

36 Hours in Perugia, Italy

[36 Hours: 36 Hours in Perugia, Italy](#)

Courtesy Perugia (Chocolate); Chris Warde-Jones for The New York Times (Corso Vannucci and Mastri Cartai Editori)

From left: Learning to make chocolate at the Perugia factory; Corso Vannucci is the main drag and a good place to see the nightly passeggiata; everything is decouped at Mastri Cartai Editori. [More Photos »](#)

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IF [Italy](#) were a dartboard, the city of [Perugia](#) would most likely be its bull's-eye. Equidistant from [Florence](#) and [Rome](#) in the bucolic, central Italian region of Umbria, Perugia is an enchanting hilltop city with a compact historic center that is a rambling maze of medieval streets. Although many associate Perugia with the controversial murder trial of the American Amanda Knox, this forward-thinking city maintains a friendly appeal. In 2008, an eco-friendly high-tech light rail line called the MiniMetrolò made its debut, zipping visitors into the city center from outer areas and keeping its historic streets mostly car-free. Instead, the streets jam with visitors during two popular annual events: a summer jazz festival that attracts the [music](#) world's biggest acts, and Eurochocolate, a huge autumnal [chocolate](#) festival that this year runs Oct. 14 to 23.

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Friday

4

p.m.

1) WHERE'S WONKA?

No golden ticket is required to take a guided tour of the Perugina chocolate factory (Via San Sisto, 42; 39-075-527-6796; [perugina.com](#)) — a simple love of the sweet stuff (and a 5-euro entrance fee, about \$6.75 at \$1.35 to the euro) will suffice. This factory (now owned by Nestlé) on the outskirts of town produces the famous silver-wrapped, chocolate-and-hazelnut confections called Baci — Italian for “kisses” — at a 1,500-per-minute clip. As you wander through a test kitchen, past chocolate-themed museum displays and above whirling conveyor belts, you won't encounter any oompa-loompas, but you will be treated to an all-you-can-eat tasting at the end of the tour. And isn't that what you really wanted anyway?

7

p.m.

2) DRINK IN THE VIEW

Walk off the inevitable chocolate-induced bellyache with the locals as they undertake the nightly passeggiata along Corso Vannucci, the city's main drag. Pause for a glass of prosecco at an outdoor table at the newly opened bar Gus (Via Mazzini, 19; 39-075-573-4365), a prime people-watching location. If you're more interested in the sinking sun than the promenading pairs, snag a table along the ledge at the outdoor bar Il Punto di Vista (Via Indipendenza, 2; 39-339-662-0326) to drink in a panorama of the rolling green Umbrian hills.

9

p.m.

3) UMBRIA ON A PLATE

There's no better place to sample everything Umbria has to offer the taste buds than Osteria a Priori (Via dei Priori, 39; 39-075-572-7098; [osteriaapriori.it](#)), a small restaurant and specialty food shop that opened in June 2010. The spot is dedicated exclusively to Umbrian-sourced food and drink, meaning you can pair a platter of charcuterie and cheese from local farms with a glass of rare Sagrantino di Montefalco, or anything else that strikes your fancy on the 270-bottle all-Umbrian wine list. Feast on hand-cut tagliatelle with ragù bianco made with chianina beef, or pork loin smothered in seasonal truffles. After dinner, linger outside on the tiny streetside patio over an artisanal Umbrian beer, like the unfiltered multi-grain Birra Grifona from local craft brewery Birrificio Artigiano. Dinner for two, about 45 euros without drinks.

Saturday

10

a.m.

4) MASTER AND PUPIL

Perugia's most celebrated painter, Pietro Vannucci, who was also known as Perugino, once had an even more famous pupil: the Renaissance master Raphael. To see both artists' handiwork simultaneously, visit the Cappella di San Severo (Piazza Raffaello; 39-075-573-3864; [perugiacittamuseo.it](#)), where a fresco in the minuscule chapel is said to have sprung from the brushes of both Raphael (top half) and Perugino (bottom half). A more extensive view of Perugino's oeuvre is in the [Galleria Nazionale](#) dell'Umbria (Corso Vannucci, 19; 39-075-586-

68410; www.gallerianazionaleumbria.it); an impressive collection of Umbrian art is housed in the Palazzo dei Priori, a grand stone building dating from the 13th century.

1

p.m.

5) BANANA BREAK

Make nice with the wisecracking owner at the no-frills trattoria Vecchia Perugia (Via Ulisse Rocchi, 9; 39-075-572-5900), known as “da Franky” after the proprietor, a famously colorful character who goes by Franky Banana. Watch as he slyly sidles up to tables, sizing up customers, then shakes hands, slaps backs and, if he likes the cut of your jib, boasts about his former boxing career. Under his watchful eye — and dozens of newspaper clippings and celebrity snapshots with him that adorn the walls — dig into a plate of strangozzi, a thick, spaghetti-like pasta typical of the region, that here arrives laden with fresh black truffle shavings (10 euros).

3:30

p.m.

6) IN THE PAPERS

Decoupage is the DIY project du jour at the psychedelically colorful shop Matri Cartai Editori (Via dei Priori, 77; 39-075-572-5549; mastricartai.com), where every mirror, table top, clock and photo album for sale has been artfully adorned with paper fashioned by handy local ladies. Wedged into a corner of a tiny piazza, this crafty fantasyland has something to brighten every room, from simple minimalist lampshades to a beautified rocking horse that would make Martha Stewart proud.

4:30

p.m.

7) CHILLED CHOCOLATE

It's a shame to abstain from chocolate for long in Perugia, so refuel with the frozen form in a gelato. Pair a scoop of pure chocolate with the special Raffaello flavor, a rich white chocolate and coconut mixture at Cioccolateria Augusta Perugia (Via Pinturicchio, 2; 39-075-573-4577; cioccolatoaugustaperusia.it). For a second dose of the dark stuff, swing by La Fonte Maggiore (Via della Gabbia, 3; 39-075-573-2939), where the rich chocolate options are distinguished by varying cocoa contents.

6

p.m.

8) GOING UNDERGROUND

Sneak away from the fountain and cathedral that dominate Piazza IV Novembre to explore Perugia's underground attractions, starting with the nearby Pozzo Etrusco (Piazza Danti, 18; 39-075-573-3669; perugiacittamuseo.it), an eerie Etruscan well that is believed to date back to the third century B.C. Toss a coin into the enormous well's depths, then march to the other end of Corso Vannucci for another glimpse of the subterranean world upon which modern Perugia was built. In what remains of the Rocca Paolina fortress (Piazza Italia; 39-075-572-5778; perugiacittamuseo.it), wander through a spooky, well-preserved warren of medieval streets and squares that spreads out like a second city underneath the present-day streets above.

9

p.m.

9) DINNER, DECONSTRUCTED

Get cozy dining at Perugia's only Michelin-starred restaurant, Il Postale (Strada Montevile, 3; 39-075-572-4214; ristoranteilpostale.it), which moved to a new location in February 2010. It's an intimate affair; four small tables occupy a frescoed dining room inside a storybook stone castle, but

the medieval surroundings belie the modern menu. The chef Marco Bistarelli is a master at deconstructing traditional dishes, as evidenced by his luscious “unstructured” carbonara; creative plates like foie gras two ways (duck and goose), mille-feuille of beef tongue, and roasted rooster are among the other offerings on the inventive menu. Savor a bottle plucked from the well-stocked wine cellar, and cap off the meal with an icy bowl of mojito soup with raspberries and a lime-and-pineapple parfait. Dinner for two, about 150 euros without drinks.

Sunday

9

a.m.

10) SWISS FIX

The waiters’ bright red jackets and bow ties at Pasticceria Sandri (Corso Vannucci, 32; 39-075-572-4112) are a nod to the cafe’s Swiss ancestry. But since 1860, the opulent place — with chandeliers hanging from a vaulted mural-covered ceiling — has been a Perugian landmark. Admire the elegant wood-paneled setting while enjoying a cappuccino and a slice of apple strudel laced with pine nuts, or skip right to the multilayer cakes and glistening tarts, the real breakfast of champions.

11

a.m.

11) TWO-WHEEL CRUISE

Head 10 miles outside town to Lake Trasimeno, Italy’s fourth largest after the popular northern trio of Lakes Garda, Maggiore and Como. Circumnavigation of the lake requires wheels, however, so rent a shiny yellow scooter from the lakeside Umbria in Vespa (Via Case Sparse, 42, San Savino; 39-075-843-062; umbriainvespa.com). When hunger strikes, brake for lunch at Trattoria da Faliero (Località Montebuono di Magione; 39-075-847-6528; www.hotelfaliero.it), a simple roadside spot overlooking the water that is short on signage but legendary among locals for its specialty, torta al testo, a warm flatbread stuffed with various fillings, like sausage and spinach, or prosciutto and cheese. Lunch for two, about 12 euros without drinks.

IF YOU GO

The [Hotel Brufani Palace](http://brufanipalace.com) (Piazza Italia, 12; 39-755-732-541; brufanipalace.com), at the end of Corso Vannucci, is the choicest place to stay in town, with 94 elegantly styled rooms, sweeping views of the countryside, and a basement-level glass-bottomed pool exposing ancient Etruscan ruins below. Doubles from 137 euros.

Less than two miles from [Perugia](http://perugia.com)’s historic center, **Castello di Monterone** (Strada Montevile, 3; 39-075-572-4214; castellomonterone.com) is a small hotel in an ancient castle fit for a fairy tale princess. The 18 rooms are set among manicured courtyards, stone terraces, fragrant rose [gardens](http://gardens.com), two on-site restaurants (including the atmospheric Il Postale) and a swimming pool with a spectacular view. Doubles from 120 euros.