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Postcard from Tuscany, Italy: Exploring the Sweetest Hill Town

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Indagare's Avery Carmichael recently returned from Orvieto, Tuscany and shares her impressions on the romantic hill town.

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A beautiful medieval village perched atop volcanic limestone and surrounded by the last vestiges of post-Roman defensive walls, Orvieto was once an impenetrable center of Etruscan civilization. Today, the old Umbrian town is easily accessible by a funicular that departs from the train station at the base of the mountain, which is only one hour away from [Rome](#) and two hours from [Florence](#).

Walking around at night, soaking in the cobblestone streets and the glorious open-air piazzas, you can easily imagine what the town was like centuries ago. Unlike other parts of southern Italy, so often bustling and teeming with people at all hours, Orvieto is quiet and subdued after dark.

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Tiny cobblestone streets are a distinctive feature of Orvieto.

The town, with its unexpected charm and rustic sensibility, is small enough to get around entirely on foot. The perfect spot for a relaxed, romantic getaway, it enchants with displays of an unscripted, utterly Italian way of life: Sunday markets, where families buy and sell fresh produce, honey and textiles; tiny, candlelit trattorias, where the chef invents the menu daily; and locals with a benign ease about timeliness and a true affection for their natural surroundings.

Although many visitors will be content simply to eat, stroll and contemplate life's essential beauty, others will find that Orvieto is also rich in cultural activities and sights such as the cathedral, an ornate, gilded extravaganza of Romanesque and Gothic architecture. Inside, it contains bas-reliefs depicting stories from the Old and New Testaments and a colorful, well-preserved 14th-century mosaic titled *Coronation of the Virgin*.

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A view of the Orvieto town Cathedral.

For such a small town, the shopping options are surprisingly robust. A stone's throw from the cathedral, **Il Mago di Oz** (4 *Via dei Magoni*; 39-0763-342-063) is an emporium of handmade toys and trinkets. The collectible, one-of-a-kind items are handcrafted by Orvieto's wizard-in-residence, the store's grandfatherly owner. In his pageboy cap and half-moon glasses, he inspires a sense of untainted, pure wonder, and there is a level of showmanship to his shop: at the press of a button, the store comes whirring to life with figurines playing music, dancing and singing.

For great antique jewelry, both costume and fine, venture into **Petrella Gioielli** (19 *CORSO CAOUR*; 39-0763-343-969). With care, the proprietor lays out his favorite pieces for you on a vintage velvet pillow—sparkling with a pair of diamond cluster earrings, or an Art Deco sapphire ring. You can also find beautiful, sophisticated pieces designed in original Etruscan styles at **Orogami**, a five-minute walk away (*Via del Duomo*, 14-16; 39-076-334-4206). For a lasting memory of Orvieto, purchase one of Alberto Bellini's lovingly carved models of the town at **La Corte dei Miracoli** (13 *Piazza de Ranieri*; 39-349-315-6502). His atmospheric shop is filled with the heady scent of warm clay and lit by candles at all hours.

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Shopping for drawings, photographs, trinkets and more at Il Mago in Orvieto.

For lunch or dinner, Orvieto has restaurants ranging from casual, rustic trattorias tucked in alleyways to the *Michelin*-starred **Casa Vissani**—but they all share the same devotion to fresh, local ingredients and simple, traditional preparations. For a stunning view of the cathedral, visit **I Sette Consoli** (*Piazza Sant'Angelo*; 39-076-334-3911). Other recommendations include the off-the-beaten-path **Al Saltapicchio** (*Piazza XXIX Marzo*; 39-076-334-1805) and the pretty wine bar next to the Duomo, **Vinosus** (*Piazza del Duomo* 15; 39-076-334-1907).

Visitors should make time to try a glass or two of the town's specialty: a light, dry white wine. Made from grechetto and trebbiano grapes, Orvieto's wines are just as much inspired by Etruscan wine-making traditions as by contemporary processes.

A day trip to Orvieto makes for a lovely addition to a romantic weekend at one of Indagare's [favorite resorts in southern Tuscany](#) and is a welcome escape from the urban hustle and bustle of [Rome](#).

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– Avery Carmichael on June 20, 2018

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