

Umbria

In
with Richard Martin

by Felix Russo

PHOTOGRAPHY IS A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY.

One could not ask for a better tour leader than Richard Martin or for a better location than the central region of Italy, called Umbria, from which to experience this journey. Located north of Rome and bordered by Tuscany to the west, Umbria is considered Italy's most rural region. In collaboration with Elisa Paloschi, an accomplished photographer and documentary video maker, Richard led a group of six enthusiastic photographers on an intensive ten-day photographic tour of the region, including two days of photographing in Tuscany. The tour began with a trip from Rome to the first destination, Perugia, capital city of the region of Umbria and a notable artistic centre of Italy.

After checking into the hotel, the group was quickly engaged in an afternoon shoot in Perugia. Here Richard Martin is in his element. He has been leading tours and teaching workshops for 17 years, in his native Kingston, Ontario and all over the world.

What are some qualities that make a good instructor? Richard states, "A good instructor should have the ability to move people – connecting them to their emotions." Equipment is important but the emphasis, according to Richard, is on "reinforcing to the participants the fact that fine images are made with their hearts and souls." During the sessions, everyone is given ample one-on-one time; Richard believes, "A good instructor has to be accessible. It is important that the instructor enjoys sharing knowledge without any ego."

Richard's enthusiasm for photography is contagious. The workshop environment provides an opportunity to meet with people who are totally immersed in photography and the sharing of ideas adds to the excitement. Richard feels that "A workshop is a great environment to try new things with the opportunity to explore your craft in ways you may not attempt on your own. It is a place where you can engage your imagination, stimulate the senses and rekindle your passion for photography. A workshop is a place to develop new skills and acquire new technical knowledge."

Fieldtrips started each morning at 5:30, followed by breakfast at 8:30. At 10:30 the group was on the road exploring the surrounding landscape and nearby towns. Richard states, "The workshop process works best when participants approach all aspects of it with an open mind. It is important that this process allows time for the unexpected opportunities and serendipitous twists on the creative path. Some of my best experiences and favourite images have occurred between selected points of interest. The process should allow for the freedom to err - there is nothing more valuable in photography than making mistakes, because it means you are going into a little more dangerous ground and trying new things. There is success in this kind of failure; it indicates risk and growth."

The workshop experience provides an opportunity to use and test equipment. Richard's advice is to "Make an equipment list – include a polarizing and UV filter." Consider the lenses and tripod you will bring on your trip. Richard has been using Manfrotto tripods and Tamron lenses for 25 years. He says, "Choosing a lens is one of the most fundamental creative decisions a photographer can make." The Tamron SP AF 11-18 mm is considered an ultra-wide lens and Richard uses it to "alter the illusion of depth in a scene, creating an impression of expanded depth and a greater feeling of space." Richard feels that the wide-angle lenses are the most underutilized lenses in a photographer's camera bag. He recommends "training your eyes to see as a wide angle does, ... to see its distortions, expanded distances and ability to create illusionary space." The Tamron SP AF 18-250 mm covers the range from wide angle to telephoto and can be considered a one-lens-does-it-all lens. Richard uses the telephoto range to "alter the illusion of depth in a scene, compressing the apparent distance between near and far objects. Making use of their shallow depth of field can create some very simple backgrounds for portraits and is great for blurring distracting foregrounds and backgrounds in other subjects. This compression of spatial elements can also create some very graphic landscapes or abstract photographs."

Besides Perugia, other towns visited in Umbria were Assisi, birthplace of St. Francis; Todi, one of Italy's best-preserved medieval hill towns; and Gubbio, a town with a rich medieval heritage that seems to be cut out of the mountains. In Tuscany the group stayed in Val D'Orcia, considered to be the heart of Tuscany and photographed in the Renaissance town of Montepulciano and the surrounding landscapes.

Richard offers some travel tips for photographers. Being in a new environment may dull your sense of observation; he states, "There is a natural tendency to be less observant in general, while engaged in exciting new situations. Ultimately the challenge is to consciously observe beyond the surface of one's own 'selective reality.' Make an effort to relate the photos that you make with your own experience and impressions, instead of merely repeating what you see on postcards and travel brochures. Leave the pressures of life at home. Allow your travel to be a time for the inner self to get away from the daily routines and refresh your creative energies. Experiment with finding new ways of expressing yourself through your photographs."

A workshop with Richard Martin could be the photographic experience that is just right for you. 📷

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