

LE MARCHE ON ITALY'S ADRIATIC COAST IS EVERY BIT AS BEAUTIFUL AS TUSCANY AND UMBRIA BUT HAS PROPERTY AT HALF THE PRICE. IS IT ANY WONDER BRITS ARE STRIDING TOWARDS A NEW LIFE IN THE AREA? GINETTA VEDRICKAS REPORTS. >

Marching home



L'Italia in una regione reads the strap line on the Italian Tourist Board's brochure for Le Marche. Roughly translated, the blurb describes the area which hugs the Adriatic Coast bordering Emilia Romagna in the north and stretching south to Abruzzo as "all of Italy in one region".

And it's not just blurb, according to Homes in Italy's Mark Slaviero who points to Le Marche's miles of coastline, medieval hilltop villages and verdant hilly terrain: "Le Marche really does have it all," adds Slaviero who sells rustic-style properties in the region for around half the price of equivalent properties in Tuscany and Umbria and there are still a few 'bargain basement properties' on offer for as little as £50,000. Interestingly, just two years ago Le Marche was being marketed, by their tourist board, as 'Italy's best kept secret' but this certainly isn't the case these days.

Price hikes in the tried and tested enclaves may be pushing greater numbers of buyers to seek out better value areas such as Le Marche, but budget airlines such as Ryanair must also take credit for opening up this previously unknown region to British buyers. Popularity is on the increase but this doesn't mean that buyers can expect to find another 'Chianti-shire' just yet. "It's still very much up and coming, although now it has featured on several property shows I think it will become even more popular. But your neighbours will definitely be Italian," adds Slaviero who always offers to introduce his clients to other Brits in the area, as

"The landscape is beautiful, it's a medieval hilltop hamlet and the advantage is that you can live in rural isolation like a monk, but you are only 20 kilometres from the seaside"

part of the service: "You shouldn't cut off all ties but people who buy in Italy are different from those who buy in Spain, they want to be part of the community."

Of Italian stock himself, Slaviero has countless tales of Italian warmth and hospitality as British buyers have been firmly welcomed into tiny communities up and down the region – including incidences of delicious local dishes being left on doorsteps. He sees no local resistance to the growing British interest: "On the contrary. The locals know that many of these kinds of properties would have lain derelict for years and this way they are being brought back into use and are bringing interest to villages where there is often very little going on. They're proud of their communities and the fact that people have chosen to buy here."

But Slaviero warns that good village houses are hard to find, Italian families tend to hang onto them for years, and British visitors occasionally profess disappointment when they first glimpse the region's coastline: "Much of the coast is very commercialised," admits Slaviero. Yet, for those prepared to



- 1) This two-bedroom apartment in Ascoli Piceno is available through Casa Trovella
- 2) This rural farmhouse is available through Homes in Italy for around £88,500
- 3) £126,000 will buy you this home in a village two kilometres from Sarnano
- 4) The historic town of Ascoli Piceno still offers modern infrastructure

search, relatively unspoilt and beautiful parts of the coast do still exist: The rugged coastline adjoining the Monte Conero National Park and the seaside resorts of Numona and Sirolo, with their pretty ports and proximity to Ancona airport, are more attractive than the miles of flat coastline which typify much of the Italian coastline. But perhaps the real beauty of the area lies within the numerous medieval villages and hamlets scattered throughout Le Marche.

Property prices have risen by around eight per cent annually throughout the country, but Le Marche's hotspots such as the town of Macerata, and the village of San Ginesio rose by more than double this amount according to Slaviero – and other hotspots saw price rises of 25 per cent in the second half of last year. Prices may be rising, but this part of Italy still attracts buyers looking for real value for money. Susan Daya from Essex originally wanted a



Spanish holiday home where she and her husband could enjoy early retirement: "We looked around but the prices were going through the roof. Then my brother came back from a holiday in Italy and suggested that we look there instead."

Susan went to look for herself and, like many other visitors to Italy, admits to falling in love at first sight with Umbria. "It was absolutely gorgeous but unfortunately we couldn't afford anything apart from ramshackle properties which we knew were impractical, as they would take so long to sort out."

With a budget of around £50,000, Susan admits to feeling disheartened at this point so, at a visit to the *Homes Overseas Magazine Exhibition*, she was pleased to find an encouraging response from the Homes in Italy stand: "They suggested that we try Le Marche which, for the moment at least, is still very reasonably priced. We really liked the look of some of the properties they had on their books so we decided to book our flights to Ancona."

Susan and her husband flew out and again were well and truly smitten: "It is absolutely beautiful, perhaps even more so than Umbria which is very mountainous and where you often find



yourself driving on treacherous roads. Le Marche is easier as it's hilly rather than mountainous." The couple particularly loved the medieval town of San Ginesio where they finally found their dream home for around £50,000. Just four miles from the village, with its beautiful square, shops and restaurants, the house is also situated only seven miles from the major town of Tolentino and is very near the coast. "Originally we'd wanted a detached stone-built farmhouse and this is brick built, so we've made compromises, but it stands in an acre of land with views of the mountains so it's perfect."

Renato Taglioferra has been part of his father's property business for many years selling mostly in the Bologna area where he grew up. He finds that, while most Italians profess an undying love for whatever region they come from, 'we Italians never stray far from our local church's bell tower', Taglioferra has a new rival for his affections in Le Marche, where he has just completed the first phase of Casa Serafini, a renovation of a 'Borgo', near the ancient towns of Fano and Urbino, transforming it into 40 luxurious apartments: "The landscape is beautiful, it's a medieval hilltop hamlet and the advantage is that you can live in rural isolation like a monk but you are only 20 kilometres from the seaside."

It's not just the British who are being drawn to this region: "Italians in particular can't afford the prices in Tuscany, and this region is just as beautiful but with far more attractive prices," adds Taglioferra who is selling Casa Serafini apartments for between €2,000 to €3,000 (£1,400 to £2,100) per square metre. He believes there will be considerable interest from British buyers drawn towards the concept of living in a beautifully restored ancient building, fully equipped with modern conveniences such as a swimming pool, 24-hour security and ▶




maintenance, and the sort of technology that allows them to switch on heating before their arrival.

Linda Travella of Casa Travella says that Le Marche is now well and truly on the buyer's map. She has recently returned from filming the latest episode of *I Want That House*, set in Le Marche, and has witnessed the growing demand for this area spreading further south towards the borders of Abruzzo: "Prices in Le Marche are still good value, and areas such as Macerata are best for rustic style properties, but if you head just a bit further south you can buy property which is also very close to the sea."

Casa Travella currently has a range of property throughout the region but, while 60 per cent of buyers want 'typical country farmhouses', Travella finds that the remainder want smaller properties such as city pied-à-terre and seaside apartments: "They often want something small without the hassle of renovation or a garden to look after." Travella currently has a stunning, period apartment for sale in the beautiful town of Ascoli Piceno, which is fully renovated, full of clean lines and original features, and on



offer for £130,000 (€90,000). Just outside the lovely village of Ripatransone, and eight kilometres from the sea, Travella is selling a detached, 200-square-metre house with another small building in its half-an-acre plot, which could be converted into a one-bedroom apartment, for €11,000 (£7,500): "You'd spend the same amount again on renovation but would end up with a large four-bedroom property or two two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartments, and it has lovely countryside views," adds Travella.

Ripatransone is well known for its summer operatic performances and open-air theatre. There are open views of the sea to the east, and the Sibillini Mountains to the west – the mountains offer skiing opportunities and face the national park of Gran Sasso. But buyers in this part of Le Marche enjoy the best of both worlds, wonderful countryside and easy access to the capital as a tunnel reduces the journey time to Rome to around two-and-a-half hours. Flying into Rome and out of a regional airport adds flexibility believes Travella: "And what makes this area really perfect is that it's relatively untapped, yet all the infrastructure is here." 

5) This two-bedroom Ascoli apartment is available through Casa Travella for £132,000

6) This renovated three-bedroom home is on the market with Homes in Italy for £65,000

7) On the books with Casa Travella is this two-bedroom detached house near Sarnano

contacts

Homes In Italy

Tel: +44 (0)1332 341 146

Website: www.homesinitaly.co.uk

Casa Travella

Tel: +44 (0)1322 660 988

Website: www.casatravella.com

Casa Serafini

Email: info@casaserafini.it

Website: www.casaserafini.it