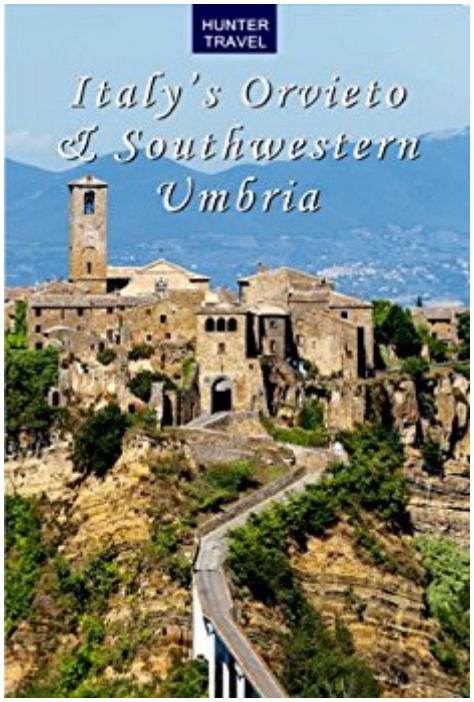
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Italy's Orvieto, Foligno, Spoleto & Southwestern Umbria



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Synopsis

Close to the border where Umbria meets Tuscany and Lazio, the city of Orvieto and the western corner of Umbria occupy a stunning and uncontaminated countryside that ranges from basalt and tufa precipices in the volcanic hinterland to rolling hills and alluvial plains of the Paglia and Tiber rivers, both of which are now regional parks. It is a history-rich area, which has seen much action since the Etruscans first inhabited the area some 3,000 years ago. Halfway along the A1 highway between Florence and Rome, the unforgettable architecture of hilltop Orvieto gives a strong indication of the important role the city has played since Etruscan times. Standing on a single mass of tufa (known as la rupe, or the cliff), the Etruscan city of Velzna ruled here from the seventh century BC until the Romans destroyed it in 264 BC. A striking underground city still survives from that time. It was reconstructed in the fifth century, when it was called urbs vetus (old city). Pope Clement VIII fled here during the sacking of Rome in 1527 and thereafter it became a retreat for the popes. The above-ground settlement was during this time that the city reached its peak that saw the Gothic cathedral constructed and the town remodeled to befit its illustrious guests. The historical center is small enough to cover in a day, but it’s worth hanging around to explore the lush valley, where its famous wine is produced. Tear yourself away from Orvieto if you can and head across the Tiber River Regional Natural Park to the beautifully preserved town of Todi. On its main square, Piazza del Popolo - one of the most beautiful in Italy - a break in one of the pretty caffÃƒÂ¨s offers the chance to soak up the great view over the city Duomo, palazzi and surrounding countryside. A lush green valley between the Tiber and Nera rivers, the Amerino is a striking landscape of ilex groves, vineyards, olive groves and chestnut forests centered around one of the most ancient of all Umbrian towns, Amelia. Commanding the Tiber Valley from within its fourth-century BC polygonal town walls, the ancient city is packed with interesting Roman and medieval remains. The beautiful and romantic city of Spoleto comes into its own during the passeggiata, the leisurely dusk-lit strolls favored by its inhabitants. This is the best time to admire the vast range of monuments, churches, castles and towers that reflect Spoleto’s importance, from its early Umbrian origins, through Roman rule, self-government under the Dukes of Longobard, destruction under the Barbarians and reconstructions in both medieval and modern times. The town that once heroically repelled the advances of Hannibal is now home to one of the region’s most impressive cathedrals, one of the most beautiful piazze in Italy, and a plethora of cultural and artistic traditions that reach their fullest expression in the yearly Spoleto Festival. Throughout this guide, all the best places to stay and eat are detailed, along with the sights you must not miss, the activities, from horseback rides to exploring the monuments and castles, the historical background of what you see and much more.

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