

# Travel

Travel Editor *Cathy Adams*

EXPLORE  
HONG KONG'S  
ART SCENE  
TRAVEL ON MONDAY



**TAKE FIVE**  
Restaurants to spot politicians in Washington, DC

**Old Ebbitt Grill**  
Washington's oldest restaurant, known for its oysters. Next to the White House, it counts ex-Presidents among clientele.  
[ebbitt.com](http://ebbitt.com)

**Le Diplomate**  
With classic Gallic dishes, this is a Francophile's dream and a place to see and be seen.  
[lediplomatedc.com](http://lediplomatedc.com)

**Cafe Milano**  
Refined Italian fare in a formal dining room with murals. Michelle Obama and Joe Biden have dined here.  
[cafemilano.com](http://cafemilano.com)

**The Oval Room**  
Two blocks from the White House, this fine-dining American restaurant, above, is known for power lunches.  
[ovalroom.com](http://ovalroom.com)

**Bistro Bis**  
A popular lunch choice among Capitol Hill staffers. Weekend brunch is also popular with locals.  
[bistrobis.com](http://bistrobis.com)

Christabel Lobo

## Mother Nature's revenge and beauty

### ITALY

Two years on from a devastating earthquake, **Rose Gamble** finds Italy's Sibillini mountains as enticing as ever

**A**FTER a tough scramble up a steep forest path, we emerge out of the tree line into rolling green meadows carpeted in buttercups and cornflowers the colour of the sky. A ring of hazy cloud hovers like a halo above a distant snow-capped summit. These gently undulating hills characterise much of the little-known Sibillini mountains in central Italy.

Straddling the provinces of Le Marche and Umbria, the Sibillini National Park's 70,000 square miles of sunlit hillsides are interspersed with 20 snow-capped peaks over 2,000m — a serious challenge for any keen hiker. And unlike large swathes of the Italian Alps or the Dolomites, it is almost entirely devoid of tourists. Sadly, that lack of tourists may in part be down to extensive damage caused by an earthquake that struck the region in 2016.

The walled-town of Norcia, just 4km from the quake's epicentre, is where we start our hike. On our first morning, after cramming our rucksacks with Norcia's speciality wild-boar salami, we wander into the town's main square.

The statue of Saint Benedict at its centre still stands, but a former bell



**Dazzling:** the medieval town of Castelluccio, overlooking the Piano Grande, which is carpeted with poppies in June and July

tower has been reduced to jagged stone teeth wrapped in scaffolding. Only the front façade of a once-intricate stone basilica remains.

Despite these scenes of devastation, people are sitting out on the square sipping rosé, and the town still buzzes with locals and Italian tourists.

It's just 20 minutes on foot from Norcia to reach the Sibillini National Park. The trails are empty of other walkers and largely unsigned, though with a good map easy to follow (download trails from [parks.it](http://parks.it)). We stop to fill up our water bottles from a snow-melt stream, which is rushing, clear as gin, straight off the mountainside. Later, we crest a ridge to find a herd of wild ponies.

As idyllic as hiking here is, it's not all scampering about in the daisies. One day we set out to walk a teetering ridge, crossing several peaks. Not long in, we find ourselves scrambling into the snow line and forced to skirt a hefty area of snow by ascending a near-vertical slope on our hands and knees. Back on the ridge path there are precipitous drops on either side.

We return seven hours later to Norcia starving but satisfied, to defrost our fingers over plates of wild boar ragu.

Later, we head to the medieval town of Castelluccio perched at 1,525m on a hill overlooking the Piano Grande ("big plain"). Between June and late July it is blanketed in wild poppy fields.

Castelluccio looks like a warzone, the town roped off and its occupants evacuated. We find a building site and several cheery food stalls full of treats such as black truffle and cured hams. We eat focaccia with freshly sliced pecorino at a wooden picnic table.

At 2pm the builders amble off to the town's one restaurant. Because in Sibillini, life just carries on.

### DETAILS ITALY

Ryanair ([ryanair.com](http://ryanair.com)) flies direct from Stansted to Perugia from £107 return. Doubles at Agriturismo Casale nel Parco dei Monti Sibillini ([casalenelparco.com](http://casalenelparco.com)) from £71, B&B.

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