

Trip to Tuscany and Umbria (24th – 30th September 2015)

Following the success of last year's trip to Lake Garda, Venice and Verona, 33 members of the Travel Club set off for Italy again, this time visiting iconic places such as Florence, Assisi, Siena and Pisa.



Assisi and Perugia

Our first day was spent in Umbria. Firstly we went to Assisi, a small hilltop town which devotes itself to acting as a centre of pilgrimage. The interior of the Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi must rank as one of the most visually stunning Catholic places of worship anywhere in the world and our visit there was one of the highlights of the tour. The afternoon was spent in the medieval town of Perugia. With its origins in Roman times, the original streets which led up to what is now the city centre were covered over. We therefore had the curious experience of going through what were historic streets, but are now tunnels on a series of modern escalators, which took us up to the central shopping and business district and the central square.

Siena

This delightful medieval city is world famous for the Palio horse race, which dates back to the 14th century and was fought for by the city's fiercely competitive parishes. It involves three circuits of the Campo, Siena's central piazza, which resembles a vast amphitheatre. The black and white banded cathedral (Duomo) is a stunning piece of Gothic architecture.

San Gimignano

This hilltop village in the Chianti wine growing is famous for its 13 medieval towers erected by its citizens to display their wealth and prestige. However the Black Death in 1348 brought about its downfall and it ended up under the control of Florence. The town remains a medieval masterpiece and is consequently very popular with tourists.

Florence



The Renaissance Art capital of the world is famous for its cathedral dome, the Uffizi art gallery and the Ponte Vecchio bridge. We were given a guided tour around the interior of the Duomo (very stark apart from the inside of the dome) and the Piazza della Signoria, which is adorned by statues such as Michaelangelo's David (just a copy, as the original is housed in the Accademia), Cellini's Perseus and the Rape of the Sabine Women. The Ponte Vecchio which dates from 1345 is covered by shops – all jewellers, as in 1593 Ferdinand I decreed that only jewellers and goldsmiths should occupy the bridge, and it remains so to this day.

Pisa

The iconic Leaning Tower is situated in a green lawned square, known as the Campo dei Miracoli, where it sits alongside the city's Duomo and Baptistery. The tower began to tilt as far back as 1274, as the soil on which it sits comprises sand and silt. By 1990 it was deemed too dangerous to allow visitors into the tower, so extensive work costing over £20 million was carried out to stabilise it at an angle of around 3.5 degrees.

