

# Homes in Le Marche

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Regularly showered with accolades for its beauty, cleanliness and quality of life, Le Marche remains a big hit with visitors and homebuyers. There are great-value properties here, says Fleur Kinson.

Over the last couple of decades, Le Marche has become something of a media darling. It regularly features in international travel press lists of top places to visit, live or retire. Whether you're a lover of clean beaches, a seeker of authentic local culture, an eco-conscious traveller or a would-be retiree looking for a healthy, happy rural retreat, there's always some sort of recent official award or ranking that shines a spotlight on Le Marche as a place you should go. Listing this year's accolades alone would take up a lot of space, so I'm not going to bother. You're just going to have to trust me.

If you haven't yet succumbed to the excited encouragements of travel writers and Le Marche remains a place you haven't yet visited, here's a bit of general description. It's a central Italian region whose chief neighbours are Umbria, Emilia-Romagna and Abruzzo, but whose border also briefly kisses Tuscany and Lazio. Le Marche's lovely landscapes unfurl between the sparkling blue Adriatic and the majestic Apennine Mountains. Its eastern edge is a long line of clean golden beaches meeting warm, shallow seawater. Inland, the terrain rises to form an undulating world of green and sun-blonded hills – many of which are crowned with handsome little towns. In the west, the land climbs higher into the wooded Apennines and their exceptionally beautiful little offshoot, the Sibillini Mountains.

If you love metropolitan glitz and hubbub, Le Marche might not be the place for you. The region has no big cities. What you lose in noise, crowds and traffic, you gain in tranquillity, space and fresh air. Le Marche's population is well-dispersed across the region, making the overall population density low to moderate. Communities are very warm and friendly, enjoying abundant cultural events together and taking pride in their well-maintained villages and towns full of attractive old buildings. You'll be unsurprised to hear that the region's crime rate is very low. Le Marche has very little heavy industry, but the employment rate is high, with many people involved in the traditional manufacturing of high-quality or artisan goods. While peaceful and orderly, Le Marche is no remote backwater. The transport infrastructure is very good; it's easy to get around this region and the international air and sea connections are smooth-running.

## **THE MARKET**

With so many feathers in its cap, it's no surprise that Le Marche has for the past 20 years or so been one of Italy's most favoured regions for buying a home abroad. Abundant rural locations with beautiful views and plenty of old stone houses at reasonable prices have only enhanced its appeal. Right now, property prices are lower than they were a dozen years ago, largely due to the long shadow cast by the 2007/8 international financial crisis and the recent hesitancy among British buyers spooked by the uncertainties of what might happen after Britain leaves the European Union. The upside of all this is that Le Marche currently has a buyer's market and that you can get even more for your money here now. Meanwhile, this region is unlikely to wane in long-term popularity, and every expectation is that prices will soon begin to drift upwards again.

As for a rough guide to prices today in Le Marche, you might get a rustic ruin for €50,000-€100,000, which you might choose to restore or to knock down and rebuild to slick modern standards but with a traditional look. For €60,000-€200,000, you could get an immediately-inhabitable village house, townhouse or apartment. For €100,000-€240,000 you could buy a seaside apartment. And for €250,000-€450,000, you could get a beautifully restored old farmhouse. Quite a few of the earliest buyers in Le Marche who did plush restoration jobs on abandoned old country homes twenty years ago are now looking to sell them on.

## **AND BREXIT?**

The issue of how Brexit might affect things has naturally been on the minds of most would-be buyers in Italy, so it's worth covering that issue at some length here. Jane Smith of the estate agency Magic Marche gave me on-the-ground experience of exactly how the Brexit vote has affected buyers in Le Marche. "After the 2016 referendum, the number of UK buyers slowed for three years," Jane says. "However, since the December general election, our enquiries from UK citizens have increased, as have enquiries from other European countries – it seemed the uncertainties with Brexit stalled all European countries, but now they are on the move again. Many UK buyers put their plans on hold during the years of Brexit negotiations and now want to move forward, especially to gain their foothold in Italy before the end of 2020. From what we hear and understand, the Italian government is keen to encourage existing ex-pats to stay and to see the ex-pat sector grow. No penalties are applied to property owners from around the world, so UK property-owners will be no different."

Jane continues, "Our understanding is that the UK leaving the EU at the end of 2020 will not affect British citizens buying or maintaining their property at all. The buying costs will remain the same, the right to purchase will remain the same and the right to sell and transfer the proceeds of sale out of Italy will remain the same. This is based on how the Italian government treats nationals of other non-EU countries. In

theory UK citizens will be treated in exactly the same way; no higher or extra taxes apply to non-EU nationals, so there is no reason why the UK would be treated any differently. For anyone moving *\*permanently\** to Italy, there will be a few extra things to consider; for example, it might become more difficult to switch your UK driving licence to an Italian one. And you should definitely register as a Resident if you are living in Italy for more than 183 days per year.”

## **WHERE AND WHAT TO BUY**

It's useful to divide Le Marche into three main areas based on landscape and average property prices – the coast, the inland hills and the mountains. As is often the case in Italy, the coast is generally the priciest place for property. Le Marche's seaside is a lovely place, full of long, clean beaches backed by contented, family-friendly resort-towns. Low-rise, modern-built apartments are a common property type on the coast, and these might ask between €100,000 and €240,000. Prices are higher the closer to the water you are. At the opposite end of the scale, Le Marche's mountainous parts have the region's very lowest property prices. These areas are often a little harder to reach and have fewer amenities, which accounts for the lower prices.

However, not far inland from the sea lie lots of gentle hills, and it is this hilly coastal hinterland that is often the most highly recommended area for buyers in Le Marche. As well as being less populous than the seaside and less remote than the mountains, this rural area gives you great views of both – with the blue Adriatic in one direction and the handsome Apennines in the other. Plus, the properties here generally offer great value-for-money. Kevin L. Gibney of Property For Sale Marche says, “Areas between 10 and 50km of the coast – such as the province of Macerata, for example – are offering terrific value-for-money. Luxurious villas are available between €550,000 and €750,000 that may have cost 20 per cent more just eight to ten years ago. At the other end of the scale, terrific ruins to restore can be had for €50,000, that may have fetched prices over €100,000 ten years ago. And in the middle, we have houses on our books – restored, three to five bedrooms, with pool, great views – for €350,000-€450,000.”

As well as stunning rural spaces, Le Marche's inland hills also yield many handsome old towns and villages, of course. So it's not just country homes with land that you might consider. Jane Smith of Magic Marche highlights the appeal of small-town properties. “Townhouses and town apartments are having a great resurgence,” She says. “Buyers wanting to use their Italian home as an easy ‘lock and leave’ arrangement find town properties offer everything: medieval beauty, an instant community around you and amenities close at hand. And no garden maintenance taking up your time when you arrive! Because town properties have been a neglected sector for a number of years, the prices and value-for-money right now are amazing.”

## **HOLIDAY RENTALS**

Le Marche is a very popular holiday destination and its popularity has only been increasing in recent years. Visitors come for the beaches, the charming towns and the rural tranquillity, as well as for the authentic local culture and the wonderful food. The coast is the most visited area, but very popular too is the hilly hinterland, roughly anywhere within 40 minutes of the sea. Quite a few people also come to explore Le Marche's mountainous parts, in particular the very beautiful offshoot of the Apennines in the region's southwest, the Sibillini Mountains. Le Marche's chief visitors are British, Dutch, German, Belgian and Swiss, plus lots of Italians from other regions to on the coast.

All this means that you're likely to enjoy good holiday rental prospects on a home in Le Marche. Kevin L. Gibney of Property For Sale Marche says, "All my clients who rent their homes speak of a terrific market for rentals. The bulls-eye is a house that sleeps six to ten people and has a pool. There is also an emerging niche for smaller property rentals where singles, couples and nuclear families seek smaller, more intimate, less costly rentals."

## **OUR LIFE IN LE MARCHE**

Londoners Jessica Lynn and Amie Garner own a three-bedroom house in the gentle hills of southern Le Marche, just under 20 miles from the sea. They spend a month there every summer and a couple of weeks at both Christmas and Easter. At all other times, they make the house available to family and friends.

What drew them to Italy? "Italy has always been a place of relaxation for me," Jessica explains. "I had a really stressful job in the City for many years and every summer I would go on a retreat to Tuscany or Umbria and just collapse for two weeks. The sun, the beauty and the slower pace of life was so restorative. Eventually, I gave up the City job and became a teacher, which is how I met Amie. I kept up my habit of going to Italy in the summer, but now taking Amie with me, and she quickly fell in love with the country as any sensible person would do! We decided we wanted to get closer to Italy, get to know one area really well and integrate into a community, which is why we bought the house. We've both learnt Italian now, have lots of local friends, and we plan to retire to Italy eventually."

“The house is on a hillside with lovely wide views of the Adriatic on one side and the Sibillini Mountains visible in the distance on the other side. We had a terrace area put on part of the roof so we have a near-panoramic view from up there. It’s the most perfect place to sit drinking wine and watch the sun go down and the stars come out. The house was habitable when we bought it in 2015, but we had some work done. We installed eco-efficient heating, better electric wiring, and had the earthquake-proofing strengthened. We also landscaped the grounds and put in a vegetable garden. Amie is a terrific cook, and it’s wonderful to be eating vegetables we’ve grown ourselves in our own garden. It feels healthy to be in touch with the natural world like this – something it’s often hard to be when you’re living in a big city.

“I would definitely recommend Le Marche to anyone thinking of buying in Italy. The standards of everything are very high here. Our estate agent was excellent, translated everything for us and guided us through every step of the buying process. The healthcare and medical facilities are top-notch, the roads are good, and everything just seems to function well with nothing being overstretched or overused. Coming from London, Le Marche always seems so spacious, clean and calm to me. I obviously still find life in Italy restorative!”

## **USEFUL CONTACTS**

[www.magicmarche.com](http://www.magicmarche.com)