



Tuscany-Umbria



May 30TH – June 6TH, 1998

Jessica Deutsch

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Join an intimate house party of fifteen, in a private 18th-Century frescoed villa filled with original paintings and furniture. Set on the border of Tuscany and Umbria, with spectacular views of the Tiber valley, **Villa Schifanoia** is also close to the mountainous region of Le Marche. It is ideally situated to explore unknown areas in the tranquil heart of Italy unspoiled by tourism.

The program will be led by John Wilton-Ely, architectural historian and Professor Emeritus in the History of Art, The University of Hull; and Valerie Thornhill, art historian and Renaissance specialist. They will take us on a journey through a spectacular landscape to mountain villages that maintain an isolation from outside influences and impart a timeless spirituality.

The program will explore several interconnecting themes; the proto-Renaissance starting with **Giotto**; the religious movement of **St. Francis**; and the Renaissance with its echoes in contemporary arts and crafts. However, no visit can ignore the Etruscan and Roman past and the turbulent medieval history. Amongst the highlights will be Giotto's frescoes in the **Basilica of San Francesco**, one of the greatest monuments of Italian

art; the birthplace of St. Francis at Assisi; and the **Palace of Duke Federico de Montefeltro** in Urbino, called by some "the most beautiful palace in the world".

Meals and receptions at private castles and villas will be arranged to convey the romance of the late medieval period or rich refinement of life in Renaissance times. Visits to local vineyards and olive groves offer samplings of the soft wines and pure green oil for which the region is renowned. Craft workshops and local jewelers allow for opportunity to shop for fine ceramics, textiles and gold jewelry. At local antique stores and village fairs there are a variety of decorative arts and paintings awaiting those with a keen eye for collecting.

Most special however is **Villa Schifanoia**, where we will have ample time to relax. Its magnificent reception rooms, twelve-acre park with century-old trees, swimming pool and tennis court, allow for a serene experience of a way of life once enjoyed by the upper levels of Italian society. Meals prepared by the chef at the villa, a demonstration in the preparation of true Umbrian cuisine, and dinners in the villa complete the picture.

This will be an enchanting week where history and art, while studied intensively, remain as a backdrop to viewing the grandeur of the heart of Italy. Our hosts will show us why this is "a place to be rather than to do". ♦

Schedule

In addition to the main centers mentioned, we will stop at many small villages. The schedule is subject to variation depending particularly on the restoration work at Assisi.

Saturday, May 30th

Collection by bus from central Rome at noon. Scenic drive to **Villa Schifanoia**. Late afternoon reception and dinner in the villa.

Sunday, May 31st ~ Gubbio

After a leisurely morning in the gardens at the villa we make our way to this city. On its windy slopes we explore the hard-edged brilliance of the Italian Middle Ages as well Etruscan and Roman ruins. The **Museo Civico** has amongst its treasures the bronze **Eugubine Tablets**, with the only inscriptions ever found in the Umbrian language. As our visit will be on the last Sunday in May, we will be treated to one of Gubbio's traditional festive days - a fiercely fought contest, dating from 1461, when crossbow-men from Sansepolcro come to compete. Renaissance dinner in a private castle near the village of Umbertide.

Monday, June 1st ~ Assisi

Umbria's famous hill town, the birthplace of the 13th-century saint, dominates the flanks of Monte Subasio. We encompass buildings bearing witness to St Francis, including the **Basilica of San Francesco**, with its frescoes by **Giotto** and other trecento masters. We also enjoy private

entrée to a ceramic workshop that produces both traditional and modern works. Our day includes a visit to the wine area of Torgiano with its museum of viniculture.

Tuesday, June 2nd ~ Urbino

Scenic drive to the isolated mountains in the Northern Marches. Our visit will be devoted predominately to Urbino and its most precious ornament, the **Palazzo Ducale**, built under the patronage and learned rule of the 15th-century **Duke Federico da Montefeltro**. In the palace we see the famous **Flagellation of Piero della Francesca**. The city was the birthplace and home of the Renaissance master **Raphael** and we explore his house (now restored as a museum). Dinner in Urbino.

Wednesday, June 3rd Arezzo and Cortona

Michelangelo wrote, "If my brains are any good at all, it is because I was born in the pure air of the Arezzo countryside." Strategically located on a hill this was once one of the richest cities of the Etruscans and the stronghold of the late medieval condottiere, **Braccio Fortebracci**. Today, it is the center of a flourishing jewelry industry. We will visit some of the small firms producing the carefully crafted jewelry for which Italy is famous. Drive through the valley of Valdichiana where we lunch in a private castle before proceeding to Cortona. This city is one of the unexplored jewels of the Italian heartland, with terraced slopes covered with olives and vines, and a