CASA DELLA ZIA

A Spiritual Journey in Umbria

VALLO DI NERA • UMBRIA

WITH GIANLUCA AVANZATO AND JESSICA VECCHIONE

June 1–8, 2027 • Seven nights



Writing, sacred places, village life and meaningful encounters

Join us in Vallo di Nera for a week of reflection, discovery and connection. With Gianluca's writing circles and Jessica's deep ties to the village, we'll explore the spiritual and cultural traditions of Umbria at an unhurried pace.

Retreat itinerary and photo scrapbook

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DAY 1 · TUESDAY, JUNE 1

Arriving in Umbria

We'll meet in Rome for our group transfer to Vallo di Nera. After settling into your accommodations, take time to unpack, rest and explore the village.

That evening, we'll gather for a welcome aperitivo at Taverna del Bordone. Over food and wine, meet your fellow travelers and hear about the week ahead.

Gianluca will introduce our personal retreat journals, handmade Italian quaderni from Zubboli in Assisi, which will accompany us throughout the week. Through a simple opening ritual, we'll begin reflecting on what brought us here and what we hope to discover.



Welcome to Vallo di Nera

DAY 2 · WEDNESDAY, JUNE 2

Finding Our Rhythm

After breakfast, we'll gather with Gianluca in the garden for our first writing circle. Through gentle prompts and conversation, we'll consider what brought each of us here and what we hope to make room for during the week.

We'll explore Vallo's medieval lanes and historic churches, stopping for coffee with Franca before lunch at Cacio Re.

The afternoon offers quiet time for writing, reading or resting. Those who wish can join an optional walk toward Castel San Felice.

We'll enjoy dinner in the village, followed by an informal evening reflection.



Casa della Zia



A meal together

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DAY 3 · THURSDAY, JUNE 3

Assisi and the Franciscan Spirit

Today we'll travel to Assisi, following in the footsteps of Saints Francis and Clare.

With a local guide, we'll visit the Basilica of Saint Francis, taking time to appreciate its remarkable frescoes and the spiritual traditions that have drawn pilgrims here for centuries. Gianluca will offer reflections on simplicity, compassion and our relationship with the natural world.

After lunch, we'll visit the Basilica of Saint Clare and enjoy time to explore Assisi's winding streets, artisan shops and quiet corners.

After our time in Assisi, we'll travel into the beautiful Valnerina valley to Scheggino, a picturesque riverside village just a short distance from Vallo di Nera. We'll enjoy dinner at Locanda Valcasana, overlooking the tranquil waters, before returning to Vallo.



Basilica of Saint Francis



Scheggino

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DAY 4 · FRIDAY, JUNE 4

The Hearth, the Table and the Abbey

Our morning begins with a writing circle focused on home, belonging and the traditions we carry with us.

Later, we'll gather at Cacio Re for a hands-on cooking lesson, preparing traditional Umbrian dishes before sitting down to enjoy what we've made.

In the afternoon, we'll travel through the Valnerina to the magnificent Abbazia di San Pietro in Valle, near Ferentillo. Founded in the early medieval period, this Benedictine abbey offers an opportunity to explore the relationship between monastic life, history, art and the landscape.

We'll visit the abbey church, admire its frescoes and learn about the Benedictine tradition that shaped this remarkable place. Gianluca will guide a short reflection on balance, community and the rhythms of daily life.

We'll remain at the abbey complex for dinner at Alloro, subject to group arrangements, before returning to Vallo.



Cooking together at Cacio Re



Abbazia di San Pietro in Valle

A Spiritual Journey in Umbria

VALLO DI NERA • UMBRIA

DAY 5 · SATURDAY, JUNE 5

Fabriano and the Written Word

An early departure takes us to Fabriano, a town with a special place in Gianluca's own creative and spiritual journey.

At the Paper and Watermark Museum, we'll discover the centuries-old craft of papermaking and the history of the pages on which people have recorded their thoughts, prayers and stories. A hands-on papermaking activity may be included if available.

After lunch in town, we'll visit one of the nearby spiritual sites, either the hermitage of Santa Maria di Valdisasso or the monastery of San Silvestro at Montefano.

Gianluca's personal connections in Fabriano may allow us to arrange a more intimate encounter with the traditions and people associated with these places.

We'll leave time for writing or quiet reflection before enjoying an early dinner in Fabriano and returning to Vallo.



Traditional papermaking



Mountain landscape near Fabriano

A Spiritual Journey in Umbria

VALLO DI NERA • UMBRIA

DAY 6 · SUNDAY, JUNE 6

Santa Rita, Saint Benedict and the Meaning of Hope

We'll begin our day in Cascia, visiting the Sanctuary of Santa Rita and learning about the extraordinary life of a woman whose story has inspired generations of pilgrims.

Gianluca will guide reflections on hope, forgiveness, resilience and finding strength during difficult times.

From Cascia, we'll continue through the mountain landscape to Norcia, traditionally recognized as the birthplace of Saint Benedict and his sister, Saint Scholastica.

We'll enjoy a leisurely lunch featuring the local cuisine for which Norcia is famous, then explore Piazza San Benedetto and the Basilica dedicated to the saint. Gianluca will introduce Benedict's philosophy of balancing work, prayer and contemplation, and how those principles might find a place in our own lives.

There will be time to explore Norcia's shops, sample local specialties and perhaps find a quiet corner for a little writing. We'll finish with an early evening aperitivo or light supper before returning to Vallo.



Basilica of Santa Rita



Piazza San Benedetto

A Spiritual Journey in Umbria

VALLO DI NERA • UMBRIA

DAY 7 · MONDAY, JUNE 7

What We Carry Home

Our final morning writing circle offers time to revisit the week's experiences, share a passage if desired and consider what we want to carry into everyday life.

Later, we'll gather in the garden at Casa della Zia to prepare focaccia in the old outdoor oven. We'll enjoy a leisurely lunch together, celebrating the food, friendships and experiences we've shared.

The afternoon is intentionally unhurried, with time for a final village walk, packing, reflection or simply sitting in the garden. Gianluca will offer a closing practice that participants can continue at home.

That evening, we'll gather at Cacio Re for a farewell dinner, celebrating our week together in Umbria.



Our outdoor oven



An evening together

DAY 8 · TUESDAY, JUNE 8

Arrivederci

After breakfast and goodbyes, we'll depart for Rome and our return journeys.



Arrivederci, Vallo di Nera

Your Home in Umbria

VALLO DI NERA • UMBRIA

Rooms and spaces at Casa della Zia



❧ *Master Bedroom* ❧



❧ *Second Upstairs Bedroom* ❧



❧ *Full Upstairs Bathroom* ❧



❧ *Downstairs Bedroom* ❧

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CASA DELLA ZIA

Your Home in Umbria

VALLO DI NERA • UMBRIA

Rooms and spaces at Casa della Zia



❧ *Kitchen* ❧



❧ *Living Room* ❧



❧ *Downstairs Full Bathroom* ❧



❧ *The Garden* ❧

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Your Village Hotel

VALLO DI NERA • UMBRIA

Locanda Cacio Re · Vallo di Nera



❧ *Locanda Cacio Re · Exterior* ❧



❧ *Guest Corridor* ❧



❧ *Guest Bedroom* ❧



❧ *Private Bathroom* ❧

CASA DELLA ZIA

Your Village Hotel

VALLO DI NERA • UMBRIA

Locanda Cacio Re · Vallo di Nera



❧ *In-Room Amenities* ❧



❧ *Outdoor Garden* ❧



❧ Outdoor Terrace ❧



❧ Guest Room with Private Bathroom ❧

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Two Very Different Umbrias

THE VALNERINA & THE VALLE UMBRA





The Valnerina

Casa della Zia is in the Valnerina, the mountain valley carved by the Nera River through southeastern Umbria. Here, steep wooded slopes, limestone peaks and winding roads surround small stone villages. Vallo di Nera, Scheggino and Castel San Felice belong to this intimate landscape, where village life and the natural world remain closely connected. This is the Umbria we will call home for the week.

The Valle Umbra

Travel west from the Valnerina and the mountains open onto the Valle Umbra, a broad, fertile plain of olive groves, vineyards and fields. Medieval towns rise above the valley: Assisi, Montefalco and Trevi, with Spoleto at its southern edge. The openness of the landscape offers a striking contrast to the enclosed mountain valley around Vallo.

Your Hosts

A shared love of Umbria, reflection and discovery



Gianluca Avanzato

Gianluca Avanzato curates intentional spaces for deep exploration, discovery, and creativity. In his Sacred Writing Circles and one-on-one Creative Journeying sessions, he teaches writing as a spiritual practice of self-knowing and empowerment.

He also teaches university-level Italian and leads regenerative community spaces for Italian Americans seeking to explore their lineage.

Gianluca holds a Master of Divinity from Harvard Divinity School and a Diploma in Interreligious Studies from the Angelicum in Rome. His background in spiritual care and interfaith studies informs his work with people from a wide variety of cultures and faith traditions. Rooted in mystical Christianity, his approach draws on wisdom from multiple religious traditions and his training with Ron Young in Spiritual Healing and Constellations. He has participated in educational programs and cultural exchange experiences in Germany, Italy, India, Jerusalem, and Abu Dhabi.

A New Tradition at Casa della Zia

This will be Gianluca's first retreat at Casa della Zia. He looks forward to sharing the beauty of Umbria through writing, reflection, meaningful encounters and the rhythms of village life, with the hope that A Spiritual Journey in Umbria will become a cherished annual tradition.



Jessica Vecchione

Jessica Vecchione is a New Yorker with deep family roots in Italy and the owner and host of Casa della Zia in the medieval village of Vallo di Nera, Umbria. Her mother was Roman, her father Italian American, and much of her family still lives in Italy. She grew up spending summers in Italy and has returned throughout her life, developing an enduring connection to the people, culture and rhythms of Umbrian village life.

Jessica first visited Vallo di Nera with her Aunt Luigina in 1968. In 2023, she fulfilled a long-held dream by purchasing a stone village home there, which she named Casa della Zia in her aunt’s honor.

Fluent in Italian, Jessica welcomes small groups, families and friends for intimate retreats rooted in local life. Through shared meals, cooking, village walks, encounters with artisans and excursions to historic towns and sacred places, she creates opportunities to experience Umbria personally and at an unhurried pace.

For A Spiritual Journey in Umbria, Jessica joins Gianluca in welcoming guests to the village and introducing them to the people and places that have made this part of Italy feel like home.

The Village That Welcomes Us

People, Places, and Everyday Discoveries



❧ *An Ancient Village Passage* ❧



❧ *Sacred Art in Vallo di Nera* ❧

The Village That Welcomes Us

People, Places, and Everyday Discoveries



❧ *Coffee and Friendship with Franca* ❧



❧ *The Garden at Casa della Zia* ❧

The Village That Welcomes Us

People, Places, and Everyday Discoveries



❧ *Local Flavors and Traditions* ❧



❧ *Discovering the Valnerina* ❧

CASA DELLA ZIA

Sacred Places and Timeless Stories

Faith, Art, and Centuries of History



❧ *Basilica of St. Francis, Assisi* ❧



❧ *Saint Rita and Cascia* ❧

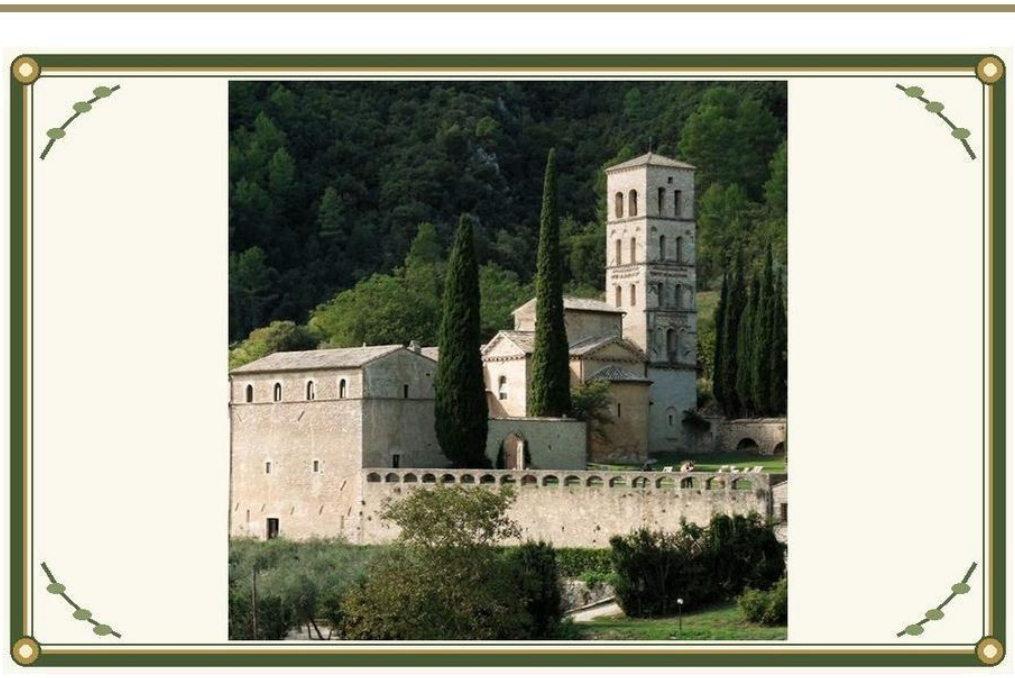
CASA DELLA ZIA

Sacred Places and Timeless Stories

Faith, Art, and Centuries of History



❧ *St. Benedict's Norcia* ❧

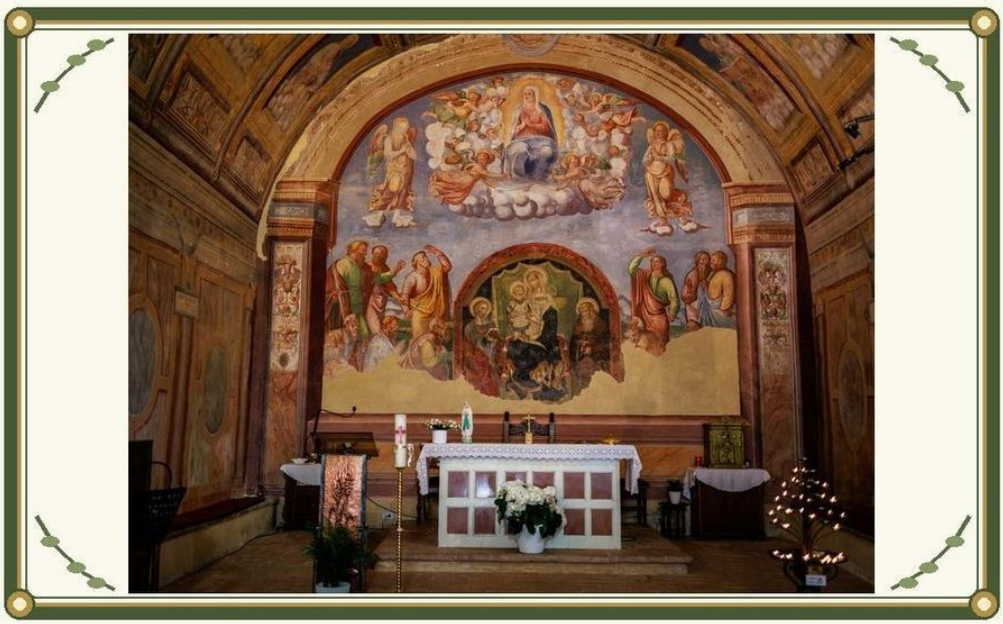


❧ *Abbey of San Pietro in Valle* ❧

CASA DELLA ZIA

Sacred Places and Timeless Stories

Faith, Art, and Centuries of History



❧ *Sacred Art and Frescoes* ❧



❧ *A Quiet Corner of Vallo* ❧

CASA DELLA ZIA

The Art of Slowing Down

Reflection, Creativity, and the Natural World



❧ *The Art of Handmade Paper* ❧

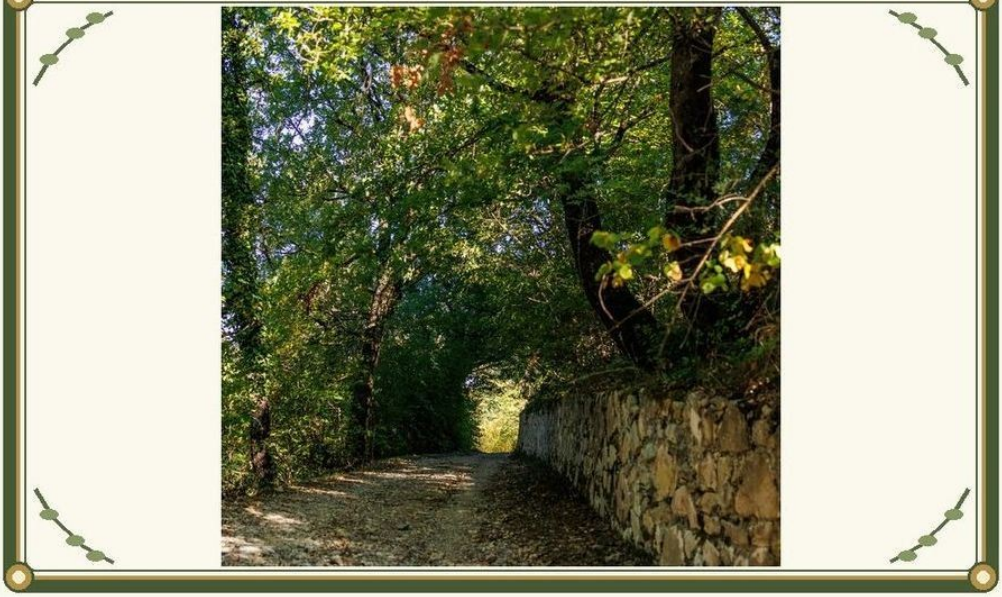


❧ *A Moment of Creative Reflection* ❧

CASA DELLA ZIA

The Art of Slowing Down

Reflection, Creativity, and the Natural World



❧ *A Woodland Path* ❧



❧ *The River Nera* ❧

CASA DELLA ZIA

The Art of Slowing Down

Reflection, Creativity, and the Natural World



❧ *Mountains and Stillness* ❧



❧ *Resting in the Garden* ❧

CASA DELLA ZIA

Around the Umbrian Table

Good Food, Good Company, Lasting Memories



❧ *Pasta Making at Locanda Cacio Re* ❧



❧ *Focaccia from Our Outdoor Oven* ❧

CASA DELLA ZIA

Around the Umbrian Table

Good Food, Good Company, Lasting Memories



❧ *The Flavors of Umbria* ❧



❧ *Long Lunches and New Friendships* ❧

CASA DELLA ZIA

Around the Umbrian Table

Good Food, Good Company, Lasting Memories



❧ *Dinner with Friends* ❧



❧ *An Evening Stroll* ❧

CASA DELLA ZIA

Your Home in Umbria

Casa della Zia · Vallo di Nera



❧ *Gathering in the Garden* ❧



❧ *Our Welcoming Living Room* ❧

CASA DELLA ZIA

Your Home in Umbria

Casa della Zia · Vallo di Nera



❧ *The Kitchen at Casa della Zia* ❧



❧ *A Comfortable Guest Bedroom* ❧

CASA DELLA ZIA

Your Home in Umbria

Casa della Zia · Vallo di Nera



❧ *The Garden and Mountain Views* ❧



❧ *Our Historic Outdoor Oven* ❧

CASA DELLA ZIA

The Art of Cheesemaking

A Morning with Fabrizio Pucciotti · Vallo di Nera

Just a couple of minutes' walk from Casa della Zia is Fabrizio Pucciotti's cheese cave. We can visit at around 8:30 a.m. on any morning to watch him make cheese using traditional methods and discover a treasured part of daily village life.



❧ *Meet Fabrizio Pucciotti* ❧



❧ *The Cheese Cave* ❧

CASA DELLA ZIA

The Art of Cheesemaking

A Morning with Fabrizio Pucciotti · Vallo di Nera



❧ *Traditional Cheesemaking* ❧



❧ *Fresh Cheese in the Making* ❧

CASA DELLA ZIA

Retreat Details & Pricing

Gianluca Avanzato Retreat • June 1–8, 2027

Price and reservations

$4,900 per person, all inclusive, based on double occupancy, including Gianluca's retreat leader fee. A $1,000 deposit holds your spot. Receive a $250 discount when your deposit is received before January 1, 2027, bringing your retreat price to $4,650 per person, based on double occupancy.

After your deposit, the remaining balance may be paid in two to four payments. Full payment is due April 15, 2027. Hotel supplements are additional.

Accommodations

Guests stay at Casa della Zia and at nearby Locanda Cacio Re, a short walk from the house. The main house has three bedrooms with a mix of double and twin beds. Rooms are assigned based on double occupancy. All guests have full access to the house and common areas. Hotel supplements: single occupancy $550; double occupancy $750.

What is included

Accommodations, meals, in-country transportation during the retreat, cooking lessons, guided experiences, Sacred Writing Circles and reflective conversations led by Gianluca, and a handmade Zubboli quaderno (journal) from Assisi for each guest.

Travel and insurance

Airfare is not included. Travel insurance is required and purchased separately.

Deposit and cancellation policy

$500 of the $1,000 deposit is non-refundable. Cancellations more than 14 days before arrival receive a refund less $500. Cancellations within 14 days of arrival are non-refundable.

Before you come

Expect moderate walking on cobblestone streets and inclines. Comfortable walking shoes are essential.

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