



FAST FACTS

TOTAL AREA:	
GRAPE VARIETIES:	Verdicchio, Passerina, Pecorino, Montepulciano, Sangiovese
TOTAL WINE PRODUCTION:	860 hl
APPELLATIONS:	Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi DOC, Cònero DOCG, Rosso Cònero DOC, Rosso Piceno DOC, Marche IGT

PRODUCERS

GAROFOLI

OVERVIEW

Marche is a region on the Adriatic coast of central Italy, between Emilia Romagna and Abruzzo. It is often called Le Marche (pronounced lay MAR-kay), and infrequently the English equivalent The Marches, because in medieval times it comprised three frontier domains, each known as a march or, in Italian, marca---plural marche. Those domains disappeared several hundred years ago, but the name stuck. Marche boasts many lively seaside towns (well known to Europeans if not Americans), the religious and historical attractions of Urbino and Loreto, and some delightful wines with a growing fan base.

History: The area of modern-day Marche was mostly inhabited by a tribe called the Piceni before it was occupied and absorbed by the ancient Romans. After the Roman Empire fell, the area went through periods of Goth, Byzantine, and Lombard control before the Frankish king Charlemagne invaded in the 8th century and added King of the Lombards to his titles. Charlemagne established three marches (territory controlled by a marchese) to rule the region, which was at the southern boundary of his realms. Before too long, these marches came under the authority the popes in Rome, part of their Earthly dominion known as the Papal States. The real power in various parts of Le Marche was wielded by influential families for centuries, but eventually the autonomous cities came under direct papal rule. Marche extracted itself from the Papal States in 1860, joining the nearly complete unification of Italy.

Geography: Marche occupies a hundred miles (160 km) of Adriatic Sea coastline toward the top of the Italian Peninsula and stretches inland 30-45 miles (50-75 km). Most of the region is an unending succession of rolling hills, but the western side becomes more mountainous. A mountain ridge defines the Marche-Umbria border on

the west, and a second ridge parallels it farther east. Between the two ridges is a long north-south valley. The regional capital is Ancona, a major seaport located on a small headland formed by the 1,875-foot (570 m) Mount Cònero.

Climate: Marche is on the northeast side of the Apennine Mountains, relatively unprotected from weather coming down from central Europe, so its climate is more continental than Mediterranean. Summers are quite warm and humid, and winters can be cold and snowy. Precipitation is fairly uniform, with the wettest months coming during the growing season. The interior valley in western Marche is less affected by the sea, so it is less humid and can have greater temperature extremes.

Primary grape varieties: Three grape varieties make up more than half of Marche's production. The top two are red: Sangiovese and Montepulciano, in nearly equal proportions. Marche thus forms a middle ground between Sangiovese-dominated Tuscany and Umbria on the west and Montepulciano-dominated Abruzzo on the south. The other primary grape variety is Marche's highly respected white, Verdicchio. Less common varieties associated with Marche include the whites Passerina and Pecorino and the red Lacrima.

Key wine regions: Marche is weighted a bit more toward white wines than red, and its leading denomination in terms of production is Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi DOC, located more or less in the center of the region. Verdicchio is also represented by a second, much smaller denomination, Verdicchio di Matelica DOC, in the intermountain valley on the western side of the region. Among the red wines, Montepulciano gets more of the spotlight than does Sangiovese. Two DOCG wines—Cònero and Offida—are Montepulciano based, as is Rosso Cònero DOC. Rosso Piceno DOC, however, which is the largest red-wine denomination, can be primarily Montepulciano or Sangiovese or a combination of the two. Of the rarer grape varieties, Passerina and Pecorino can be found in the white wines of Offida DOCG, and Lacrima has its own denomination, Lacrima di Morro d'Alba DOC.

Cuisine: A full meal in Marche often begins with a cold appetizer plate of salami, prosciutto, and cheeses. The first course would traditionally be polenta with any of a variety of additives. Another possibility along the coast would be fish soup (brodetto), which can sometimes contain up to a dozen different fish and shellfish. If pasta is served, it is likely to be egg pasta similar to that of its neighbor to the north, Emilia Romagna. A signature pasta dish is vincisgrassi, which is basically lasagna with a thick meat béchamel sauce and is flavored with nutmeg and cloves.

Some typical Marchegiano main courses are porchetta (a whole pig roasted with herbs and seasonings inside), pigeon, rabbit, and other game. White and black truffles are found in the mountains, and these may be used to season the dish. On the coast, seafood features prominently in the cuisine, since San Benedetto del Tronto, Ancona, and numerous smaller towns are major fishing centers. Ascoli Piceno in the interior south is known for its fried foods of all sorts, the most famous being olive ascolane, meat-stuffed deep-fried olives.