

Festive Days in Assisi, Town of St. Francis

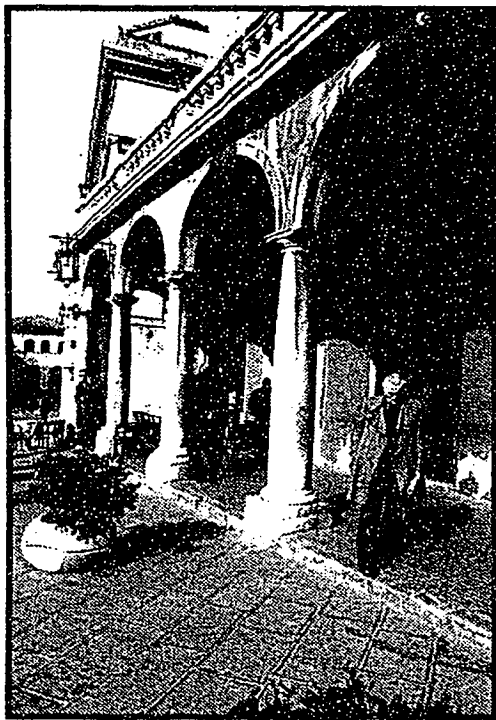
Pilgrims celebrate the gentle saint's love of nature

By JAMES RESTON JR.

BREATHE the air of Assisi deeply," a Jesuit astronomer had said to me on a hot day south of Rome, when I told him where I was going for four days in early August. There was a hint of envy in his voice, and he left it to me to find out what he meant.

I arrived late on Aug. 1, the first day of the annual two-day Feast of Forgiveness (Festa del Perdono), and as the taxi climbed the hill toward the medieval town, a steady stream of pilgrims was making its way down to the great basilica beyond the railroad station, the Santa Maria degli Angeli. This massive 16th-century church, one of the six papal

JAMES RESTON Jr. visited Italy to research his new book, a biography of Galileo, for HarperCollins.



In the Piazza del Comune.

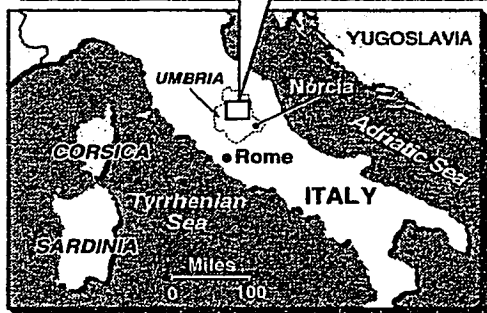
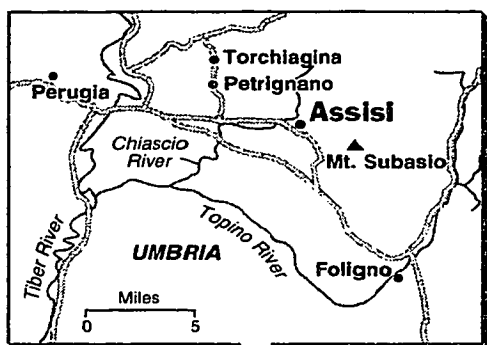
cathedrals of Italy, is built around the humble hermitage of St. Francis called the Porziuncola. The next day I would join the pilgrims at this basilica, at a Mass celebrated by Pio Cardinal Laghi, who a few years ago was the Papal Nuncio to the United States. There, the simple stone chapel rests awkwardly in the apse of the great cathedral, making it difficult to witness a Mass when there is a big congregation. In 1212, it is said, St. Francis consecrated St. Clare in the chapel as the bride of Christ, before she established the Second Order of St. Francis, the nuns known as the Poor Clares.

The Feast of Forgiveness is a creature of the Crusades. St. Francis was distressed that, under church canon of the 13th century, the sinful man could escape punishment in purgatory by going off to the Middle East to fight for Christ. Believing that there should be a more peaceful way, St. Francis received the Pope's permission for Catholics to come to Assisi once a year for confession and prayer and indulgence, to renew their relationship with the church and with their families. Thus, this annual pilgrimage was established.

At the Piazza del Comune, the center of the town, I was put out of the taxi not far from the Temple of Minerva, which lured Goethe to Assisi during his 18th-century Italian journey. This well-preserved Roman colonnade, built during the reign of Augustus, is nestled now between medieval buildings and attached to a Baroque church. The square was filled with singing, dancing, playful young people, members of Franciscan youth organizations, who had come to Assisi for two weeks of retreat and were living at the Basilica of San Francesco. In my four days in the town, these rapturous troubadours had much to do with the festive air of Assisi.

Close to midnight several days later, for example, I walked down to the Basilica of San Francesco to find 500 of these charismatic Christians, joined by a handful of friars and nuns, forming an immense, moving circle on the lawn in front of the basilica and singing their catchy songs from a modern pop musical about the life of St. Francis, who died in Assisi in 1226. The rose window of the basilica, I would learn later, is regarded as the eye of God, and the great green in front of the basilica was known in times past as collis inferni, the mouth of Hell.

I had already arranged — a good idea in

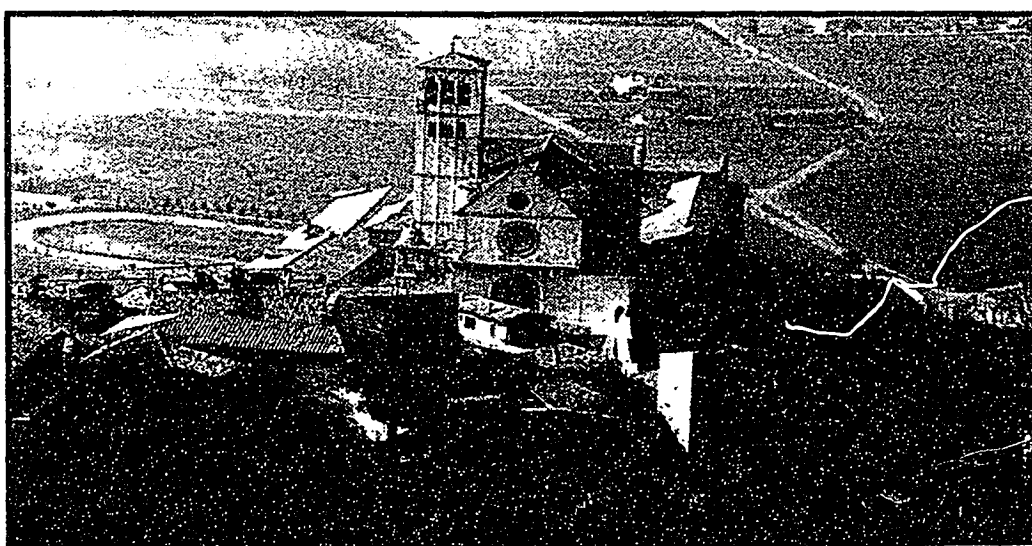


The New York Times

high season — to stay in a small trattoria called La Fortezza, whose eight guest rooms above a superior restaurant seemed to be an afterthought. There are many such small pensions in Assisi, some connected to simple restaurants that offer a two-course tourist menu with a half-liter of table wine for about \$12. To reach La Fortezza, I had to climb some gentle winding stone steps of a medieval walkway above the Piazza del Comune, and, as I did for the first time, the strains of a violin greeted me. I soon came to associate my walks with the sound of rehearsal, for the place is full of musical events.

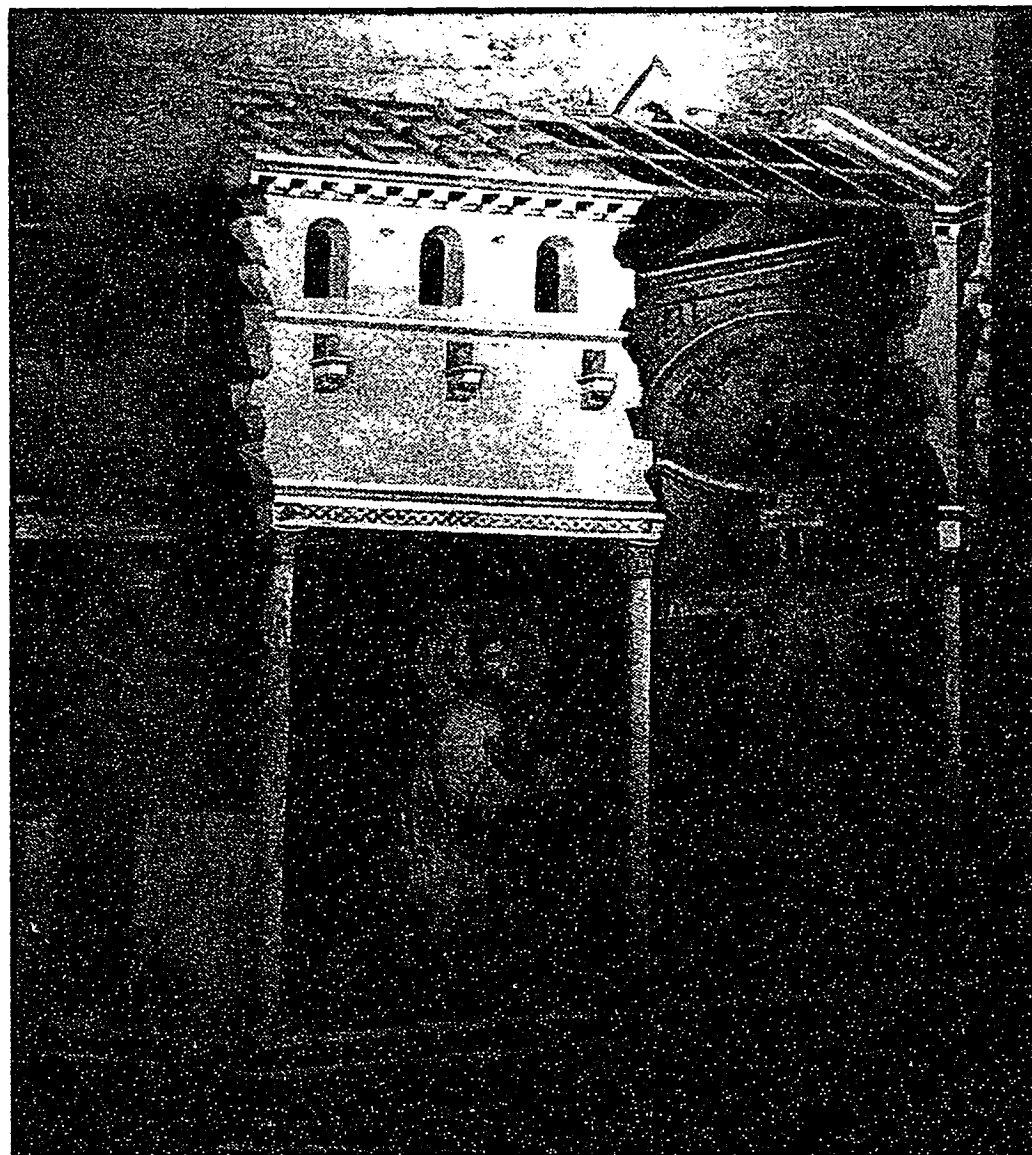
One can also stay in guest houses run by nuns. St. Anthony's Guest House, for example, is managed by the Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement, who come from Graymoor, N.Y. If the price of St. Anthony's Guest House is hard to beat (\$30 a night for a double), the view across the rooftops from the small library of the guest house and over the rose-and-white Church of St. Clare and its cloisters is unparalleled. After fighting the

Continued on Page 32



Photographs by Stefano Amantini/Atlantide for The New York Times

ABOVE Basilica of San Francesco seen from the Rocca Maggiore. BELOW Giotto frescoes in the Basilica of San Francesco.



STUDY FRENCH AS YOU CRUISE TO PARIS!

What an enchanting way to learn French! A unique 18-day Berlitz Transatlantic cruise aboard the Mermoz, the only French cruise liner in the world. Visit French-flavored Guadeloupe and Martinique, the Azores, and Spain's stunning Santiago. Then enjoy three nights in fabulous Paris where you can practice what you learned. With unrivaled French cuisine, a charming French staff, and the sophisticated élan of the luxurious French Mermoz — c'est vraiment fantastique! Departs May 2nd. Call your travel agent or (800) 556-8850.



1510 S.E. 17th Street, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316
Ship's registry: Bahamas.

If you're single it's free
32 pages of single-minded fun →

SINGLE WORLD
You'll never have to travel alone!

800-223-6490
or see your travel agent

35th year
SINGLE WORLD
3-12 day Cruises
CARNIVAL • NCL
PRINCESS • REGENCY
ROYAL CARIBBEAN
Bermuda • Caribbean
Hawaii • Europe • Alaska
South Pacific • Mexico
9-15 day Europe Tours
Spain, Portugal, Greece, Egypt
Europe Leisurely

FLORIDA \$119	CALIFORNIA \$149	SYDNEY \$325
JAMAICA \$149	MADRID \$215	NICE \$255
S. DOMINGO PLATA \$159	MUNICH/BERLIN \$218	ROME \$259
PARIS \$169	HAMBURG \$220	WARSAW \$274
MANCHESTER \$173	COPENHAGEN \$224	LENINGRAD \$289
AMSTERDAM \$184	STOCKHOLM \$228	MOSCOW \$299
PORT OF SPAIN \$189	MILAN \$229	CAIRO \$309
FRANKFURT \$190	VIENNA \$229	TOKYO/OSAKA \$329
BRUSSELS \$191	BUCHAREST/BUDAPEST \$234	AUCKLAND \$329
CARACAS \$199	LISBON \$240	TEL AVIV \$335
GLASGOW \$209	FLORENCE \$244	BOGOTA \$339
ZURICH \$212	ATHENS/VENICE \$245	RIO DE JANEIRO \$350
GENEVA \$212	THESSALONIKI \$245	DAKAR \$399
		JOHANNESBURG \$449

For Travel Mon. - Thur. • Fri. - Sun. \$225 • Certain restrictions apply • Plus Taxes: \$6 - \$11 E9, \$10 - \$15 W9. Taxes included on California AMEX, VISA, & MASTER CARD WELCOME • 12 ROUNDTRIP FARES • DAILY DEPARTURES FROM 117 US CITIES
111 East 15th Street, New York, NY 10003 (212) 758-1149 800-825-3834



Discover Portugal

STARTING AT \$995-1,132*
Including Round-Trip Airfare, Hotels and Transfers.

Come to Portugal and make the vacation discovery of a lifetime. You will find medieval walled cities, breathtaking scenery, sumptuous regional cuisine, spectacular shopping and a warm people waiting.

Just call one of the fine tour operators listed here for a holiday package perfectly suited to your taste and budget.

And, your vacation will begin the moment you board one of TAP Air Portugal's modern wide-body jets. TAP Air Portugal offers convenient flights from New York, Newark and Boston to Portugal and beyond to over 60 worldwide destinations.

So call today and begin your own Age of Discovery.

Skyline Travel (516) 222-9090 (800) 645-6198
Sun Holidays (203) 323-1166 (800) 243-2057
TAP Air Portugal Discovery Vacations (800) 247-8686

For more information send this coupon to:
TAP AIR PORTUGAL
P.O. Box 9022, East Setauket, NY 11733-9022

Name: _____
Address: _____
City/State: _____ Zip: _____
Phone: (____) _____ DNYTC15

MORE ITALY FOR LESS.

CHI offers the best tour value! We offer more options, great hotels, professional service and itineraries, including fascinating Sicily and undiscovered Apulia.

- Escorted, Hosted or Custom-made Tours • Fly/Drive or Rail Packages • Up to 50% savings on car rentals
- Daily departures • \$5 million Consumer Protection Plan
- \$100 Bonus per Couple

For brochure requests 7 days a week, 24 hrs. a day.
1-800-468-6248

CENTRAL HOLIDAY TOURS
For information please call
1-800-526-6045

GREAT ESCAPES TRAVEL

LONDON \$149	ISTANBUL \$265	STONEY \$325
PARIS \$180	BERLIN \$240	ROME/MILAN \$289
MUNICH \$190	MANCHESTER \$210	RIOS PAULIS \$350
AMSTERDAM \$199	MADRID \$219	BANGKOK \$400
ATHENS \$240	MOSCOW \$290	VIENNA \$299
BRUSSELS \$250	SCANDINAVIA \$295	ZURICH \$320
BUDAPEST \$240	SAN JUAN \$123	ZURICH/GVA \$295
DUSSELDORF \$249	STUTTGART \$245	TAPEI \$425
EDINBURGH \$225	SCANDINAVIA \$295	LENINGRAD \$325
GOTHENBURG \$225	SANTAGO \$360	SINGAPORE \$395
JOHANNESBURG \$310	PRAGUE \$350	DAKAR \$417
Buenos Aires \$40	TEL AVIV \$395	HAARLEM \$474
CAIRO \$310	TOKYO \$350	LAGOS \$574

Fares are one way based on 800 purchase. Round-trip fares, where applicable, include taxes and fees. Call for more info & avail.

Portugal & Spain
With the Specialists
TAP AIR PORTUGAL IBERIA

- 'A la Carte' Tailor-Made Packages
- Fly-Drive Tours with 'Pousadas,' 'Paradores' and Palaces
- Escorted Motorcoach Tours
- Freestyle Vacations in Cities and/or Resorts
- Villas & Apartments Vacations
- Golf Packages

For brochure and information call:
800-645-6198 or (516) 423-9090
376 New York Ave., Huntington, NY 11743

Skyline Travel Club or see your travel agent

SHOPPERS TRAVEL INC.

LAX/SEA/SFO \$149	HONOLULU \$269	CARACAS \$199
LONDON \$139	TOKYO \$319	EGUIBOR \$279
PARIS \$159	TAIPEI \$429	COSTA RICA \$229
MILAN/ROME \$189	HONG KONG \$429	Buenos Aires \$369
MADRID \$229	BANGKOK \$489	BUENOS AIRES \$369
ATHENS \$199	SINGAPORE \$489	COLIMBA \$279
COPENHAGEN \$229	COLOMBO \$339	GUAYAMA \$279
STOCKHOLM \$229	INDONESIA \$339	PAUANA CITY \$279
TEL AVIV \$339	SYDNEY \$339	BRUNEL \$279
ZURICH \$199	AUCKLAND \$329	EL SALVADOR \$279

ONE WAY FARES BASED ON 800 PURCHASE. PLUS TAXES, CUST. IMM. DEP. \$28. RESTRICTIONS APPLY.

Quality and Value with IPI's Exclusive Price and Satisfaction Guarantee. Over 200 Top Deluxe to Budget Tours!

IPI/InterPacific and Northwest Airlines... America's Number 1 to

China-Orient
For Group and Independent Travel

As low as \$1299
FULLY INCLUSIVE LAND AND AIR
10- to 25-Day Tours visiting 3 to 13 cities

1st Officially Authorized U.S. Agent for
Vietnam

As low as \$2795
FULLY INCLUSIVE LAND AND AIR
15- and 18-Day Tours visiting 8 cities

Seasonal prices vary. See or call your travel agent or IPI/InterPacific Tours Int'l America's Number One to Asia and Pacific
111 East 15th Street, New York, NY 10003
212-953-6010 • 800-221-3594 U.S. Canada

TRAVEL SYNDICATE 212-697-5811

LONDON \$189	PRAGUE \$279	HAARLEM \$619
PARIS \$194	BUDAPEST \$309	VIENNA \$579
BRU/AMS \$210	SYD/MEL/AKL \$449	BOM/DEL \$579
MOSCOW \$349	RIO/SAO/BUÉ \$489	FLORIDA \$579
TEL AVIV \$339	DAKAR \$399	TOKYO \$359
DAMASCUS \$419	ABIDJAN \$509	HONG KONG \$399
CAIRO \$359	BANJUL \$439	BANGKOK \$479

OTHER DESTINATIONS TO/FROM USA WORLDWIDE AVAIL. FARES BASED ON O/W ROUND TRIP PURCHASE. REQUIRED TAXES & EXTRA FEES APPLY.



*Per person, double occupancy including round-trip airfare from New York, Newark, or Boston to Lisbon, 6 night stay at superior class hotel in Lisbon, round-trip transfers from airport to hotel, daily continental breakfast and 1/2 day sightseeing tour. Mid-week departure, valid 6/1/92-9/31/92. Prices may be higher from 6/16/92-9/31/92. Prices may change without notice; other restrictions apply. \$18 taxes and inspection fees not included.