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Courtesy of Reschio Hotel

ITALY'S CALLING

Add Umbria to your 2025 must-visit list; Bay Area girls get an up-close look at the motorsports industry; and an update from the S.F.-Marin Food Bank, just in time for the holidays.

Views from Umbria's Reschio Hotel

LEGENDS OF THE FALL

Italy's "green heart" is an understated alternative to Tuscany and especially inviting in November.

By Casey Hatfield-Chiotti



IN THE RUGGED HILLS OF UMBRIA fall is a season of abundance, says Nencia Bolza, who operates Reschio, a 3,700-acre estate and luxury hotel, with her husband, architect and designer Count Benedikt Bolza.

"After the first rains, we get almost a second spring — the dry fields become green and the meadows begin to blossom again," says Nencia.

Locals move with a slower but purposeful pace in the central Italian region that sits next to Tuscany but feels more mysterious and less tame. The only region in Italy that doesn't border another country or the sea, and with strict laws regarding development, Umbria has remained a time capsule. In November, trained dogs begin sniffing out truffles in Umbria's oak tree-covered hillsides. Figs, walnuts and mushrooms

are also available for foraging and locals celebrate the hard work of harvest. Across the region, families pick olives, creating some of the country's highest-quality olive oils. The olive groves at Reschio include Dolce Agogia trees, a temperamental variety found only in Umbria that produces a complex oil with notes of grass and orange peel.

Here's how to make the most of fall and winter in Umbria.

Reschio Hotel's stunning pool area (left); The Palm Court at Reschio Hotel



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COUNTRYSIDE ESCAPE

Swaths of shadowy Umbrian countryside are covered with protected woodlands and estates. When my family and I arrived at **Reschio Hotel** (from \$1,033 per night; www.reschio.com), the gold standard for a countryside stay in Italy, I was struck by its rusticity and refinement. The hotel occupies a 1,000-year-old castle, once an imperial fiefdom decreed by emperor Charles IV in 1355. Benedikt Bolza's father purchased the whole of the estate in the

mid-'90s. There are no televisions in the guest rooms, which are inspired by Bolza family members and ancestors and feature antique portraits and gleaming espresso machines designed by the count. A Boot Room overflows with fresh cut wildflowers and the Palm Court, a glass and sage green wrought-iron structure, recalls a grand city hotel rather than a country guesthouse. Elegantly dressed guests gather there for aperitif hour to listen to nightly jazz while sipping white-peach bellinis.

When I met Count Benedikt in his on-property architecture and design

studio in a restored tobacco factory — he has renovated multiple ancient farmhouses on the property and has his own B.B. for Reschio furniture line — he told me Reschio isn't a wine community even though it has vineyards, or a “resort” even though it has several restaurants, an oval swimming pool, an equestrian center and a spa in the castle's ancient wine cellars where treatments take place next to a flickering fire. “We are a private estate run by a family,” he says. “Our mentality is incredibly rooted in the fact that we are here to stay,” he adds.



Sina Brufani
guest room



Sina Brufani's pool

EXPLORING PERUGIA

While it would be all too easy to stay in the Umbrian countryside, the hilltop city of Perugia 50 minutes southeast of Reschio is less touristy than Florence and Siena, but equally impressive. The city sits on ancient Etruscan ruins. Guests can see the archaeological treasures from the glass bottom of **Sina Brufani's** (from \$222 per night; www.sinahotels.com) swimming pool. Perched atop the city's defensive walls, Sina Brufani has presided over Perugia since opening in 1884 and many of the high-ceilinged guest rooms have panoramic views of the countryside. The hotel's best feature, however,

is its location near the wide pedestrian-only Corso Vannucci lined with luxury shops and gelaterias. Perugia's must-see sites are just a short stroll, like the **Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria** (www.gallerianazionaledellumbria.it) in the medieval Priori Palace, Umbria's Uffizi, with more than 3,000 works from the 13th to 20th centuries. At the opposite end of the street from the hotel sits impressive Piazza IV Novembre with a Gothic cathedral and a marble fountain intricately carved with zodiac signs. Make reservations at Michelin-starred Ada (www.adagourmet.it) for newfangled takes on nostalgic Umbrian fare.

WHERE TO TASTE TRUFFLES AND MORE

Few Italian regions can lay claim to more deliciousness than Umbria, which produces mouthwatering chocolate, precious saffron and abundant black and white truffles. The town of Città di Castello north of Perugia hosts a white truffle festival November 1 to 3 (www.biancopregiato.it) that includes truffle cooking demonstrations and tastings.

In addition to celebrating wine harvest, Umbria is known for its deep and savory Sagrantino grape, and visitors can also taste the region's renowned new extra-virgin olive oil in November. **Frantoi Aperti**



Villa Molinella at Tenuta di Murlo

(www.frantoiaperti.net), one of Italy's largest olive oil festivals, takes place through November 17. Many olive mills throughout the region are open to the public so visitors can sample the freshly pressed oil and walk among olive groves.

Tenuta di Murlo (www.murlo.com), an estate that has been in the same family since the 16th century, has launched a cooking school where guests can learn to make traditional Umbrian dishes. A new farm area centered around a restored farmhouse is a meeting place for experiences like truffle hunting and apiary workshops. The resort can organize gourmet picnics with estate-grown wine, olive oil, honey and biodynamic fruits on its vast grounds, which are larger than Manhattan. 

WELLNESS, ITALIAN-STYLE

The luxury wellness resort brand Six Senses is set to open its second Italy outpost in Umbria in 2026. In the meantime, hotels like Reschio are increasingly venturing into the wellness space. Co-proprietor Nencia Bolza says the cusp of winter seemed the right fit for Reschio's first Yogherello retreat November 18 to 22. "You need to pause and be in the moment and see those rich colors that nature provides all around us," she says. Participants will get grounded through yin yoga sessions in the estate's San Michele Church and by learning the 6,000-year-old art form of watercolor painting.