

Falling in love with Le Marche

We asked **Dawn Cavanagh-Hobbs** from property company **Appassionata** why the tranquil central region of Le Marche has captured her heart



This is a question I have been asked many times over the past few years. While I don't like to generalise, the common theme is people who want to experience the real Italy, to immerse themselves in the culture and history; who value the importance of family – and, of course, the great cuisine! For our family, for our business, Le Marche is the perfect place. Trying to find some authenticity in this crazy, busy world is getting harder. Sometimes we just need to escape the chaos and experience something real and true.

Some people are leaders. They are adventurous and like to make their own discoveries; for them, each day is exciting and they have a thirst for knowledge. Some people are followers. They go where others have been and see what others have seen; they like to travel the trodden path. Most visitors to Italy go to the main tourist cities like Rome and Florence and bask on the beaches along the Amalfi Coast. These places are amazing and definitely worth visiting, but do they give you a true insight into the real Italy?

GET UNDER THE SKIN
For those of us who really like to get under the skin of a country

This page, clockwise from top right: Dining among the vines, a special event organised by one of our local cantinas; the famous walled city of Urbino; fields of sunflowers light up the valleys in summer; our sunrise concert in Pedaso

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Images courtesy of Dawn Cavanagh-Hobbs and www.montefioredeellaso.com



Clockwise from top: Me cycling along the promenade with my grand-daughter, Millie-Mary, on a Friday morning; Conero Riviera, one of the most scenic stretches of coastline anywhere in Italy; Ascoli Piceno is famous for the use of travertine marble in its architecture

and integrate with the locals, rather than be surrounded by thousands of tourists, Le Marche is the place. I prefer to hear the beautiful tones of the Italian language being spoken while I'm drinking my morning coffee, rather than my mother tongue.

Picture a place where mountains roll gently down to a stunning coastline of Blue Flag beaches dotted with restaurants serving the catch of the day. A patchwork vista really does exist here: a blend of olive groves and vineyards and fields of sunflowers shimmering in the sun. Sometimes I feel like I'm driving through a film set. Generation after generation have farmed the land for hundreds of years, growing produce for their family or selling it on to the local shops and restaurants.

Le Marche is a region brimming with ancient churches, abbeys and monasteries. Tiny village theatres, with frescoed ceilings and gold-leaf mouldings are found tucked away along the cobbled streets of virtually every medieval village. I have had the great privilege of watching many productions over the past years and I often have to pinch myself that I'm not in Covent Garden – I'm sitting in a tiny, exquisite, eighty-seat theatre, built hundreds of years ago, in a hilltop town in Le Marche, but the standard, the professionalism and the dedication is the same.

SO MUCH TO DO

Here is a brief snapshot of our down time in Le Marche: Monday evening was magical, sitting under the stars in the *piazza* of the Polo Museale di San Francesco in Montefiore dell'Aso, watching an old Italian movie, *L'albero degli zoccoli*. This museum dates back to 1264 and Carlo Crivelli's polyptych is the centrepiece.

Sergio, the owner of Osteria delle Cornacchie, one of our local restaurants, invited us all over for dinner on Tuesday as a thank you for being some of his best customers.

He is famous for his sense of humour, and polenta served on a wooden board. People travel for miles to taste this speciality.

Early to bed on Wednesday evening as we had a 4.30am alarm call on Thursday morning for a sunrise concert by the violinist Valentino Alessandrini on the beach at Pedaso. The music, the setting, everything was totally breathtaking. The waves crashing against the rocks added to the emotion of this very special occasion. It was certainly worth the early start and I will definitely be returning next year.

Friday is the day I love to cycle along the promenade, which runs for miles alongside the beach. I pull over for a *cappuccino*, chat to the locals and browse the market in San Benedetto. I can never resist stopping for lunch in Grottammare, at one of the best seafood restaurants in the world, Il Grecale.

Saturday evening... This was something I have always wanted to experience, *La Cena in Vigna*, 'Dinner among the Vines'. One of our local cantinas, Dea Flora, organised a wonderful evening of food, wine and live music. It was a beautiful setting with shooting stars lighting up the night sky.

Our philosophy is to celebrate and share the very best that Italy has to offer, without compromise. Le Marche is quintessentially Italian and that's what people fall in love with – and yet it remains one of Italy's best-kept secrets. ■

APPASSIONATA FACT BOX

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