

OVERSEAS

British buyers tend to head to the French Riviera or the south of Spain when looking for a second home within striking distance of mountains and sea. Yet the lesser-known region of Le Marche on Italy's east coast is gaining a reputation as an affordable alternative.

With Italy's crown jewels — Florence, Rome and Venice — struggling with overtourism, house-hunters are turning their focus to the 1,600km of coastline facing Croatia across the Adriatic Sea. Dotted with sandy beaches to rival those of the Côte d'Azur, but with fewer non-Italian tourists, Le Marche has been referred to as "the next Tuscany" by *The New York Times*.

Ryanair runs daily flights to the region's capital, Ancona, from Stansted, while Lufthansa has flights out of Heathrow, and Manchester via Munich. At the port in Ancona, boats sail to Greece, Croatia and Albania, making it an ideal place to have a second home if you want to visit other parts of the Adriatic.

While little is known of Le Marche outside Italy, it holds special significance for Italians because of its role in the Renaissance. Raphael, the painter, was born in its walled city of Urbino, which is a world heritage site. Urbino is 40km south of the Most Serene Republic of San Marino (as it's affectionately known), an independent city state that is Europe's least-visited country. It makes a good day trip for people fond of architecture and you can receive a stamp in your passport too.

Historically, international second-home buyers in Le Marche have been German or Scandinavian. Yet the region is starting to draw British buyers, with the number of second-home house-hunters in the region rising 18 per cent last year compared with 2017, according to Gate-Away, an Italian property portal for overseas buyers. However, that figure is from a low base, with Le Marche ranked 11 out of Italy's 20 regions in terms of inquiries from Britons.

Tuscany has been the top destination



This four-bedroom house in Ascoli Piceno in Le Marche is €399,000 through Gate-Away and Magic Marche

Why Le Marche may be the next Tuscany

This overlooked Italian region has miles of pristine coastline and affordable traditional properties, says Annabelle Williams

for foreign homebuyers over the past decade, according to Scenari Immobiliari, a property consultancy. The "Tuscan Triangle" of Florence, Siena and Lucca, which border the Chianti region known for its red wine, are the most popular areas. "Chianti is jokingly called Chianti-shire because of the many British people who have bought and restored a house there," says Simone Rossi, the managing director of Gate-Away.

In the north Lake Como in Lombardy draws high numbers of well-heeled international buyers — the Clooneys own a house there — but the high property prices mean many British buyers have started



The medieval city of Urbino in Le Marche

looking farther south. Umbria, with its beautiful Valle del Niccone, which borders Tuscany, has become a hotspot in recent years.

"Umbria was discovered more recently. Tuscany has always been the key place for international buyers,



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especially Britons," says Amy Redfern-Woods, a senior negotiator in the Italian office of Knight Frank. She says that buyers in these key areas of Italy can expect to pay between €5,500 and €12,000 a square metre, with the wide range in price reflecting the differences in condition and size of properties, from tiny doer-uppers to sprawling farmhouses restored to a high standard. "Most Britons now want a finished property. We are seeing that more," she says.

Ascoli Piceno in the south of Le Marche is one the region's highlights. In its centre is a grand palazzo, where Italians snack on olive all'ascolana (deep-fried stuffed olives) and baccala all'anconetana (salted cod, potatoes and tomatoes in olive oil).

Ten minutes outside the town a British couple are selling their restored four-bedroom, three-storey stone house for €399,000 (£355,000) through Gate-Away. The owners are selling to move closer to family in the UK and are leaving behind a light-filled house with double-aspect windows that take in views of the undulating land. Le Marche is hilly and the house's basement is only accessible via a steep slope.

At 300 sq m the property costs €1,333 a square metre, a fraction of the cost of property in Tuscany or Como, and it comes with two and a half acres. "Since the 2008 crash property prices have fallen by about 30 per cent, especially in the south and smaller towns and villages," Rossi says.

A 30-minute drive from Ascoli is the seaside town of San Benedetto del Tronto, the centre of the Riviera delle Palme, a strip of coast popular with tourists for its Mediterranean promenade and pedestrianised boulevards lined with restaurants and boutiques. In these town centres homebuyers will find former monastic buildings that have undergone modern renovation.

North of Ascoli and 10km from the sea is Ripatransone, another ancient hilltop town with a mix of medieval and Renaissance architecture. A two-bedroom flat in a former seminary is on sale through **Gate-Away** for €280,000. The living room has an original vaulted ceiling, and there is a shared courtyard and cloister for sitting in the shade. "Italy is the only country in Europe where prices are still falling, so it is very advantageous buying a property in the bel paese," Rossi says.