

The Marches region is one that is not overrun with tourists, and its landscape is as captivating as the better-known provinces of Tuscany and Umbria and undoubtedly more varied and original in character.

Its chains of hills can already be seen on arriving from the coast, and gradually lead over to the higher land of the Apennine Mountains.

Not far away from the village of Mergo, a two-hundred-year-old farmhouse flanked by two huge old oaks is to be found ensconced in gentle, hilly countryside.

The house

The natural stone house has been renovated with much attention to detail in an approach involving use of three building materials only – natural stone, oak and slate.

We also found it important to achieve a balance between traditional and modern architectural details without neglecting the house's earthy character. Thanks to consistent use of the above materials and unobtrusive detailing, a highly restful interior is the result.

The ground floor offers a large kitchen with worktops in polished terrazzo as the main focus, and offering such amenities as a six-burner gas cooker and a large number of high-quality and carefully chosen cooking utensils. The kitchen is more than a kitchen – it is a workshop and workplace in the original sense of the words and will greatly add to the pleasure of cooking. It also has a scullery with a further washbasin, dishwasher, fridge and shelves for food storage, etc.

The kitchen leads over to the dining room offering a large, oak table with room for ten to twelve people. Also featuring an open fireplace, various easy chairs, a bookshelf complete with contents and an iPod socket, the dining room is a very comfortable living space.

The ground floor gains its particular character from the slate floor throughout and the large door-length windows that all open onto the garden.

A radically reduced oak staircase leads up to the upper floor and a room open to the gables and offering a further open fireplace, seating and a television set (with digital satellite reception). This room leads over to three double bedrooms and a generously-sized bathroom equipped with two washbasins, a bathtub and shower. A large oak washstand with drawers and sliding doors provides plenty of space for personal hygiene items.

The windows on the upper floor provide wonderful views of the surroundings.

Garden and grounds

The large, well-tended garden with mature trees leads over to the rest of the 1.5-hectare grounds.

Various terraces and seating places are located at or close to the house, as in the case of the wine-hung pergola on its long side, and also the eastward-facing gable wall, where the pizza oven is located. A few steps away, an Asian-looking pavilion makes an inviting impression and is an ideal place for spending time away from the heat of the sun. The pavilion marks the start of a wooden walkway that curves its way up a slope of acacia and old olive trees to the most spectacular part of the grounds: a lookout platform spanned by shade sails and offering spectacular panoramic views and complete solitude (making it a perfect place for sleeping out under the stars). Mention also needs to be made of a natural stone terrace, about 60 square metres in size and featuring a large wooden immersion tub, recliners and

sunshades. Framed by vegetation and enclosed at the back by a natural stone wall, it is a cool and secluded retreat.

Last but not least, an annex that can be reached from the garden offers a laundry complete with a washing machine and a further bathroom with shower and toilet.

The surroundings

We would now like to add a few comments about the surroundings and possible activities.

The Marche stretch of the Adriatic coast is worth mention in itself, particularly as the water is of very high quality. Depending on the section of coast concerned, crystal-clear water is to be found in fantastic coves, particularly at the precipitous cliffs around Monte Conero Nature Park (about 50 minutes away by car).

The atmosphere on the flat, white sandy beaches of Senegallia (which is 30 minutes way) is totally different but no less attractive, offering typical Italian beach life.

The dripstone caves of Frasassi, one of the largest accessible complex of grottos in the whole of Europe, can be reached in 20 minutes, and Assisi, Perugia and Urbino are also worth a visit.

Small, mediaeval villages can be found closer to home, most of them with completely preserved town walls and narrow alleyways.

The nearby mountains (about 2000 m high) are ideal for hiking, mountain biking or racing bike use and will be as interesting to nature lovers as a stroll through Jesi (18 km), Ancona (50 km), Senigallia (35 km) and Fano (60 km).

In fact, what with lively beaches and the possibility of cultural outings or restful days in untouched nature to choose from, it is sometimes difficult to know where to go or what to do.

The culinary side of the region is also worth mentioning. The cuisine of the Marche bears witness to maritime and mountain influences and is surprising in its variety.

White wines such as Verdicchio and reds such as Rosso Piceno, Lacrima Moro d'Alba and Rosso Conero are gaining in regard among wine aficionados, both in bottled form from award-winning vineyards or obtained as *vino sfuso* (open wine) from local wine farmers.

Travel directions

- By car:

Take the Brenner motorway until shortly before Modena, change onto the motorway to Bologna-Rimini-Ancona and leave at the Ancona North exit. Continue on the superstrada towards Jesi/Fabriano, and after about 33 km drive off at the Mergo exit. The road curves upwards for a further 6 km to Mergo, a village 340m above sea level. The house is now just a few minutes away. Further details will be provided with confirmation of booking.

- By plane:

Lufthansa and Air Dolomiti fly to Ancona-Falconara airport, and the airports in Bologna and Rimini can be reached with Ryan Air, Condor and LTU.