

Solomeo Brings a Renaissance Fair and Luxury to Umbria

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Solomeo, a tiny town 14 km. (about 10.5 miles) southwest of Perugia, in Italy's Umbria region, brings history to life every summer with its Renaissance Fair. For ten days between late July and the first few days of August the handful of streets in this dollhouse village (population: 500) are crowded with more than 15,000 visitors from elsewhere in Italy and from abroad.



Street performers liven the streets of Solomeo during its summer Renaissance Fair. – Cuccinelli communications department

Street performers in costume animate every angle, craftspeople ply local wares ranging from edibles to wearables, and every evening a banquet is

served outdoors on rough-hewn wooden tables by locals in Renaissance attire. Almost every visitor to the fair winds up enjoying at least one evening meal. The food and wine are rigorously Umbrian, with the emphasis on pasta, meat, and regional produce such as figs, fava beans, greens, and truffles, all washed down with excellent local wines and the ubiquitous unsalted bread.

But the town's roots predate the Renaissance by more than a millennium. Solomeo's history can be traced back to Etruscan times (from about 700 BC), Relics from that civilization have been found in the area, and the Etruscan deity "Lumm" was apparently honoured by the inhabitants, so the name is believed to be a derivation of "San Lume".

If you want to know what it is like to walk the streets of a medieval hamlet with Etruscan origins, albeit a spotlessly clean version free of disease and animal excrement, plan to come before or after the Renaissance Fair. The town may feel a little like Disneyland but there is no admission fee, and you can arrange for a guide to describe Solomeo's history and architectural features in several languages, including English.



Solomeo's flower-decked streets blossom most vividly in the warm months.

These features include the Renaissance-dated Castello di Solomeo, the 16th century Villa Antonori, and the church of San Bartolomeo dating back to the 12th century. Seven schools for crafts — including textile tailoring, cutting, and mending, masonry, and gardening – are tucked away in parts of the castle; students come to learn these artisanal skills much as Renaissance apprentices learned by observing and assisting master craftsmen.



Ancient crafts are on display for education and acquisition at Solomeo's Renaissance Fair. –

Solomeo also has its own theatre. The latter was completed in 2008, but was constructed with respect for its historical context, so it fits in with the historic buildings. The piazza outside the theatre includes a Roman-style outdoor “amphitheatre” that hosts performances in the summer, when the theatre itself is closed.



The medieval art of falconry is on display at Solomeo’s summer Renaissance Fair. – Cuccinelli communications department

The name of the theatre, Teatro Cucinelli, is a link to the town’s restoration and its relationship to cashmere: the former was financed by one man, Brunello Cucinelli, and his eponymous company and foundation. Brunello Cucinelli is sometimes called the “king of cashmere”, because the company he founded in 1978 focuses on the design, production, and sales of upscale cashmere garments.



Solomeo's main church and spotless streets

In 1985 Cucinelli bought most of Solomeo, including the castle, the villa, and the church. By then his company was doing well and he wanted to establish headquarters in the then-almost-abandoned hamlet, partly for sentimental reasons (his wife is from Solomeo and he courted her there), partly for economic reasons (a dying town doesn't cost a lot), and partly for image (a prestige brand needs a prestige headquarters). The importance [Brunello Cucinelli](#) attaches to the town can be seen in the logo of his company, which incorporates the coat of arms of the Castello di

Solomeo.



Throughout Solomeo's piazza are scattered the various schools of artisanal crafts, as in medieval times.

Today the family lives in Villa Antonori; when not traveling, Brunello can walk to his office, as do some of the company's 700+ employees who work at headquarters. Visitors are invited to tour various company facilities, such as its gorgeous library, and eyeball others from afar, such as the luminous timber-roofed new company restaurant whose main flaw is that it is not open to the public.



Cucinelli Theater in Solomeo – Brunello Cucinelli

One can actively participate in the town's veneration of cashmere at the Cucinelli factory store, part of the headquarters complex. Prices are 30 per cent less than in High Street shops, and the shop is sometimes used as a testing ground for new products and marketing ideas. So you may pick up an item before it makes its way into next season's collection. All are welcome at the store without prior appointment. But, for the rest – tours of the town, visits to the craft schools, the history of Solomeo – it is advisable to write in advance to comunicazione@brunellocucinelli.it.

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