

OVERSEAS

## Where to buy property in Umbria, Italy

Rolling hills, picturesque ruins and stylish renovations mean the central region has charmed everyone from Stanley Tucci to Ed Sheeran



Panicale in Umbria  
ALAMY

Cathy Hawker | Friday October 28 2022, 12:01am, The Times

Seasons don't come much more mellow or misty than autumn in Umbria. The harvest is well under way, changing the rugged landscape and bringing tastes to treasure: wine from Orvieto, truffles from Spoleto and olive oil and porcini from just about everywhere in this landlocked region neighbouring Tuscany.

Umbria is known as the green heart of Italy. The hills are higher, the forests are wilder — especially as you head east — and the countryside is less manicured than in Tuscany. This is authentic Italy, from the hilltop villages to the agricultural fields.

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Umbria stretches from Montone and Citta di Castello in the north to Terni in the south. It includes Lake Trasimeno and Orvieto in the west, Perugia, the capital, in the centre and the town of Norcia, the epicentre of a powerful earthquake in 2016, in the east. In between, says Victoria Greenwood of Savills associates Abode, are pockets of untouched beauty.

"Umbria is not as much on the tourist treadmill as Tuscany," she says. "I think Umbria is to Tuscany as Herefordshire is to the Cotswolds. In summer, when Tuscany's Val d'Orcia is filled with camper vans, you can still find parts of Umbria well off the beaten track."



This two bedroom home on sale for €240,000 via Abode

Favoured locations with international buyers include the valley stretching down beyond Umbertide, the hills behind the Nicone Valley and the area around Lake Trasimeno. The days of finding a four-bedroom house and pool under €500,000 (£435,000) in those locations have long gone, says Greenwood, unless it requires significant work, with prices today starting from at least €650,000 (£565,000).

"More than a specific location, though, what's driving prices in Umbria are three things," Greenwood says. "Views, accessibility and the quality of the finish in the property. The topography in Umbria means views from houses in the same village can differ enormously, something buyers must consider. And while 30 years ago people came and snapped up a remote bargain to renovate, now people are much less cavalier. They want somewhere around 90 minutes to two hours from an airport at most, not somewhere down ten kilometres of rough white road, and they want somewhere that has been renovated with real style."



This five bedroom house with a saltwater swimming pool is on sale for €1.15m with Savills

Last November, Sheri Ireland, 55, and her husband Edward, 63, bought a renovated two-bedroom apartment five minutes from Umbertide and have lived there full-time ever since. They moved from a valley in Arizona with a population of more than five million to a hamlet of less than 300 people. The previous owner had introduced his tasteful Milanese style to the property, adding what Sheri calls "the perfect combination of traditional exposed stone walls and Sheri calls "the perfect combination of traditional exposed stone walls and contemporary features".

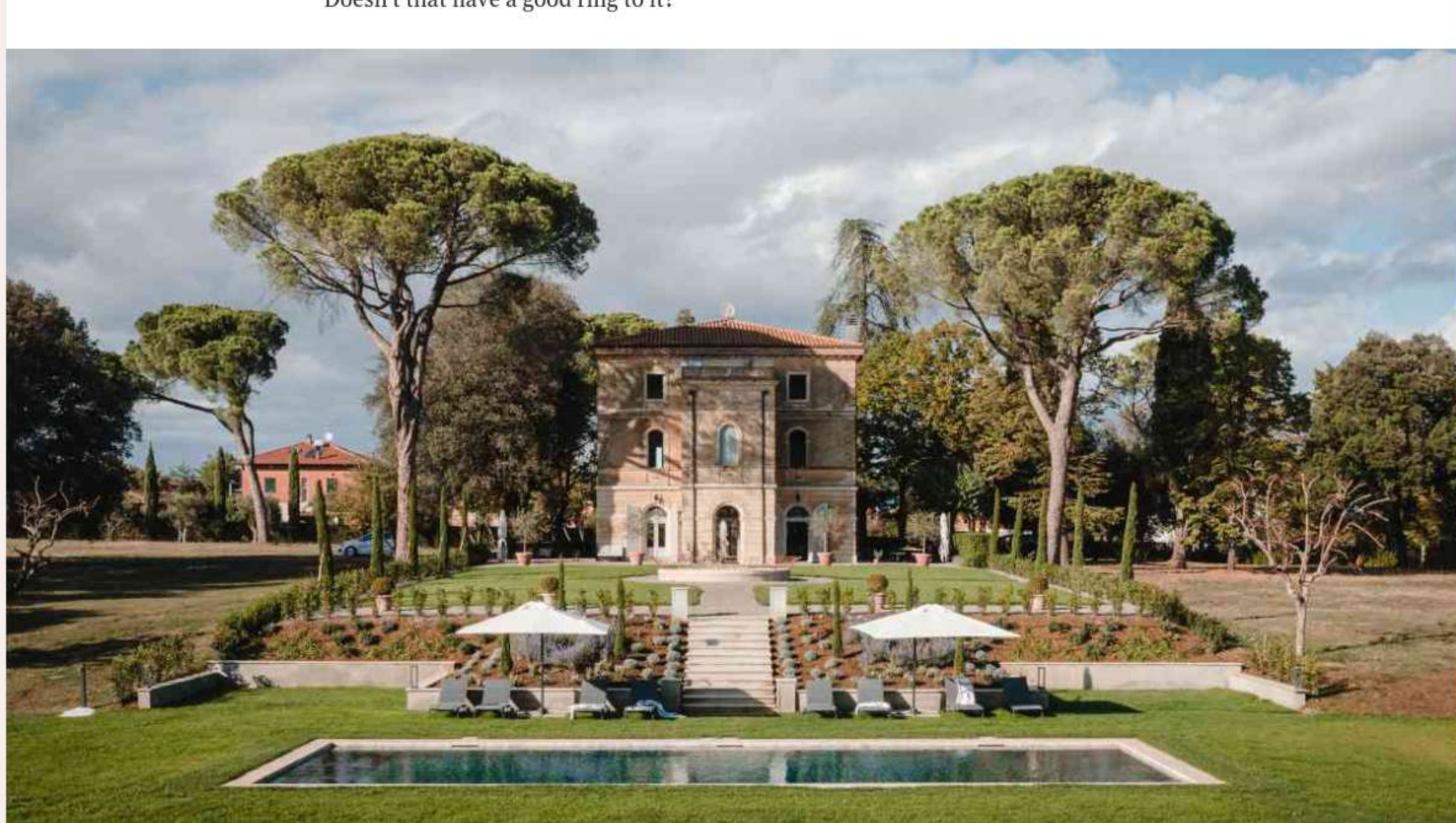
"Umbria's rolling hills, picturesque ruins and historic hill towns are the perfect place for a relaxed transition into retirement," Sheri says. "We've enjoyed a year watching the seasons change, seeing the crops grow and then arrive in our weekly market. Food trucks sell mouthwatering porchetta and one of the very best restaurants for local cuisine, Locanda di Nonna Gelsa, is in our village. You'll never know hunger living in Umbria."



A flat on sale for €580,000 via Special Umbria

They buy their wine in the local sfuso (cantina) and make time for the daily café culture. Edward plays golf at Antognolla and together they are happily working their way around the many medieval towns and villages.

"There are always interesting things happening," Sheri says. "We like the monthly antique fair in Arezzo and in July we attended three nights of the Umbria Film Festival in Montone, watching the actor Stanley Tucci receive the keys to the city. My husband likes to say we live in the "Upper Tiber Valley". Doesn't that have a good ring to it?"



This six-bedroom villa comes with a 2.7 hectare park and is on the market for €2.65m with Special Umbria

The agency Special Umbria renovates, sells and rents properties in Umbria, concentrating on north Umbria, the areas around Todi, southwest of Lake Trasimeno and the valley south of Perugia. Since 2008, its Dutch owners Jeroen Macco and Rob Landeweerd have 55 completed renovations under their belts. The sweet spot for buyers at present is fully restored properties ranging from €400,000 for two bedrooms to over €1,000,000 for a four-bedroom house.

"Umbria ticks so many boxes," Macco says. "It's green and peaceful, within two and a half hours by car of 20 per cent of western cultural heritage in Siena, Rome and Florence, with prices that are significantly lower than the prime locations in Tuscany. We know from our own website that well-decorated, restored houses here can easily achieve 15 to 20 weeks of rental income."

Celebrities who have embraced the Umbrian lifestyle, buying homes, include Ed Sheeran and Colin Firth, while Tucci's recent BBC programme *Searching for Italy* was in part a paean to Umbria food and, in particular, the black truffle. "Umbria cherishes the past while embracing the future," he says. *Complimenti*, Umbria.

### Need to know

- Italy's flat tax regime allows overseas residents who move tax residency to Italy to pay a lump sum on all non-Italian sourced income for up to 15 years. Successful applicants are exempt from all inheritance and gift taxes for assets and property owned abroad.

- British passport holders are permitted to stay 90 days in any one 180-day period within the Schengen Area, which includes Italy.

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