



# CENTRAL ITALY

EMILIA-ROMAGNA, TUSCANY, UMBRIA, MARCHE, LAZIO AND ABRUZZO

## WHERE IS IT?

For the purpose of this guide, Central Italy comprises of the following regions: Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria, Marche, Lazio and Abruzzo. Essentially, we're looking at the region from the flat Po Valley in the north, down mid-way between Rome and Naples.

Riding from Venice to Bologna after descending out of the Dolomites, you could be forgiven for thinking 'well that's the end of the interesting roads in Italy', but nothing could be further from the truth. As you approach Bologna the land starts to undulate and rise as you head into the Apennine Mountains, which run for 750 miles down the length of Italy.

The Apennines are a series of mountain ranges that form the backbone of the Italian peninsula, stretching from the coastal region of Genoa in the north and following a broad arc to the tip of the Italian toe at Reggio Calabria in the south. The highest summit of Corno Grande (2,912m) tops out in the Abruzzo region where, should you be touring in winter, you can ski and ice climb as I've done a few times in years gone by.

However, when in Bologna you must set aside some time for a visit to the Ducati museum where you can take a factory tour. You don't need a prior booking for the museum, but you will need to book in advance if you'd like to go on a factory tour.

At the time of writing, the factory is closed to visitors on Wednesdays and weekends, so you'll need to bear that in mind when planning your trip. Check out [www.ducati.com](http://www.ducati.com) for up-to-date details, timings and prices.

Heading south from Bologna towards Florence, you really can't go wrong. The whole region is full of winding mountain roads through a landscape rich in history and archaeology. However, my personal favourite involves a route that takes in the Raticosa and Futa passes and a pass by the

famous Mugello Circuit, where the Italian MotoGP is hosted.

Be warned though, this route, especially from the Raticosa via the Futa and onto Lake Bilancino near Mugello, is as close as you're likely to get to competing in a road race. If I said to you that, on a good day, this stretch of tarmac is the Italian equivalent of Mad Sunday at the TT, I'm sure you'll get the picture. These passes are incredibly popular with motorcyclists that appear to have a point to prove and it's not that they enjoy a slow sight-seeing bimble.

That said, it's a thrilling ride with endless, sweeping turns and it's not to be missed when passing through the area or route to the spectacular city of Florence.

If you're anything like me, city tours do not feature highly in my motorcycle touring plans, but I make an exception when touring Italy. Venice is a must-see, as are the sights of Rome and Pisa, if only for the Leaning Tower in the case of the latter. If you only have the time or patience for one city visit, then make it Florence.

Florence is a work of art. Its cathedral and baptistry are magnificent as is the Piazza della Signoria, the Ponte Vecchio bridge and Medici Riccardi Palace. On the downside, they will be teeming with tourists. There are also excellent museums which house many world-renowned paintings and sculptures including perhaps the most famous sculpture in the world, Michelangelo's David, and Botticelli's Birth of Venus. At the very least, it's worth parking up the bike for a day and checking out this amazing city and its sights and treasures.

Anyway, enough of this culture, let's get the show back on the road and head further down into Tuscany. Historically, my visits to Central Italy have been dictated by my climbing gene so I would set course for the areas of highest elevation and therefore ride down the east of Tuscany and into Marche and Abruzzo before swinging right and heading into Rome.

