

The “undiscovered” charms of Le Marche



The Apennine Mountains, traversed by many of your forefathers

Tourist agencies and holiday websites nearly always use this epithet when describing the region of Le Marche, situated on the eastern side of the country, taking up the calf of the boot-shape that is Italy. In fact, it is well-known to Northern European holidaymakers, who flock to its hills and valleys in the spring and summer. And although it can't boast all the artistic and cultural tourist magnets of Florence or Assisi, it has many more discreet charms of its own. The city of **Urbino**, in the north



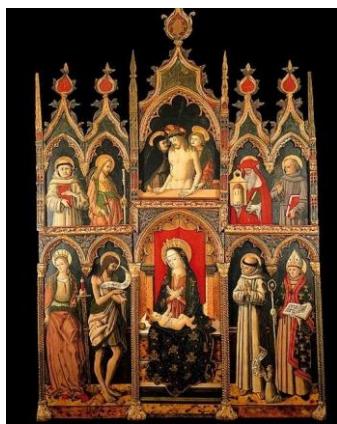
*Federico da Montefeltro,
Duke of Urbino
by Piero della Francesca*

of the region, and a World Heritage site, easily competes with the aesthetic hubs of Tuscany and Umbria. Home to Piero della Francesca, it includes the impressive ducal palace of Federico da Montefeltro, diplomat and warrior and subject of Piero's famous painting of his profile with hooked nose. That painting is now in the Uffizi in Florence, but the rest of the Duke's considerable art collection is housed in the ducal place. At the other end of the scale, the small hilltop village of **Montefalcone Appennino** houses a triptych by Pietro Allemanno that would not be out of place in the Uffizi. Neither would the frescoes of Carlo Crivelli, on the walls of the church of St Martin in **Monte San Martino**, beside the small square named in memory of our

founder Keith Killby.



Ducal Palace, Urbino



Triptych of Pietro Alemanno

Prior to the unification of Italy, Le Marche was one of the papal states, with its peoples acting as tax collectors for the Pope, thereby giving rise to the saying: *“Meglio un morto in casa che un marchigiano alla porta.”* (“Better a death in the house than a Marchigiano at your door.”). As a result, the local communities had strong connections with Rome, something which benefited **Servigliano** in the 18th century. Unlike most other communities in Le Marche, such as the Trust's eponymous Monte San Martino, which are medieval hilltop villages with narrow streets and vertiginous drops, Servigliano today is built on a grid in the valley of the River

Tenna. This is a result of several earthquakes starting in 1758 which destroyed the old town, whose luminaries then made supplications to Pope Clement XIV who, in one of the earlier examples of town planning, responded by instructing its rebuilding as the elegant town seen today.



One of the three gateways into Servigliano

Le Marche is also known as “all of Italy in one region”. The coast is the venue for the typical Italian beach holiday, with bars and umbrellas and extended families enjoying the peaceful Adriatic Sea. Inland, hilltops give way to the Apennine Mountains, running down the spine of Italy and known as the **Sibillini** in Le Marche. Imbued with legends, including a wizard and prophet, after whom the Monte Sibilla is named, the most spectacular site is the **Lago di Pilato**, a lake high up in the mountains said to hold the remains of Pontius Pilate, and which turns red due to the presence of a particular shrimp, to be found only at this location. Walks up to the lake start at the delightful hamlet of Foce, with sustenance provided by the



Entrance to the *Gola dell'Infernaccio*

Rifugio Taverna Della Montagna.

Miracles and legends accompany most of the mountain walks in this region. There are two that are easily reachable from Servigliano, the first being the “**Gola dell'Infernaccio**”, the “Gorge of Hell”, from which one can climb up to the church of St Leonard, originally an ancient hermitage completely rebuilt by one Padre Pietro, who carried out all the reconstruction entirely by himself (including carrying all the necessary material up from the gorge) from the 1970s until his death in 2015. Secondly, the neighbouring gorge of the River Ambro contains the church and sanctuary of the **Madonna dell'Ambro**, marking the

miraculous vision of the Madonna by a mute shepherdess, still the destination of pilgrims to this day.

These gorges and much else beside are covered by the **Sibillini National Park**, making the area ideal for nature-lovers (recent re-introductions include the chamois), walkers and climbers.

Still on the subject of legends, the town of **Loreto**, south of Ancona, is one of the most important Catholic pilgrimage sites, containing in its Basilica the “Holy House”, namely the home of Jesus, brought from Bethlehem by angels. Further north lie the **Frasassi Caverns** (*Grotte di Frasassi*) only discovered in 1971 and one of the largest cave systems in Europe (they say the cathedral in Milan could easily fit in the largest of its rooms). Dramatically lit and with gantries and stairs to make walking easy, it is a spectacular place to visit.

Just south of Servigliano is the town of **Ascoli Piceno**, with beautiful piazzas constructed of travertine marble, in which one can people-watch from the Bar Meletti, while sampling a Marche street food speciality, *olive ascolane* – olives covered in breadcrumbs and

stuffed with meat, or *Vincisgrassi*, a regional lasagne much lighter than the usual offering and reputedly named in honour of a local Austrian general, Alfred von Windisch-Grätz. Both go well with the local wines such as Rosso Piceno or Verdicchio (to name but two) from the many local wine producers, perhaps



Bar Meletti, Ascoli Piceno

the most famous being Ciu Ciu (the nickname of the founder), whose cantina is open for tastings in the town of **Offida**, itself famous for its lace production and where it is still possible to watch women sitting outside their houses making extraordinarily intricate items.



Servigliano centre aerial view



Frasassi caverns

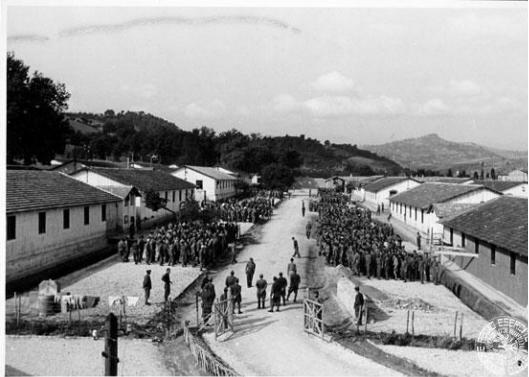


Antipasti marchigiani together with olive ascolane

Brief history of PG59 Servigliano

Built as a prison camp for Austrian PoWs in the First World War, the camp was re-opened in January 1941 and by January 1942 the first Allied prisoners began to filter

through from North Africa. An Other Ranks camp, as were the two others in the region (PG53 Sforzacosta and PG70 Monte Urano – both requisitioned factories), at its peak it held 2,000 men, including increasing numbers of Americans after their country's entry into the war. It has its fair share of escape stories pre-Armistice, including three tunnels,



PG59 and prisoners



Wartime reconnaissance photo of camp (centre right) and town (above & to left)

one of which was partially successful in that some men did escape, but not as many as should have as a result of one Chief Petty Officer being too large and getting stuck. It is the only other example (along with Fontanellato) of the escapes in September 1943 being negotiated between the Camp Leader (SBO equivalent in OR camps) and the Commandant, with Dr Millar the Camp Leader having to sign a form saying he took full responsibility for the break-out (now preserved in the

Imperial War Museum). The outline of the hole excavated by Keith Killby and his SAS companions can still be seen in the wall at the back of the camp.

After the Armistice, PG59 was re-purposed as a transit camp for Jews on their way to the death camps at Dachau. It has the singular honour of being the only place where the Allies actively helped in the liberation of Jews. Liaising with local partisans, the RAF bombed the camp, allowing the Resistance to enter and remove any of those inside who were willing to leave.



PG59 Watchtowers and slogans

Post-war, it

remained in use as a refugee camp for Italians driven out of the Yugoslav territories of Istria and Dalmatia, and was only finally closed in 1955, becoming a public park in the 1980s and now officially designated an Italian National Monument, its role being developed by the "Casa della Memoria" Association, building both

a museum and a library for the study

of the camp's long and chequered history.



Museum of Casa della Memoria in the old railway station from which prisoners disembarked



PG59 with Servigliano in the background

Recommended reading: Gilbert Broadbent "Behind Enemy Lines" – an almost day by day account of life in PG59 Servigliano. And the Trust's own Keith Killby "In Combat Unarmed" describes his brief sojourn and escape from the camp. Also <https://camp59survivors.com/> - American curator Dennis Hill's father was in PG59 and he has been collecting memories and accounts on the subject for the last 10 years.

General Information

Specific details will be provided to supporters who express an interest. Meanwhile, the following may be useful:

Airports:

There are 3 airports within easy reach of Servigliano. All currently served by Ryanair, they are:

Pescara: 1hr40 south, notable for its huge arched window housing a restaurant.

Ancona: 1hr40 north, port city for ferries to Croatia.

Rome Ciampino: 3hrs but a lovely drive through the Abruzzi National Park. Or if you prefer to avoid the autostrada, then the old Salt Road -*Via Salaria*.

All three are small airports and quick and easy to exit from. All the main **car rental services** are at each location.



Italian Frecciarossa



Pescara: Aeroporto d'Abruzzo

Train:

If you want to make an expedition of it, Eurostar then the very fast French TGV and Italian Frecciarossa (Red Arrow) will get you to Ancona station, where Hertz and Avis both have offices. This website is recommended for further information <https://www.seat61.com/>

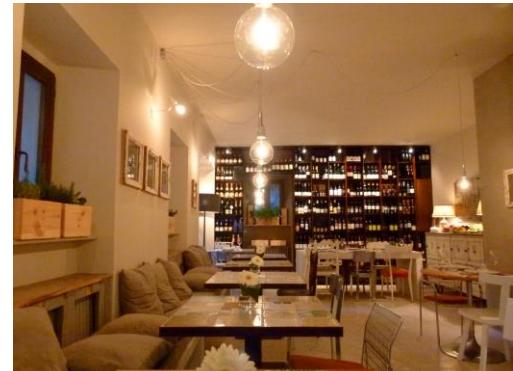
Food and wine

Like all Italian regions, Le Marche is proud of its local specialities and almost every town will have at least one shop selling "prodotti tipici". Restaurants abound, ranging from sophisticated takes on traditional dishes to cheap 'n cheerful peasant fare. For the latter, look for a restaurant with all the local tradesmen's vans parked outside at lunchtime!

Wine tastings can be arranged at various locations, with a strong showing of both local reds and whites and a sparkling wine produced by the Velenosi family just outside Ascoli Piceno (and whose alarming surname means poisonous.)

Accommodation

Airbnb, Booking.com and other sites will find you a large selection of accommodation in the area. Choices include boutique hotels, B&Bs, villas, agriturismi (farm stays) and range from standard to luxurious.



Pane e Vino, Servigliano, superior dining in a relaxed setting

Anne Copley, trustee, has a home in Le Marche and can be contacted for any queries about exploring the area, places to stay and things to do. She says: "*The most common comment from everyone I have escorted around Le Marche over the years is 'Why have I not known about this beautiful place before!' acopley01@gmail.com*

