



Most guests, however well intentioned, often just end up lounging round the pool of their villa rather than seeing the Umbrian sights of Assisi and Orvieto

Getting away from it all: the tower pool at Borgo San Biaggio, near Umbertide. Effusive remarks in the visitors' book prove the popularity of this converted medieval hamlet

speaking limited English but are friendly and helpful.

Converted villages

Occasionally whole medieval hamlets have been bought up, renovated and let. While some of these resemble glorified apartment clusters, others, such as Borgo San Biaggio (see right) are magical, with quaint streets, individual buildings and atmosphere. Properties are usually rented individually but you can rent the whole village. Many have their own restaurant.

● **L'Antico Gelso** (Cuendet) near Todi, six apartments each sleeping four to six, £2,306 per property, not including flights or car hire. Kittens scramble in the mul-

village is named, and there is a rose garden, a swimming pool and floodlit tennis courts. There is a communal reception area with coffee-making facilities and each of the apartments is tastefully furnished with handmade furniture.

● **Castello di Casigliano** (Traditional Tuscany), near Todi, five apartments sleeping two to four, £570 based on two sharing, not including flights or car hire. Owned by one of Italy's oldest and wealthiest families and a good choice for anyone wanting to mix self-catering with pampering, the village combines an inn with self-contained apartments.

Highlights include the restaurant and wine cellar. The

apartments are unimaginatively decorated as well as being rather cramped. Romano, the English-speaking manager, will organise wine tastings or help with excursions.

● **Borgo San Biaggio** (CV Travel), near Umbertide, four properties sleeping two to four, £2,230 based on four sharing, not including flights and car hire.

Effusive remarks in the visitors' book bear testimony to the popularity of this converted medieval hamlet. The properties, which include an old tower and a priest's house, are close together but private, each with its own garden and individually decorated. Popular with groups and small wedding parties — although less

visitors might find the

steep stairs difficult. Renato, the owner, is friendly.

● **Monte Lagello** (Cuendet), near Mercatello, three apartments available sleeping two to five, £1,256 per property, not including flights or car hire.

A quiet, converted hill village owned by a Swiss group and cared for by Maria, a friendly German. The apartments are furnished with comfortable sofas, a kitchenette and bathroom. The building has its own garden with table and chairs — nice for breakfast and aperitifs.

Castles and towers

Often with acres of land and lots of atmosphere, but not for everyone. Families with small children, for example, are

often banned. While most conversions have bathrooms for the disabled, the buildings tend to be ancient and can have treacherous stairs and uneven floors.

● **Torre d'Orlando** (Cuendet) near Todi, sleeps ten to 12, £10,624 per property, not including flights or car hire.

A magnificent medieval castle which has been carefully restored and filled with paintings and objects gathered by the owner on his travels. Each of the six sumptuous double bedrooms has its own bathroom and there is a large kitchen with covered outdoor eating area and a pool.

A separate tower, more comfortably furnished, provides a hideaway for honeymooners.

No children under 12. The owners occasionally stay in one wing of the property.

● **Torre di Porchiano** (Cuendet) near Todi, sleeps 11, £7,602 per property, not including flights or car hire.

Another splendid castle tower complete with aristocratic family to meet and greet guests. Private, with formal walled gardens, a secluded pool and walls so thick they have had bathrooms built into them. A cosy library with gallery, antique furniture and tapestries add to the atmosphere. Large, homely, well-equipped kitchen. Great for big groups.

Unusual Umbria

● **Casa dei Fiori Blu** (Vacanze in Italia), near Civitella del Lago, sleeps two

to four, £1,292 per property, including car hire but not flights.

The house is set in a garden reeking of rosemary and lavender, and full of olives and kumquats. It is small but with a good-sized kitchen and bathroom, living area and platform bedroom. The rooms are beautifully decorated. Not suitable for children or groups; it is really a lovers' retreat. No pool but a vine-covered outdoor eating area.

● **Perugia Nobile** (Cottages to Castles), Perugia, sleeps two, £1,490 per property, including flights and car hire. This stylish city apartment in a medieval building, set in an old piazza in Perugia, is like a sophisticated Aladdin's cave. The ceilings in the sitting/din-

Simply Tuscany & Umbria (020-8541 2206, www.simply-travel.com), which has properties in Umbria for two weeks in August from £864 per person based on four sharing, including car hire and flights.

She also visited properties with these operators: Cottages to Castles (01622 726883, www.cottagestocastles.com); Cuendet (part of Italian Chapters, 020-7722 0722, www.villa-rentals.com); CV Travel (020-7591 2811); Traditional Tuscany (0700-488 7226, www.traditionaltuscany.co.uk); Vacanze in Italia (0870-077 2772, www.indiv-travellers.com). Other operators include: Bridgewater (0161-787 8587, www.bridgewater-travel.co.uk); Carefree Italy (01293 552277, www.carefree-italy.com); Citalia (020-8686 5533, www.citalia.co.uk); Ilios Travel (01403 259788, www.iliostravel.com); Italian Life (0113-281 8811); Magic of Italy (020-8939 5453, www.magictourgroup.co.uk); Something Special (01279 630401, www.somethingspecial.co.uk); Summer's Leases (020-8333 0125, www.summersleases.com); Sunvil (020-8758 4722, www.sunvil.co.uk); The Italian House (01373 814234); The Owners' Syndicate (020-7801 9807, www.ownersyndicate.co.uk); Interhome (020-8891 1294, www.interhome.co.uk); Veronica Tomasso Cotgrove (020-7267 2423, www.vtcitaly.com).

■ **Getting there:** For direct flights to Pisa, try British Airways (0845-773 3377, www.british-airways.com) or Ryanair (0870-333 1231, www.ryanair.com). For Rome, try Go (0870-607 6543, www.go-fly.com), Alitalia (0870-544 8259, www.alitalia.co.uk) or British Midland (0870-607 0555, www.britishmidland.com). For Florence try Meridiana (020-7839 2222). For Bologna (which has good rail connections to the region) try Go, BA or Alitalia.

Tips

- Many properties are at the end of long, unmade roads (*strade bianche*) — great if you want to get away from it all, but less convenient for fetching groceries or going out to eat.
- Kitchen facilities can be poor, particularly in apartment conversions. Ask about kitchen equipment.
- If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of your accommodation, complain then and there — problems can often be rectified on the spot.

ing room are vaulted and richly painted. What it lacks in size — the bathroom is tiny — it more than makes up for in style and convenience. Extremely popular during the July jazz festival.

● **Santa Maria Degli Ancillotti** (Simply Tuscany & Umbria), near Assisi, two-bedroom apartment, £1,370 per person, including flights and car hire.

The main property is a comfortable country house hotel. However, the owners also let an apartment in their house, high on a hill up the road from the hotel. It is spacious and well equipped with a large terrace, outdoor oven and views over the whole of Umbria.

■ Next week: Crete