters.

The **Nobile Collegio del Cambio** is a very well preserved office suite from the Renaissance, the beautifully frescoed headquarters of a moneychangers guild.



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The Sala dei Notari in the Palazzo dei Priori. Photo: [Cristianopelagracci](#), [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via [Wikimedia Commons](#). Cropped from original

2. Enjoy the spectacle of the Piazza IV Novembre

This attractive square is the center of town, full of people and surrounded by the imposing medieval Palazzo dei Priori and Perugia's Duomo, the cathedral of San Lorenzo. At the center of the square is the monumental, pink-and-white Fontana Maggiore, elaborately carved with a swirl of saints, angels, signs of the Zodiac, and biblical figures.

Elegant as the assemblage is, the 13th century monument is also a feat of practical engineering that for the first time delivered fresh water to the city. The façade of the Duomo was never finished, hence the stark appearance, while the elaborate interior is embellished with colorful frescoes and masterful statuary.



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Piazza IV Novembre. Photo: [Kristianpot](#), [CC BY-SA 4.0](#), via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

3. Learn about Etruscan history at the city's archaeology museum

Umbria and adjoining Tuscany were the heartland of the Etruscan civilization that prospered 2,500 years ago. A fascinating array of their artifacts are now on display at the [Museo Archeologico Nazionale dell'Umbria](#), where remarkably well-preserved tombs are carved with grape harvesters, kissing couples, and banqueters and other haunting scenes from across the millennia.

Anyone interested in history should pay it a visit.



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A cloister within Perugia's National Archaeology museum. Photo: [SBAUmbria](#), [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

4. Take a walk around the old town

The cobbled lanes that crisscross the old town often become steps as they climb hills and drop into ravines. As you wander you'll come upon fountains, arches, and the elaborate doorways of Renaissance palaces and churches.

You'll see a lot of the old city on a walk north from Piazza IV November across the Via dell'Acquedotto (see below) and through the university district to the 14th-century Cassero di Porta Sant'Angelo. This is the largest and most elaborate of the medieval defenses, with a keep and a tower.

A short walk along nearby Via del Tempio brings you to San Michele Arcangelo, a small, round early Christian church from the fifth century.



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The “Etruscan Arch” in the old town. Photo: [AliasXX00](#), [CC BY-SA 4.0](#), via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

5. Stroll along the aqueduct

A view-filled ramble just north of Piazza IV Novembre takes you along Via dell’Acquedotto, across the top of a 13th-century aqueduct with a panorama of the town and valley unfolding as you cross over a steep ravine.

On the far side is the Borgo Sant’Angelo neighborhood and the University of Perugia, one of several schools that give the city a lot of youthful energy.



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*A stretch of the aqueduct. Photo: [Comune di Perugia](#), [CC BY 4.0](#), via [Wikimedia Commons](#).
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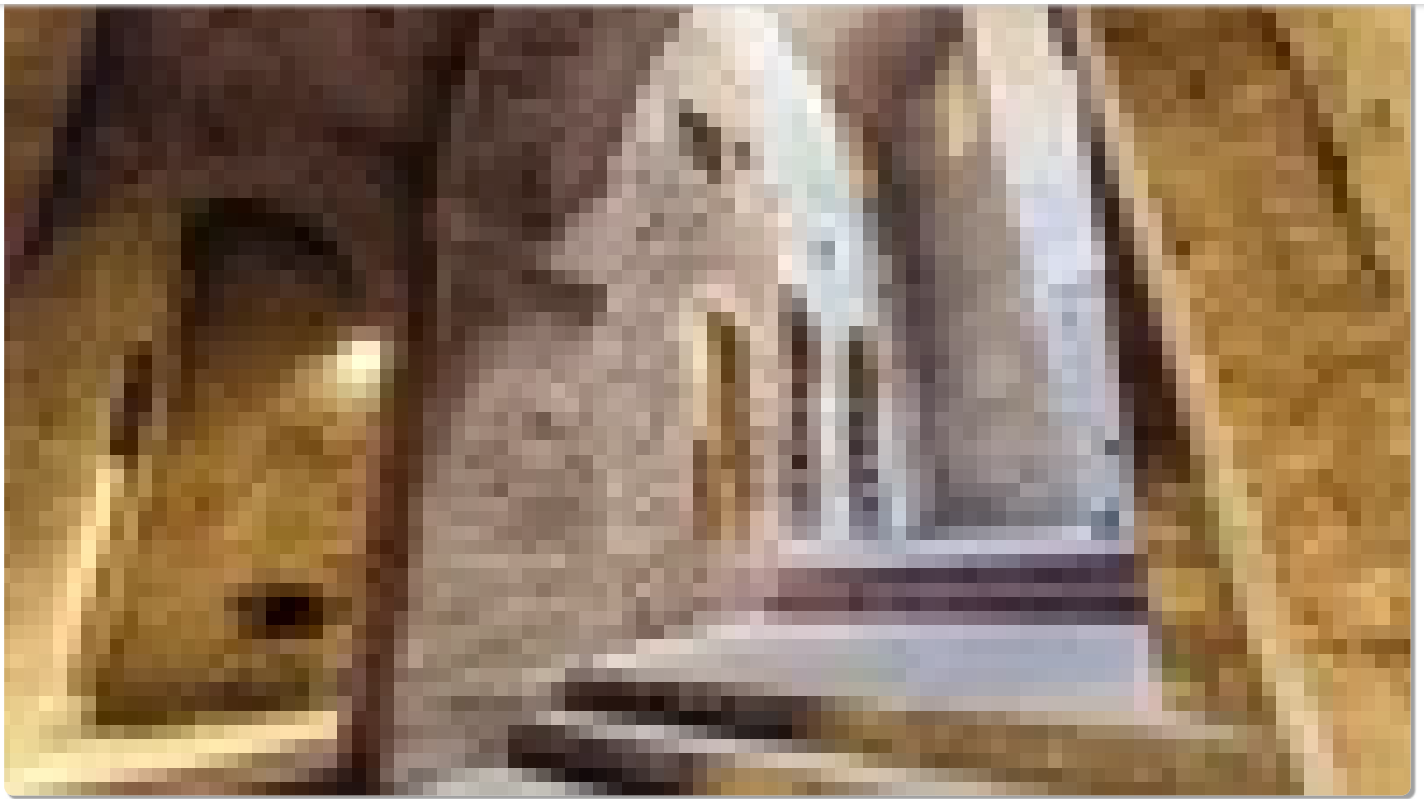
6. Tour the underbelly of Perugia at Rocca Paolina

Another walk leads underground, into the remains of the medieval city beneath Piazza Italia. Around 1530 the Papal States quelled a rebellion and took control of the city, and Pope Paul III cleared a hillside enclave to build a castle, [Rocca Paolina](#). Three centuries later, after Italian unification, Peruginos demolished the castle and laid out Piazza Italia in its place.

These days a series of escalators and walkways, entered from Piazza Italia, descend through a maze of vaulted chambers, passageways, and other remains of the papal palace.



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A section of the remains of the Rocca Paolina castle. Photo: [Cristianopelagracci](#), [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

7. Climb up to Porta Sole

The Arco dei Gigli, also known as Porta Sole, is one of the gates in the Etruscan walls that once enclosed the city. It's quite a climb to the gate, at the top of town, up steep lanes and dozens of steps, but the reward is probably the best view in Perugia, over the old town and far across the valley below.



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The view from Porta Sole gate. Photo: [AliasXX00](#), [CC BY-SA 4.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

8. Join locals on their daily “passeggiata”

An evening walk is a popular pastime throughout Italy, known as the *passeggiata*, and Perugia partakes of the ritual with relish. The preferred venue is Corso Vannucci, between Piazza Italia and Piazza IV Novembre.



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Corso Vannucci. Photo: [trolvag](#), [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

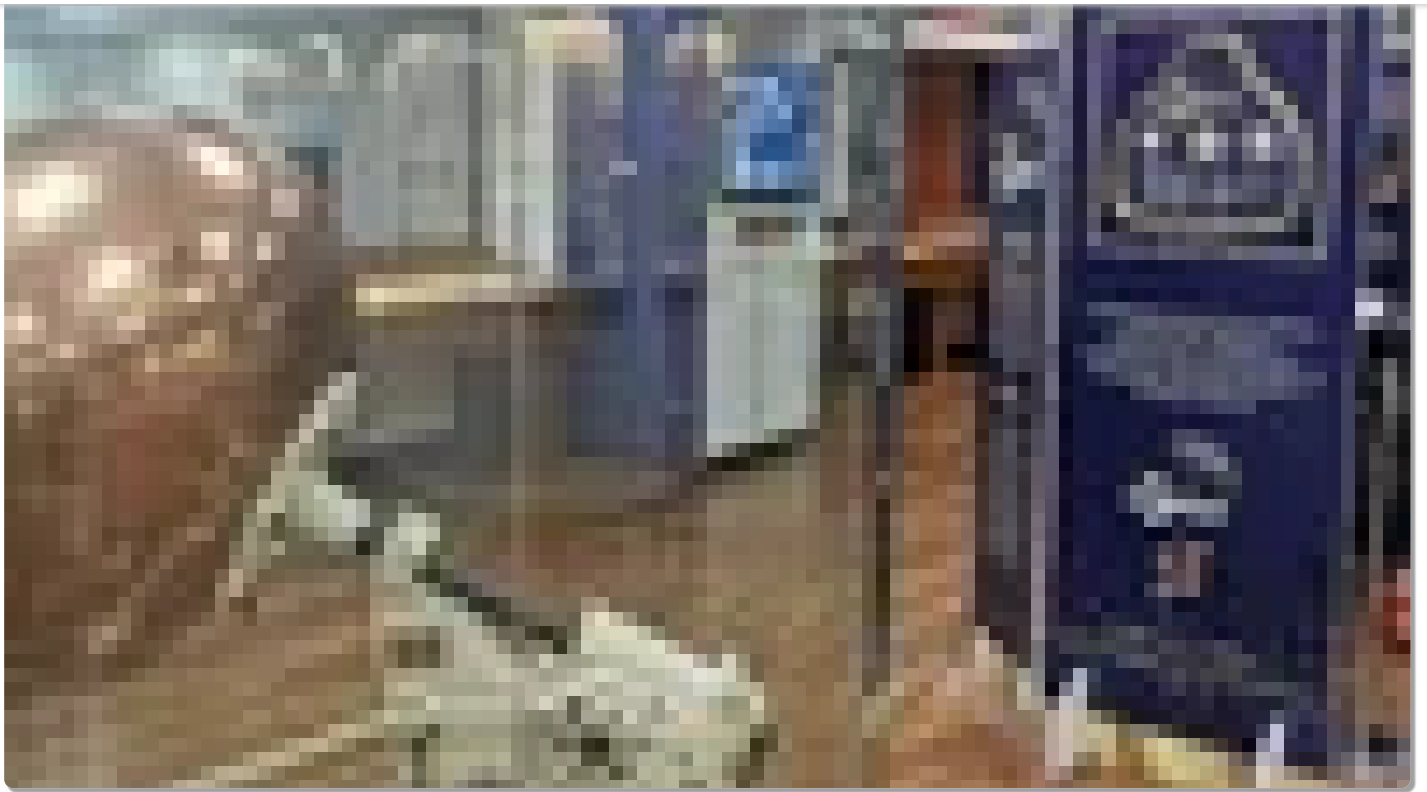
9. Sample local chocolate at the Perugina factory

Chocolate is big business in Perugia, and the local [Perugina factory](#) turns out 120 tons of chocolates a day. You'll find Baci kisses and other trademark sweets in shops on Corso Vannucci and elsewhere around town, and you can visit the company's Casa di Cioccolato, in the outlying San Sisto district, about 15 minutes from the historic center, for factory tours, chocolate-making lessons, tastings, and a chocolate museum.

The multi-day EuroChocolate festival brings a million chocolate fans to Perugia and outlying sites every spring and fall for tastings, chocolate sculpting demonstrations, and other events.



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A room at the Perugina factory/museum. Photo: [Elekes Andor](#), [CC BY 4.0](#), via [Wikimedia Commons](#). Cropped

10. Listen to some jazz

For the past 50 years Perugia has hosted the [Umbria Jazz Festival](#), attracting musicians and fans from around the world for ten days in July. All the greats - Chet Baker, Tony Bennett, Miles Davis, Wynton Marsalis, Stan Gaetz among them - have performed here.



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A show during the Umbria Jazz Festival. Photo: [Michael Clements, CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

11. Check out the (many) churches

Perugia, as with any ancient Italian city, has a wealth of beautiful old churches. None of them are necessarily exceptional in their own right, but when you're going for a wander around the town, it's worth keeping a lookout for them and popping in periodically.

The austere (on the outside) Duomo is of course the big one, but others include: the Basilica di San Pietro, built in 996 and boasting magnificent frescos inside. La Chiesa del Gesù has intricate woodworking on the ceiling, the round Chiesa di San Michele Arcangelo is unique, and the mounment Basilica de San Domenico towers over its surroundings and has a massive, gorgeous stained glass window. It also has a lovely cloister.



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The Cattedrale di San Lorenzo, Perugia's Duomo. Photo: [Cycci](#), [CC BY-SA 4.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

12. Hunt for the fortified city gates

Perugia also has a wealth of enormous, imposing city gates (22 in total!), which were built at different periods and were once the entrance points to the old town when the city walls were still fully intact. You'll find them all over the city and there's no need to visit all of them, but many are quite impressive, so they're fun to be on the lookout for.

The older ones were built along the original Etruscan walls, while the more "recent" gates were built in the second wall, hailing from medieval times.



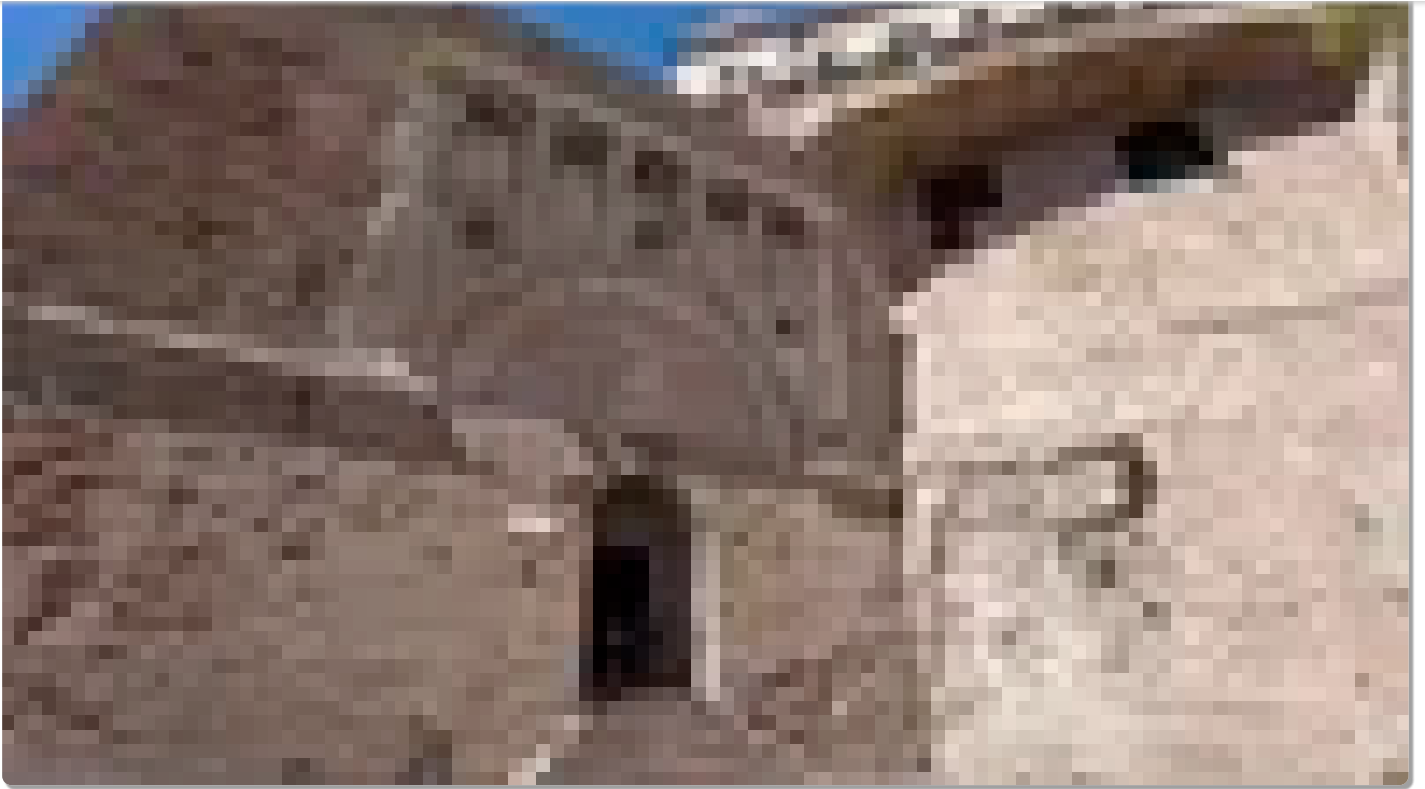
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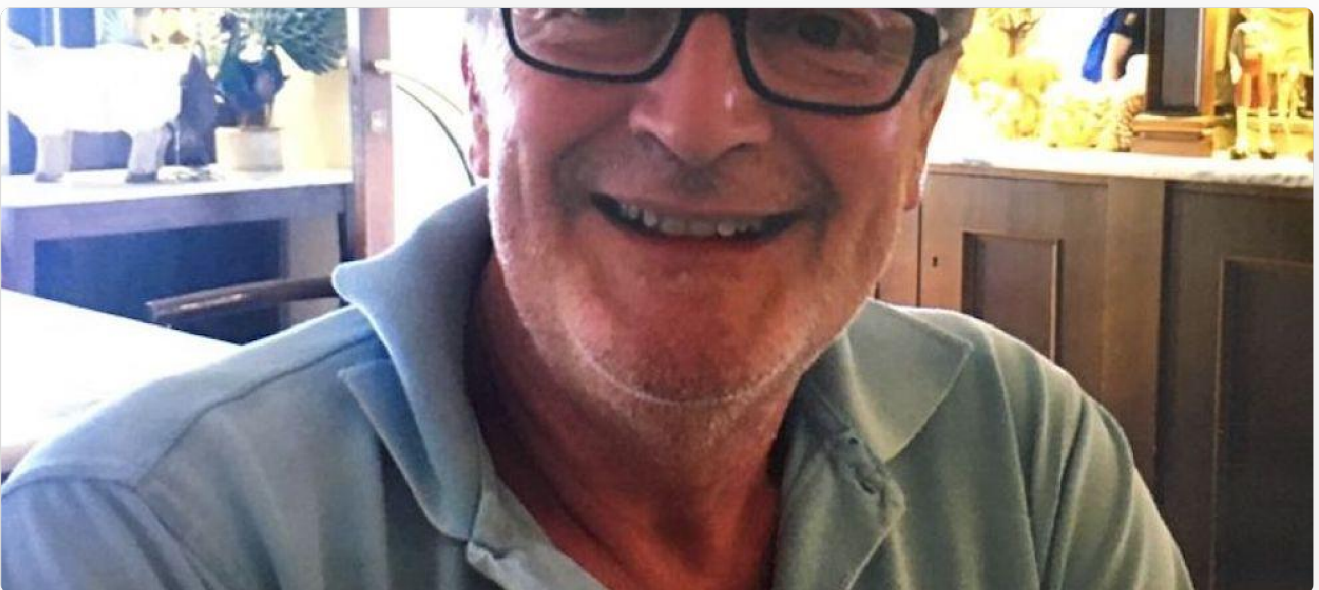
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Things to do nearby

1. Make the Pilgrimage to Assisi

The birthplace of Saint Francis, only half an hour from Perugia, is one of the world's most popular pilgrimage sites, with as many as six million visitors a year. Despite the onslaught, Assisi is also one of the most beautiful towns in Italy, with houses of mellow, honey-colored stone and sublime views across the misty valleys below.

Before you reach the hillside town you'll will pass through Santa Maria degli Angeli (and where you'll arrive if you make the trip by train). The Basilica di Santa Maria degli Angeli-Porziuncola down here is the seventh largest church in Christendom, built around the chapel where Francis renounced his worldly goods the cell where he died in 1226.

Once you get up to town, begin your visit to two other landmark churches. The Basilica di San Francesco, where the saint is buried, commands a hillside at one end of town.

Francis is interred in the Lower Church in a sarcophagus beneath colorful frescoes, and a sublime fresco cycle by Giotto in the Upper Church tells the life story of this man who nine centuries after his death is still beloved for his kindness.

One of his followers, Clare, is also honored in Assisi—and on eerie skeletal display—in the nearby Basilica di Santa Chiara.

It's a pleasure just to wander around the cobbled lanes of this attractive hill town of honey-colored stone, and a climb to the mountainside Rocca Maggiore, a medieval fortress, affords views far across the Umbrian plains.

2. Check out Spello

When visiting Assisi, you might want to include a short side trip to nearby Spello. This small town will charm you the minute you step through the gates into the flower-bedecked lanes.



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frescoes portraying the boyhood of Christ set against Umbrian landscapes. Apart from their technicolor beauty, the scenes stand out as a bit of medieval damage control.

The powerful Baglioni clan commissioned them to get back into the good graces of the church after a family feud devolved into the so-called Red Wedding, a frenzied bloodbath that left behind a pile of butchered corpses.

3. Head up to medieval Gubbio

Head up to Gubbio, less than an hour from Perugia. With its crenellated palaces set against dark hillsides, Gubbio is a thoroughly medieval-looking place, though the Romans who conquered the Etruscans settled here 2,000 years ago and left behind one of the largest theaters from the ancient world.

Begin your explorations in the town's movie-set-worthy showpiece, Piazza Grande, a dramatic expanse of brick anchored by the heavily Gothic Palazzo dei Consoli (town hall) and opening on one side to soothing views across Umbrian landscapes.

Step inside the Palazzo dei Consoli for a look at the Eugubine Tablets, from around 200 b.c.e, a sort of Rosetta Stone in which the Umbri language is transposed in Etruscan and Latin letters.

Then hop onto the Funivia Colle Eletto for a ride up Monte Ingino. As you enjoy the breezy ascent in one of the open-air cages, keep in mind that every spring during the Corsa dei Ceri, costumed teams shoulder huge statues of saints mounted on battering ram-like platforms and race up the slopes.

In December, townsfolk deck out the slopes of Ingino with lights in the shape of the world's largest Christmas tree.

4. Go for a swim in Lake Trasimeno

Lago Trasimeno, the fourth largest lake in Italy, is practically at Perugia's doorstep. The shallow, blue waters set against green hills, vineyards, and olive groves lap against pebbly beaches at Passignano and Castiglione del Lago, both within easy reach and where you can rent boats and bikes, swim, or just enjoy the views across the waters.

Boaters set their sights on Isola Maggiore (served by ferry), a charming little outcropping with some nice cafes and places for a refreshing dip.

5. Visit Cortona



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and to the south Via Nazionale opens into airy Piazza Garibaldi, where a wide sweep of the Valdichiana, with Montepulciano in the distance, unfolds at your feet.

If you're up for the exertion, follow the steep lanes through the upper town to the Basilica di Santa Margherita and even higher to the hilltop Fortezza di Girafalco. Then do some museum-going to see the Etruscan finds in MAEC and Renaissance masterpieces by Cortona's own Luca Signorelli in the Museo Diocesano.

6. Buy ceramics in Deruta

Pretty little Deruta, about a 20-minute drive south of Perugia, has a few worthy landmarks, but for most visitors the frescoed Gothic churches take second place to the town's famous ceramics, or maiolica.

About 300 workshops in the little town create the beautiful pieces, using age-old firing, glazing, and painting techniques. The output is for sale in shops and studios around town.

Where to stay

Remember, there are two Perugias, the medieval upper town and the modern lower town, and the atmospheric upper town is where you want to stay. These rates are for a double room, and unless otherwise noted include breakfast.

The Brufani Palace is at the edge of Piazza Italia and the beautifully appointed rooms, handsome lounges, and terraces overhang the valley below. Among the many luxuries is a swimming pool set above Etruscan ruins in the basement. From 220 euros.

The Hotel Locanda della Posta is another old bastion of luxury, but the palace on Corso Vennucci has been done in crisp contemporary style, leaving frescoes and other centuries-old features in place. From 125 euros.

Primavera Minihotel is a more modest choice, enjoying a nice location at the top of a house at the edge of the old town, with some excellent views and pleasant surroundings. 85 euros, breakfast extra.

Castello di Monterone is not in the center but on a green hillside about ten minutes outside town and you'll be swapping in-town convenience for gardens, terraces, and lots of cozy



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Begin your day with a walk in Piazza Italia, a leafy square that is lined with the palatial headquarters of Umbria's provincial government and on one end overhangs the valley far below.

From here the broad, shop-lined Corso Vannucci heads through the center of town to the Piazza IV Novembre, where the Duomo rises next to the elaborately carved Fontana Maggiore. A couple of stops along the way can keep you occupied for the rest of the morning.

The Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, on the top floors of the heavily medieval Palazzo dei Priori, showcases the great works of Umbrian artists from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The standout is a polyptych by Piero della Francesca, in which you can lose yourself looking into the intricate religious scenes full of precise detail and perspective.

The Nobile Collegio del Cambio next door preserves the meeting rooms of the town's medieval money-lending guild, providing a glimpse into 15th-century office life.

Grab lunch somewhere in the city center (I've included some of my favorite restaurants below) and then get ready for some more exploring.

The cobbled lanes that crisscross the old town often become steps as they climb hills and drop into ravines. As you wander you'll come upon fountains, arches, and the elaborate doorways of Renaissance palaces and churches. One of them, the Capella di San Severo, is covered in frescoes that the Renaissance master Raphael early in his career, before he became known for his work in Florence and Rome.

A view-filled ramble takes you along Via dell'Acquedotto, across the top of a 13th-century aqueduct with a panorama of the town and valley unfolding as you cross.

Another walk leads underground, into the remains of the medieval city beneath Piazza Italia, where a series of escalators and walkways, entered from Piazza Italia, descends through a maze of vaulted chambers and passageways of the demolished Rocca Paolina, a demolished papal palace.

As evening sets in, Peruginos take their evening passeggiata up and down Corso Vannucci, so join them for a leisurely stroll and then find a spot for a cocktail and some people watching.

Wind down the evening with a hearty dinner of Umbrian classics.



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hearty soups and stews. A typical Umbrian pasta is strangozzi, and it's often served alla Norcina, with crumbled pork sausage.

Here are a few of my favorite restaurants:

[**Bottega del Vino**](#) serves wine, cocktails, and a selection of ham and cheeses and pastas in character-filled rooms off Piazza IV Novembre. Dinner for two is about 60 euros.

[**La Taverna**](#) serves homemade pastas and choice meats in a charming room and good-weather courtyards. Dinner for two is about 80 euros.

[**L'Officina**](#) makes the most of local products for vegetarian and meat-based tasting menus, served in chic surroundings. Dinner for two is from 80 to 120 euros.

[**Osteria A Priori**](#) specializes in innovative takes on Umbrian classics—slowly cooked *fagiolina* (beans) and other delicious staples are featured on a menu that changes every day. Dinner for two is about 70 euros.

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City guide

Stephen Brewer

Based between Manhattan and Italy, Stephen has been writing travel guides about Il Bel Paese for three decades. You'll most frequently find him road tripping around his beloved Tuscany, but a lover of all things Italy, he's constantly exploring new regions as well.



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