



The class is greener

This is how school should be: a trip to Italy, beautiful lodgings and an education in local food. Fiona Sims finds the five best regional Italian cookery courses



Flavours Holidays Umbria

Umbria's lush rolling hills (*pictured opposite*), dotted with castles, fortresses and watchtowers, are more than a match for its well-trodden neighbour, Tuscany. And that goes for its cuisine, too – which is why Umbria has been chosen as the latest destination for seasoned Italian cooking company Flavours Holidays.

Villa Giorgio, with its barrel-vaulted ceilings and flagstone floors, is nestled in the quaint hamlet of Monticello. There you will learn about one of Italy's most diverse (and healthy) cuisines, relying heavily as it does on grains, beans, olive oil, several key vegetables and only modest amounts of meat.

Lentils are big here – the Umbrian town of Castelluccio boasts some of the best, typically served with sausages, or as a purée with shrimps. The barley-type grain *farro* also features prominently, served as a bone-warming soup, or as a salad in the warmer months, dressed with rocket and pecorino.

Every Italian region has its signature pasta, and *strangozzi* belongs to Umbria.

You'll learn to make the long, thick, rough noodles, pairing them with a chilli-spiked sauce of fresh tomatoes, finished with a slick of the region's distinctively cloudy and fruity olive oil.

If it's meat cooking you're after then you won't be disappointed – the butchers of Norcia in the south east of the region are famous throughout the country. *Porchetta* (stuffed pork) is big here, as is veal, especially when served with another Umbrian trademark, the black truffle. In fact, all roads in Umbria lead to the black truffle: it adds its luxurious funkiness to dozens of different dishes.

There's time off to visit neighbouring Orvieto, with its charming cobbled streets and aromatic wines, plus the hilltop town of Todi, famous for an intriguing dish of sweet and sour ox tongue. And when you're not thinking about food, you can splash around in Villa Giorgio's pool with a glass of prosecco.

A seven-night stay costs £1,599 per person (no single supplement), which includes accommodation, meals, local wine, five cookery lessons, visits to Orvieto and Todi, and £100 towards your flight. • 0131 343 2500; flavoursholidays.co.uk