



Adventures in UMBRIA



FOR SOME it is the extraordinary vistas, with miles of rolling hills punctuated by tiny mediaeval hill villages where time seems to have stood still. For others, it is the horses, and the care taken to matching each rider to one that will suit his or her skills and taste.

But whatever the special memory they take home with them, almost everyone who takes a riding holiday with the Centro Ippico La Somma in Umbria, Italy ends up feeling part of the family. The stables, just two hours from Rome, are set in some of the most unspoilt countryside anywhere in Europe, run by the Bevilacqua family which spans three generations.

Agostino looks after the trekking side and takes out most of the rides, along with Clare, the English guide. His son Andrea teaches showjumping, while cousins Cristina and Valentina organise pony games for children. Even grandmother Ermelinda helps out, making home-made pasta for hungry riders who sit down to dinner with the rest of the clan at a big long table.

"It is like being welcomed into an Umbrian home," said Halina Kierkuc, who joined a riding holiday in June. "Every evening our party shared a delicious home cooked meal. However hungry and thirsty we were after a day in the saddle, we were always completely full by the time we headed for our chalets."

They offer a range of riding holidays, including full weeks and shorter breaks, with the option to tack on schooling and jumping lessons as required. A centre-based week explores the beautiful countryside with a series of half and full-day treks, stopping for picnic lunches in shady groves or hilltops. In summer, another programme includes a two-day trail to Roman ruins and an optional night camping with the horses in a dramatic mountain setting. The memorable night ride, available in the warmer months, enables guests to ride out and watch the sun set on the mountains, before sitting down to a three-course lamplit dinner brought out by jeep. All the treks are suitable for both novices and more advanced riders.

"For me, the best part was seeing the most wonderful wild flowers. We were so well looked after. Agostino and Clare made sure everything went according to plan, including providing food and drink in the most spectacular picnic stops you could ask for," said Dena Bird from Devon. "I can't wait to go back!" ■

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Umbria has some of the most unspoilt countryside in Europe

Rancho Huerta del BATAN



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