



ITALIA

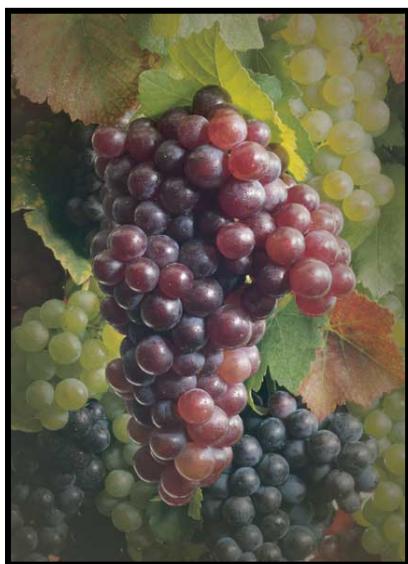
Italian Government Tourist Board

ITALY: A RAINBOW OF FLAVORS

Italian food and wine by Region

1. Valle d'Aosta	2. Piedmont	3. Liguria	4. Lombardy	5. Trentino Alto Adige
6. Veneto	7. Friuli-Venezia Giulia	8. Emilia Romagna	9. Tuscany	10. Umbria
11. Marches	12. Lazio	13. Abruzzo	14. Molise	15. Campania
16. Apulia	17. Basilicata	18. Calabria	19. Sicily	20. Sardinia

"Food is a gift from God, but cooks are surely the work of the devil", as Oscar Wilde put it with his customary sharp wit. He could well have been thinking about Italian food and wine. It is certainly true that Italy - with its varied landscape of alternating plains, hills, coasts and mountains, rivers, woods, countryside and rich seas, and its mild yet sometimes harsh climate - boasts a wealth of invaluable natural treasures. But it is equally true that what gives life to a culinary tradition, and what creates the history of food and wine, is the work, passion and imagination of man. If Italy is home to such an extraordinary variety of flavors, tastes and aromas, it is because Italians have known how to make the best of nature's gifts and to transform them by taking inspiration from nature itself. This is as it should be, for the art of gastronomy is mimetic, and imitates nature.



The process relies on a shifting between different systems, and cookery is its ideal medium. We could produce an endless list of products which might seem unimportant, but which are actually vital elements of Italian cuisine. All over Italy, from the Alps to the Mediterranean, we find the products of a thousand years of tradition, and specialties which exist only here. The desire to taste the country's cooking would in fact be an excellent reason for people to come and visit. An extraordinary adventure - die discovery of die flavors of Italy - would await them, in die great restaurants of die cities of art or major cities, but also in the thousands of small trattorias, to be found in every village and along every road, in die mountain logis, "agriturismo" (farmhouses offering food and accommodation), and wine bars. There are two sides to Italian cuisine: tradition and innovation, and in recent years cookery has increasingly meant, on one hand, performing a cultural activity, by creating new versions of traditional dishes and rediscovering the use of local agricultural products, and on the other, caring for our health, by cooking tasty yet at the same time simple food. The natural backdrop to all this is a landscape on which man has left clear signs of his presence. It is no coincidence that in the last two years 75 new "Food and wine trails" have been inaugurated in Italy, along with 5 "Olive oil trails". Over 500 wine bars have also been opened, most of them promoting locally produced wines. Moreover, in the same period, a number of associations have been set up, bringing together "Flavor towns", "Slow food towns", "Chestnut towns", "Seafood towns", and "Bread towns", alongside the existing "Wine towns", "Olive oil towns" and "Truffle towns", involving a total of over 600 Italian council districts. Throughout the Italian peninsula a capillary network of tourist facilities is being developed which revolves around the "food system" whilst promoting awareness and protection of the environment. In Italy more

than hardly anywhere else in the world it is possible to satisfy the hunger for culture and good food at the same time. A good meal may in itself be a cultural experience, offering a whole range of insights into the history, traditions and everyday life of the area in which it is eaten. Browsing through the extraordinary Italian atlas by sitting down to eat may thus become an interesting experience for the mind, and not merely for the taste buds. As the USA's best selling Karen Brown Guide points out: in Italy "gourmets will find the best food in the world", and "the miracle of Italy is that all these gastronomic and cultural treasures are found together in a magnificent country". Italian restaurants offer both the new and the old: the classics (pasta, pizza), but also locally produced wines (well worth having one's fill on a visit to the winery), cheeses, salami and hams (preferably purchased where they are produced), and extra virgin olive oil made from rare traditional varieties (to be bought directly at the olive press). The fantastic, indissoluble marriage between the landscape and its extraordinary generosity in terms of wines and other gastronomic delights inspires a journey around the food and wine trails of Italy. The gastronomic tourist is encouraged to foster a fruitful relationship with the land and its inhabitants, and is rewarded with concrete satisfaction and pleasure. It is an exciting adventure, and well worth the experience.



1. Valle d'Aosta: a symphony of Alpine pastures [top](#)

This is a region where history has been influenced by its mountains and national borders. The traditional cookery of the Valle d' Aosta revolves around the flavors of milk and cheese, meat, and the products of the land and environment. These flavors are the essence of a harsh yet beautiful land, and take us back to the origins of an ancient civilization.

With an extremely high average altitude (much higher than that of the other Italian regions), Valle d'Aosta's culinary traditions are those of a border people, inevitably influenced by landscape and history, and by contact with the Swiss and French. The cookery is based on local products (cabbage, rye bread, chestnuts and milk), but is nevertheless varied, and uses a whole range of ingredients from further afield. Since ancient Rome, many of the influences on the region's food have been related to its history and geographical position. For example, the closeness to Switzerland and France accounts for the region's famous **fonduta** (fondue), a dish which anyone visiting the Valle d' Aosta should try. The Roman legions brought vine-growing and their culinary traditions based on hunting and

the use of barley in soups. These soups - which the local people prepared with rye bread and seasonal vegetables - also abounded on the tables of the lords, where they were enriched with meat stock, cheese and butter. Still today, a favorite dish is **seuppa valpellinentze**, a soup of white and Savoy cabbage, fontina cheese and rye bread. The local **bread** has always

been made in two varieties: white and black. In the past, the former was eaten only at feast day banquets and was consumed fresh; black bread, meanwhile, was prepared only once per year in an activity which involved the entire community. It became very hard, and to cut it use was made of a "copapan", a type of iron knife that can still be found in craft shops. While the discovery of America brought corn and potatoes to the rest of Europe, in the Valle d'Aosta

polenta (maize porridge) was introduced only in the 18th century. Today it is the most characteristic dish, to be enjoyed in Alpine hostleries. It evokes the tastes of a bygone age, and is served with butter and fontina cheese, or with meat and a variety of sauces. Meat for centuries was a rarity, eaten only in winter, when the climatic conditions made its conservation possible. Still today, livestock are slaughtered just before Christmas and soon afterwards restaurant menus offer a whole range of foodstuffs which otherwise would be



impossible to conserve, such as **teteun**, dried cows udders preserved in salt and flavored with herbs. The typical need in mountain areas to preserve food for long periods led to the development in the Valle d'Aosta of numerous types of high quality sausages. There are also various types of dried and cured meat, such as the salted beef which is at the basis of the typical regional dish, **carbonade**; also unforgettable is **lardo di Arnad**, cured belly pork flavored with herbs and spices. For all those who visit Valle d'Aosta, we advise them not to miss out on one of its most characteristic rituals: the **coppa dell'amicizia** (the "cup of friendship", with a number of drinking spouts arranged around its circumference). The ingredients are simple: a region with ancient traditions dating back thousands of years, a group of friends on holiday, and a relaxing evening after a day spent in the fresh mountain air. Passing from hand to hand, the "coupe de l'amitié" gives everyone a portion of "caffè alla valdostana" (made by mixing scaldingly hot coffee with grappa, red wine, sugar and lemon zest), making sure to make enough to allow the cup to be passed round a good few times. Each time you are likely to drink from a different spout, and this gives the ritual that touch of intimacy which helps create a friendly atmosphere.

FOCUS: WINES AND LIQUEURS

The Valle d'Aosta's most famous wine is the **Blanc de Morgex et de La Salle**, also known as "glacier wine" because it is made from grapes grown at altitudes normally unthinkable for vines, up to 1300 meters above sea level. The ideal place to taste and buy the region's best wines is the Enoteca Regionale ad Forum in Aosta, which also hosts frequent food and wine evenings and cultural events. Spirits and liqueurs are important regional products, with numerous types of **grappa** and the famous **genepì**, an infusion of flowers and mountain artemisia berries in alcohol.

Festival and Country Fairs

One of the region's key food wine events takes place in July (usually in the third week) in Saint Rhémy en Bosses, which hosts the Esposizione del "jambon de Bosses", a festival celebrating the local raw ham (awarded DOP status), produced a few kilometers from the Swiss border. This extraordinary ham has a characteristic flavor, delicate, lightly salted with sweet and aromatic undertones and a gamey edge. In Arnad meanwhile, on the last Sunday in August, there has been held since 1969 the popular Festa del Lardo, a special occasion to taste not only the famous lardo (cured belly pork), but also sweets, cheeses and local wines.

2. Piedmont: wines and truffles

[top](#)

The region's food is generous, displaying the colours of the Piedmont rainbow. A tradition which offers infinite types of flavors, aromas and tastes. From west to east, from the harsh rugged mountains to the fertile plains and rolling hills, Piedmont offers an infinite range of delicacies. Sipping one of its great wines is the best way to start discovering its many miracles.

The best season for discovering the secrets of Piedmont at table is undoubtedly autumn. This is the perfect time of year to enjoy **wine** and **truffles**, two of the mainstays of the region's culinary tradition, which over the centuries has been subjected to French influences, but which also has unique features of its own. In ancient times, truffles were known not only for their gastronomic qualities, but also for their aphrodisiacal properties. The best way to bring out their aroma is to

eat them raw, sliced thinly. In the area of Alba between mid September and late December you are likely to bump into "trifulau", the truffle hunters accompanied by their faithful dogs, which are kept hungry to help keep their sense of smell keen. Piedmont is a land with a great culinary heritage, based on strong flavors and subtle pleasures, whose traditional recipes are best enjoyed in its many restaurants, trattorias and agriturismos. A Piedmontese lunch is a real ritual, starting with the ever-present **antipasto**: aromatic salami and hams, meat served with sauces or in salads, stuffed vegetables, omelettes, and cheeses in an incredible number of varieties and combinations. First course dishes are extremely rich, such as the country dish of **agnolotti** or ravioli (fresh pasta stuffed with meat). This was eaten on feast days in the country, and together with other types of fresh pasta, such as **taglierini**, represented an alternative to **rice**, which is a fundamental ingredient in the traditional diet. The king of rice dishes is "paniscia" from Novara (the version from Vercelli is called "panissa"), a hearty risotto with Savoy cabbage and beans, flavored with salami. The whole region



offers opportunities for unforgettable gastronomic adventures, but the glory of Piedmontese cookery can be found in the south of the region, between Monferrato and Langhe. Here, **meat** reigns supreme, despite the fact that the cuisine has humble origins, due to the poverty of the area in the past. Ox, beef, veal, pork, poultry, rabbit and game are all cooked in a variety of ways, from the simplest (grilled, kebabs and barbecues) to the most complex, such as **brasato**, braised meat cooked slowly in wine, or **bollito misto**, a dish of mixed boiled meats in which the balance of flavors between the various meats is combined with classic accompanying sauces. One of the curiosities of the Piedmont cookery, perhaps the typical dish par excellence, is **bagna caoda**. This is a sauce of anchovies, olive oil, butter and garlic, served boiling hot, together with raw vegetables for dipping: peppers, cardoons, celery, carrots, Jerusalem artichokes and cauliflower. Those who wish to discover this western strip of Italy must not forget to try the great variety of **cheeses**, of which there are 170 local varieties. Of these, at least two have achieved international renown: gorgonzola, a naturally matured cheese with green and blue veins, typical of the Novara area, and castelmagno, produced in limited quantities in the town of the same name using the milk of the Cuneese Val Grana breed of cattle. Last of all, there are the region's sweets and cakes. Walking around the pleasant historical centres of the towns of Piedmont, visitors will find a multitude of pastry shops offering unforgettable specialities: **krumiri di Casale Monferrato** (whose shape seems to imitate the moustache of Victor Emanuel II, first King of Italy), **biscotti di Novara**, biscuits ideal for dipping in wine or rosolio (rose-flavored liqueur), **amaretti** biscuits from Mombaruzzo, in the Asti area, and **torcetti** from Biella. In Turin, the local speciality is **chocolate**, the food of the gods. Torinese chocolates have created many delicacies, but first and foremost is gianduiotto, a delicate cream of cocoa and hazelnut paste. A perfect opportunity for getting to know and taste the typical products of Piedmont (and elsewhere) is Turin's **Salone del Gusto** (the Food Show, which takes place in October), one of the most important food and wine events in Europe.



•FOCUS: WINES AND LIQUEURS

Piedmont has been a centre of viticulture since time immemorial. Its leading products have been appreciated the world over: from the sumptuous and sought-after reds (Barolo, Barbaresco, Gattinara, Barbera), and whites (Erbaluce, Roero Arneis, Gavi, Cortese), to its sweet and inviting dessert and conversation wines (Asti Spumante, Brachetto, Moscato d'Asti, Malvasia, Caluso passito). The range of the Piedmontese quality wine is impressive, with over 40 wines holding DOC (denominazione d'origine controllata) status, and 8 classified as DOCG (denominazione d'origine controllata e garantita). In the zone of Asti there is also the "Asti wine trail", covering eight routes to help visitors discover wine bars and trattorias, as well as museums dedicated to food, wine and country life.

Festival and Country Fairs

In Piedmont there are numerous festivals related to wine production. One of the most important is the Douja d'or, which takes place in Asti between the second and third Sunday of September, with tastings, dinners and a fair-market. In 2003, the show assumed a more international flavor, by starting to introduce foreign producers. During the month of October, Alba hosts the Fiera Nazionale del Tartufo Bianco (National white truffle festival), an event not to be missed by lovers of truffles, wine and the area's typical products.

3. Liguria: a triumph of colours

[top](#)

The triumph of Liguria's characteristic products is above all a triumph of colours and aromas: fragrant herbs, vegetables from the market garden and hillsides, the infinite shades of green and grey of the olives and oil. In this region there is the scent of the sea, the fish, and the fantastic seafood. Colours only have these shades in Liguria, and only in Liguria are aromas so invigorating.

Anyone who walks through the historic centres of the cities or down the narrow streets of a coastal or hillside town will discover that the Ligurians, although renowned for being practical, communicate with immediacy and vivaciousness through their work and crafts. Moreover, they express themselves eloquently in the gastronomic delights produced in their bakeries and restaurants. Ligurian cookery, which is traditionally based on "humble" ingredients, exploits the flavours of the land and the sea with elegant simplicity. The Ligurian diet is basically Mediterranean, with olive oil, vegetables and herbs giving flavor to simple and traditional dishes which are both healthy and well-balanced. In Oneglia a museum with 18 rooms has been dedicated to the olive tree and olive oil production, the Museo dell'Oliveto. Gourmets and top chefs have for long considered that the key to success in Italian cookery lies in exploiting the flavours and aromas of traditional food. The tradition of Liguria abounds with unforgettable aromas and colours. What better place to start than its hallmark recipe, **pesto**, the "ambassador" of Ligurian cuisine abroad. This magical sauce unites in a variable blend, for which no definitive recipe exists, the fragrance of basil, garlic, parsley, pine nuts and cheese, all bound together by olive oil. The importance of the "superfluous", in terms of taste and appearance, is testified in Ligurian cooking by the great popularity of sauces. Apart from pesto, we should not forget **aggiada** (garlic and fresh breadcrumbs, served with fried fish and boiled vegetables) and **marò** (finely chopped raw broad beans with cheese, garlic, oil and aromatic mint). Well-known traditional dishes include **buridda** (a fish soup) and **cima** (meat stuffed with vegetables and herbs); salt cod and stockfish are also used in many recipes. There are unique tastes, such as that of the simple and popular **focaccia** and **farinata**, giving an aroma which fills the air at every street corner and tempts passers-by to have a tasty snack between meals, not to mention the delicious vegetable tarts. Inland, where there are chestnut woods, **mushrooms** are widely appreciated: cooked "alia genovese" (in the pan with potatoes, garlic and basil) or coated in breadcrumbs and fried, at the right time of year they are well worth making a trip for, at least to a local trattoria. On the border with Piedmont, truffles can also

be found. Liguria's most famous cake is without doubt the **pandolce genovese**, made with butter, candied peel and raisins, found on tables throughout Italy together with the panettone from Milan. Equally well known are amaretti biscuits from Sassetto, gobetti from Rapallo and the biscuits of Lagaccio. Canestrelli, traditional butter biscuits, are found throughout the province of Genoa, and are particularly good in Torriglia, Montebruno and Acquasanta, in the district of Mele. A version flavored with fennel seeds is produced in Monterosso. Up to the 19th century, Liguria was famous throughout Europe for its confectionery and

 fondants. In the 15th century, Genoa's confectioners set up the corporation of the so-called "nebulari" or "negiari", i.e. makers of waffles and wafers. At the close of noble banquets it was the custom to serve sweets by placing handfuls in the ladies' cleavages. The reputation of Ligurian confectionery even reached the Este Court, where it is recounted that during a banquet the princes were served "cotognata e persiche alla genovese" (Genoan style apples and pears).



•FOCUS: WINES AND LIQUEURS

Liguria boasts 20 wines which have been awarded DOC and DOCG status. Those with the oldest reputation are **Rossese di Dolceacqua** and **Cinque Terre Sciacchetrà**. The former (DOC since 1972) is a red wine produced in the zone of Dolceacqua. Rossese is a fragrant, ruby red, with a brilliant timbre even if light coloured, and is one of the few wines obtained from a single grape variety as opposed to a blend. Cinque Terre Sciacchetrà meanwhile, is a fruity white, ideal as an aperitif or dessert wine. Produced between Riomaggiore, Monterosso, Vernazza and La Spezia, it has qualities absolutely inimitable in its category. A must for wine and food enthusiasts is the "Wine and olive oil trail", which winds through the provinces of Savona and Imperia, stopping off in historical towns, olive groves and vineyards, not to mention farms, olive presses and trattorias where they can savour the unforgettable flavours of Liguria.

Festival and Country Fairs

The most typical of Liguria's popular festivals takes place on the second Sunday in May in **Camogli** - the **sagra del pesce** (Fish festival). In the picturesque setting provided by the harbor with the countryside behind, the largest frying pan in the world (almost 4 meters wide, weighing 26 quintals, and with a handle weighing 3 quintals) is used to fry fish for the local people and holidaymakers. This classic festival, which dates back to 1952, is the modern descendant of the centuries-old festival of Saint Fortunatus, the patron saint of fishermen.

4.1 Lombardy: risotto and so much more

[top](#)

Despite its stereotyped image as a centre of industry and business, Lombardy is Italy's second most productive region in terms of agriculture. This is a land of intense "forage" cultivation, whose products feed armies of cattle and pigs bred on the rice plains of the Lomellina area. The region contains land that is difficult to farm, high on the mountainsides of the Valtellina area, and has vineyards in Oltrepò Pavese, and around Bergamo and Brescia. This is a universe worth getting to know and discover.

There is a legend behind the origin of the most famous dish in the Lombard gastronomic tradition, **risotto alla milanese**, which is known the world over. In the second half of the 16th century, the construction of Milan cathedral was in full swing, and had been for the previous two hundred years. Among the many workers



employed was a group of Belgian craftsmen with the job of making some of the stained-glass windows. One of them had been nicknamed Zafferano ("saffron"), due to his habit of adding a pinch of saffron to the glass, with surprising chromatic results. The master glazier often made fun of him for his obsession, quipping that sooner or later he would even start putting saffron in his food. The young man took him at his word and when the master glazier's daughter got married, he arranged with the cook to have saffron powder mixed into the rice at the wedding banquet. He wanted to play a joke on him, but after initial shock, the guests were delighted with the innovation. Putting legend to one side, the wine and food tradition of Lombardy has always been influenced by the historical events which have marked the region. Dominated over the centuries by the Spanish, French and Austrians, Lombardy boasts a varied cuisine full of subtle nuances. Even though the presence of the great metropolis of Milan and its international outlook has meant that the region has been subjected to the effects of gastronomic globalisation, there are still many restaurants where you can rediscover the real flavors of Lombardy. Alongside rice, there is also room for pasta in the classic Lombard menu. There is a great tradition of stuffed pasta, with a wide variety of fillings, including meat, vegetables and cheese. An example is **casoncelli** from the Bergamo

and Brescia areas, made with spinach, eggs, cheese, amaretti biscuits and breadcrumbs. Anyone who spends a holiday among the mountains of Valtellina, a splendid place for winter skiing and for outdoor activities in summer, must try **pizzoccheri**, short buckwheat tagliatelle served with Savoy cabbage, abundant butter and stringy cheese, or **polenta taragna** (also made with buckwheat flour). From the plains of the Po valley to the peaks of the Alps, Lombardy is dotted with dairy farms, accounting for hundreds of thousands of cows. It is thus no surprise that the Lombard cheese-making tradition is rich and varied. It is also no surprise that traditional cookery includes a wide range of meat dishes. A legacy of Medieval country cooking is **cotechino**, a large salami to be eaten cooked, while Spanish influences are behind **cassouela**, a stew which uses the cheaper cuts of pork and crispy Savoy cabbage. Boiled meats, stews, grills and roasts, together with chicken, turkey and goose have an important place, and there are also many dishes of "humble" origins, such as **zuppa di trippa** (stewed tripe) and **osso buco**. For the Lombards, cake means above all **panettone**, a classic Milanese Christmas tradition which also has its own fascinating legend. It is said that at the court of Ludovico il Moro, Lord of Milan, an enormous banquet was being held on Christmas Eve, which was supposed to end with a magnificent cake, prepared according to a secret recipe. By mistake or due to an oversight, the cake was burnt. While the head chef was in a state of panic, a kitchen boy called Toni took the leftover paste of the burnt cake, added candied peel, spice, eggs and sugar, and made a new cake. It did not look particularly appetising, with an appearance rather like a flat bread. Nevertheless, it was arranged on a large plate and taken to table where, after the diners' initial perplexity, it turned out to be a great success. Duke Ludovico congratulated the head chef and "pane di Toni" became the traditional Christmas cake of the city of Milan.

•FOCUS: WINES AND LIQUEURS

Lombardy has three main wine producing zones: Valtellina, Bresciano (in particular Franciacorta) and Oltrepò Pavese, producing around 60 white, red and sparkling wines in various categories: denominazione di origine controllata (DOC), denominazione di origine controllata e garantita (DOCG) and indicazione geografica tipica (IGT). These include **Franciacorta**, **Valtellina superiore**, **Valcalepio**, the various wines of **Oltrepò Pavese**, and **Garda classico**. A perfect way to try these wines and typical Lombard products is to follow one of the region's eight Itinerari del vino e del gusto ("Food and wine trails"), where fine wines and food can be enjoyed to a backdrop of Lombardy's fascinating art and history.

Festival and Country Fairs

A gastronomic festival which is surely unique in its kind takes place in **Mortara**, in the province of Pavia, on the last Sunday in September. At the time of Ludovico il Moro, the local people decided to experiment with a goose meat salami. The experiment was a success: today, during **sagra dell'oca** (Goose festival), and the unusual **Palio dell'Oca** (goose race), the town's streets are packed with stalls, where you can taste and buy the prized salami and other gastronomic delights based on goose meat, including delicacies such as foie gras.

5. Trentino Alto Adige: mountains and sun

[top](#)

Sunny may not be the first adjective that springs to mind to describe a region whose main features are valleys and mountain peaks. But in Trentino-Alto Adige even the mountains seem to be made of light, as anyone who has enjoyed its breathtaking scenery and the

calm of its mountain pastures will be only too glad to confirm. Here, two gastronomic traditions live side by side: one of Veneto roots in the area of Trento, and the other of German origin in Alto Adige. This is a gastronomic tradition of particular elegance, in all its forms, even the most unusual.

Trentino-Alto Adige is above all a territory whose environmental and climatic variety make it unique among the regions of Italy. Here, the culture of the olive is intertwined with that of Alpine pastures. The land is characterised by glaciers and streams, forests and meadows, but also by warmer, Mediterranean scenery. This is a region, above all, in which the natural environment is safeguarded and protected, and which is known the world over for its splendid mountains, the



Dolomites. The local products - wine, cheese, honey, fruit and vegetables to mention but a few - are, in a word, excellent, not only because of the environment, but also because of the care and love which the farmers and growers dedicate to them. Fruit is also the subject of the interesting Museo della Frutticoltura di Lana (Bolzano), where visitors can learn about the history of fruit farming in Alto Adige from the Middle Ages to the present day. Tourists will love the experience of walking into a mountain chalet, sitting down by an open fire and enjoying a steaming plate of **polenta**, perhaps with some melted **casolèt** cheese from Val di Sole on top, served with cep and chanterelle mushrooms. Or maybe walking along one of the region's many crystalline lakes, stopping in a restaurant on the shore and tasting **trout caviar** spread on lightly softened toasted bread. Another delicacy is **salmerino**, a delicately flavored member of the salmon family, which is dusted with flour and fried in butter, or simply steamed and accompanied with boiled potatoes and a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil from Lake Garda. In this friendly and welcoming region, food and hospitality are closely related. If you happen to see a bunch

of flowers on the threshold of a house in Alto Adige/do not hesitate to go in and ask to taste their **vino novello**: this is Toerggelen, a country custom which was practised after the harvest, when work in the fields had stopped and the farm workers had time to rest and go and visit relatives and friends and taste the SuBer (the grape must), or Nuier (the new wine), accompanied by Köstn (roasted chestnuts). The tradition is still practised today, from late September until early November. Another speciality to be found in • the region's valleys are **sausages**, which have always been an important food resource in the coldest months. Valsugana, for example, produces unique sausages, flavored with wild herbs and spices. You are also bound to come across **moretti**, matured sausages seasoned with woodland aniseed, and the famous **carne salada**, slices of prime beef, cured in brine with bay leaves, black pepper, juniper berries, garlic and rosemary. Originally from the alto Garda, this cured meat has ancient origins, but is still prepared in the same, patient way. You will find it accompanied by beans or broccoli from Torbole, sliced thin and eaten raw, or charcoal-grilled and served with a few drops of vinegar. In this frontier land, the list of foods ranges from those with evident TyroJese influences to excellent interpretations of classic Italian cuisine. Needless to say, the choice is vast, and there are pleasant surprises to be had both in elegant restaurants and at the tables of Alpine logis. Delicacies not to be missed include **speck** (smoked raw ham), the local cheeses, homemade bread, **weinsuppe** (a soup of meat broth with cream and Terlano or Termeno white wine), fresh radishes and crisp salad leaves. What better way to finish than with **strudel**, a traditional pastry filled with fruit.



•FOCUS: WINES AND LIQUEURS

The region is characterised by significant changes in temperature throughout the year, even between day and night, a phenomenon which is highly beneficial for viticulture. White wines include **Chardonnay**, **Pinot bianco**, **Pinot grigio**, **Gewurtztraminer**, **Müller-Thurgau**, and **Riesling**. The best reds are **Teroldego Rotaliano DOC**, **Marzemino trentino DOC**, and **Schiava**. And alongside the great wines, there are also great spirits: above all **grappa**, with its long tradition. In the garden that is the South Tyrol, vines have been grown since ancient times. And wine is in fact one of the main reasons for the region's wealth, representing 70% of the region's entire production. Its reputation was such that in the 1960s, Provincial Road no. 14 was transformed into the famous "Wine trail" or Weinstraße, which runs along the right bank of the Adige river for around 40 km between Salorno and Bolzano.

Festival and Country Fairs

Every year in the month of May, **Bolzano's** picturesque historical centre hosts the **festa dello speck** (Festival of smoked ham). There are folk events and groups of musicians and dancers in traditional costume, but the heart of the festival is a market, where the producers of the consortium give visitors a chance to taste this characteristic smoked ham, accompanied by fresh bread, baked in a stone oven.

6. Veneto: from the Adriatic to the Dolomites

[top](#)

A vast land full of atmosphere with an ever-changing landscape, ranging from lagoons and coastal areas to wide plains and soft rolling hills, right up to high mountains. Veneto gastronomy is dominated by four elements: polenta, rice, beans and salt cod, all of them imported. The success of Venice and its past power are also expressed in its cookery by the use of spices, which the Venetians did not only trade in, but adopted in their cooking.

A mixture of history, art and tradition in a setting without equal, whose mere memory evokes yearning. Venice is a jewel known by the whole world, with the Rialto, San Marco, the Grand Canal... And then there is the Venice of the "calli" and "campielli" (the local names for the streets and squares of this urban universe unique in the world), with its shops and restaurants. Venetian food means above all the **fish** of the north Adriatic.



This is of exceptional quality, and thanks to local creativity, is used in a wide and often surprising variety of dishes. The **spider-crab**, for example, becomes a delicious antipasto: it is thrown into boiling water and, once cooked, is served with olive oil, salt, pepper and a squeeze of lemon juice. A dish which demonstrates the oriental influence of local cooking is **sarde in carpione** ("in saor"), which consists of braised sardines marinated in a sauce of onions, sultanas, candied peel, pine nuts and vinegar, in a characteristic marriage of sweet and savory ■ flavors. **Frittura veneziana** (mixed fried fish) is another internationally famous dish, as is **baccalà mantecato**, in which salt cod is made into a soft mousse with a surprising flavor. But the Venetians do not only eat fish. Among the dishes which have made their cookery famous are recipes such as **fegato alla veneziana**, probably Venice's best known specialty, which you can find practically anywhere in the world. The dish consists of slices of calf's liver cooked with oil, onions, butter and parsley, and is something that any visitor to Venice should try. Another famous dish is **risi e bisi** (rice with peas), which was the traditional first course of the Doge of Venice's lunch on the feast day of St Mark. Veneto cooking in general is based on **rice** and **polenta**. Rice, grown mainly in the province of Verona, is prepared in dozens of different ways and each local community tries to give a touch of originality to their recipes. It is said that in Veneto there exist forty different dishes based on rice, which is combined with a wide range of other ingredients: meat, fish, and above all vegetables such as courgettes, cabbage, asparagus, peas and cauliflower, produced in the region's highly fertile land. Polenta, meanwhile, is used by the Veneto inhabitants like bread. Particularly well-known is Vicenza's **polenta e osei**, polenta served with small game birds sautéed over a low heat, flavored with fatty bacon, sage and olive oil. Birds, in fact, and above all poultry, are the basis of most of the meat dishes. Mention must be made of the **gallina padovana**, a wide-breasted breed of chicken known the world over, and which features in many regional dishes, such as Vicenza's **paeta al malgaragna**, in which the chicken is covered with pork fat, cooked on the spit and basted with pomegranate juice.

FOCUS: WINES AND LIQUEURS

Veneto is a land of ancient winemaking traditions, and boasts Italy's largest production of DOC wines. There are in fact 17 DOC production areas with marvellous whites, reds and sparkling wines. The major wine-producing areas are around Verona, home to wines such as **Valpolicella**, **Recioto**, **Bardolino** and **Soave**, and the area around Treviso, with its **Prosecco**, the best examples of which are the sparkling wines of Conegliano and Valdobbiadene. One of the places where vines have been grown since ancient times is Colli Berici, south of Vicenza. The barrier formed by the high land allows the district to enjoy a particularly mild climate, and it is here that we find one of the region's 12 wine trails, the "Colli Berici DOC wine trail", which starts in Vicenza and heads south-east between splendid villas, wineries and picturesque towns. A fantastic event for wine lovers is **Vinitaly**, the show held in Verona in April, which attracts around 4000 exhibitors from all over the world. The Veneto region is also renowned for its particular expertise in distillation and liqueur production. Alongside the extraordinary **grappas**, the most famous from Bassano, were is a vast array of liqueurs flavored with fragrant Alpine herbs.

Festival and Country Fairs

One of the oldest popular gastronomic festivals of Veneto takes place on 8 September in **Rubbio di Conco**, a small town in the province of Vicenza. The festival celebrates the locally grown white celery, which has been appreciated since Roman times. On the occasion of the **sagra del sedano bianco** (Festival of white celery), visitors can have the chance to try traditional local dishes.

7. Friuli-Venezia Giulia: a cultural crossroads [top](#)

What is most fascinating about Friuli-Venezia Giulia and its gastronomy is the extraordinary way it brings together widely differing traditions and cultures. In little over an hour's drive it is possible to pass through three completely different environments: the mountains of Carnia, the green hills of Friuli, and Carso with the bay of Trieste. Here, the customs, culture and gastronomy of thousands of years have been superimposed to bring us a wide range of superb delicacies.

Flavors, aromas, colours - and foods which bear the marks of different cultures and traditions - enrich this region's gastronomy, which has always been marked by the passage and meeting of various peoples. Friuli-Venezia Giulia, where three important linguistic areas converge, also reveals its Austrian, Slav and Veneto influences at table. The region's cookery also expresses the simple, strong, at times brusque, but always hearty character of its inhabitants. Beans are one of the main ingredients, and are included in two of the most typical dishes: **iota** (a soup with beans and sauerkraut) and **zuppa di fagioli** (a bean soup in which the



beans are cooked twice in water with the addition of milk, pasta or rice, and then seasoned with butter). Tasting these hearty mountain soups in an Alpine farm in the Carnia district, which are open from mid-June onwards, when the flocks are taken to the Alpine pastures, is a unique way to experience personally the essence of Friuli and its traditions. Most of the specialties of the interior have simple strong flavors, such as **gulasch friulano**, derived from Hungarian goulash. Here ravioli are called **cialsons**, little pasta parcels with a sweet and savoury flavor, and are based on a centuries-old recipe; they are a specialty of Carnia. A trip to Friuli-Venezia Giulia also represents a chance to discover the famous **prosciutto crudo di San Daniele**, a mild raw ham, which owes its exceptional aroma to the Alpine air. This product of international renown has ancient roots (evidence shows that the conservation of hams dates back to the Celts), and is widely used both in country cooking and in sophisticated modern cuisine. As elsewhere in northern Italy, **polenta** accompanies a whole range of dishes, and is often used instead of bread.

Particularly appetizing is polenta "pasticciata", a meal in itself in which the polenta is cooked with various

meats, such as mutton, pigeon or pork. Among the sweets, however, pride of place goes to **gubana**, a millefeuille pastry with walnuts, liqueur and spices, a specialty of Cividale del Friuli. Before being served, it may be soaked with eau de vie or grappa. While the tradition of the inland areas has much in common with other mountain regions, the cuisine of the Adriatic coast is instead characterized by a tendency towards the fusion of combining Veneto, Austrian, Slav, Jewish and Greek recipes. It is thus not unusual to find in the restaurants of Trieste dishes such as **riso alla greca** (Greek rice), **sanguinaccio alla boema** (Bohemian blood sausage) or **costoletta alla viennese** (Wiener schnitzel). As the first course dishes, gnocchi are particularly popular, such as **gnocco di pane al prosciutto** (a huge dumpling of dried bread fried in a mixture including ham) and **gnocchetti di fegato**, liver gnocchi of Austrian origin. The many types of risotto, meanwhile, show the influence of Venetian cuisine. Fish cookery is also highly developed, as you would expect, and local specialties include **brodetto**, a sauce based on vinegar, tomatoes and wine, with the addition of mantis shrimps and crabs. On the Friuli coast there are a number of different versions of the dish, the most traditional of which is from Grado, with toasted garlic. The many sweets and cakes of Trieste are influenced by the Austro-German tradition. There are **struccoli** (strudels), **chifeletti** (walnut cakes) and **krapfen** (doughnuts) with various fillings. But pride of place goes to **presnitz**, a puff pastry spirà stuffed with dried fruit, nuts and spices. At the extreme edge of Friuli, on the border with Austria, the district of Carnia is a vast area of woodland, with typical steeped bell-towers, stone houses and wooden balconies. It is the ideal place to relax in a natural environment and dedicate time to walking, riding or mountain biking.



FOCUS: WINES AND LIQUEURS

Only recently have wine enthusiasts discovered the quality of Friuli's wines. Yet the wines of this region have great personality, starting with whites such as **Sauvignon**, **Riesling** and **Tocai**, which have not surprisingly been some of the best-selling wines in Italy for some years. Reds include **Merlots** and **Cabernets** which are able to satisfy even the most demanding connoisseurs. Nor should we forget the exceptionally smooth and aromatic **grappa**. In recent decades, alongside the traditional version, sweet varieties have been produced, some flavored with fruit or herbs. Among the region's eight wine trails, the "Collio Goriziano wine trail" is characterized by a series of slopes protected by the Prealps of Giulia and stretching down towards the Adriatic. The trail starts in Gorizia, climbs up to San Floriano del Collio, and then descends towards Gradisca d'Isonzo then to climb once more through vineyards towards Cormons and Dolegna del Collio.

Festival and Country Fairs

In late August, in **San Daniele del Friuli**, an important festival revolving around the town's famous raw ham is held - **Aria di Festa**. The ham can be tasted in the piazzas, in the local ham producers' shops and in the town's restaurants. There are also shows, music and various other entertainments.

8. Emilia Romagna: an explosion of flavors [top](#)

Geographically speaking, Emilia Romagna is composed of two parts: to the west Emilia, with its sweeping plains and orchards, and to the east Romagna, which extends along the Adriatic coast. In terms of gastronomy, the region is a mosaic of surprises, with no clear overall pattern. Each city has its own specialities, often real treasures of Italian cuisine. The traditional food is robust and hearty, and a real treat for the taste buds.

If we had to elect the king of Emilia's cooking, there would be no doubt: the **tortellino**. Bologna is its homeland, and it is a real pleasure to taste it in one of the traditional trattorias of the old town, between Piazza Maggiore and the porticos, near the Asinelli and Garisenda towers. With a filling which exalts the taste of the mortadella, tortellini alla bolognese are served with meat ragù or in a rich chicken stock. According to tradition, the tortellino represents Venus's belly button. In reality, king tortellino is surrounded by a whole entourage of courtiers, variations on the theme of stuffed pasta, created in the region's various cities: Ferrara and

the whole of Romagna specialize in **cappelletti**. In Ferrara, the filling is made with turkey or pumpkin (in which case the ravioli are called **cappellacci**), while in Romagna fresh ravaggiolo cheese is used. The **tortelloni** of Piacenza are filled with ricotta and greens. In Modena **ravioli** are filled with roast meat, while Parma is the city of **anolini**, served in a ham sauce and covered with grated parmesan. The traditional cookery of Emilia is a celebration of fresh egg pasta: in addition to tortellini, another must is **lasagne** (pasta sheets with ragù and cheese) and the various sizes of **tagliatelle**, always served with rich meat sauces. The character of the people of Emilia Romagna is a perfect reflection of their gastronomic tradition: generous, warm, hearty and fun. To discover this tradition, just follow one of the many "Food and wine trails", which will take you on a tour of the various provincial specialties and typical products of each area. You might well find yourself in town and country restaurants, or "trattorie", having a chat with the other diners around a wonderful spread, perhaps including a colourful plate of salami and hams. Pork specialties are in fact one of the great gastronomic treasures of Emilia Romagna. Pride of place goes to **prosciutto crudo di Parma**, excellent for antipasti and snacks, superb if accompanied by flakes of **parmigiano reggiano**, the great parmesan cheese typical of this region, well-known, and imitated the world over. Then there is **culatello**, a raw ham made using pork loin, a specialty of Busseto, the birthplace of Giuseppe Verdi, and **zampone**, which is cooked with braised lentils in the traditional New Year's Eve dish. In Modena (where it was invented, as was the famous balsamic vinegar), it is often served as part of a dish of mixed boiled meats, along with beef, veal and turkey, accompanied by a tasty herb sauce. Nor should we forget the highly popular **mortadella** from Bologna, **coppa** and **pancetta** from Piacenza, **salami** from Felino and many others. The salami and hams of Emilia make a tasty snack for holidaymakers, and



are sold in small shops or kiosks on the beach, where they are used to fill a **piadina romagnola**, a flat unleavened bread (rather like a tortilla), or a **tigella** (a kind of muffin), a specialty of the Apennines. The part of this region most known by tourists from all over the world is undoubtedly the Rimini Riviera, where beaches stretch along the coast of Romagna. If we think of Rimini, the idea of fun immediately comes to mind. In this holiday paradise, you can experience the region's seafood cooking, with its delicious warm flavors. These range from the classic **brodetto**, with squid, rascasse and grey mullet, to **fried fish**, and **spit-roasted fish**, cooked over wood or vine charcoal, which produce a distinctive aroma. Rimini's specialities include **seppie in umido con piselli** (stewed cuttlefish with peas) and **canocchie alla griglia** (grilled mantis shrimps). In Comacchio, a coastal town, famous for its marshlands, **eels** are a real delicacy, and are usually cooked on the spit.

FOCUS: WINES AND LIQUEURS

The regional wine par excellence is **Lambrusca**, a sparkling and impetuous red, produced in both dry and sweet versions, from grapes grown in the wide plains. There are four different varieties. There is also **Gutturnio** and **Malvasia**, from the hills around Piacenza and Parma, **Cabernet** and **Pinot bianco**, from the hills around Bologna. The wines of Romagna also have real personality: the red **Sangiovese**, and the white **Trebbiano** and **Albana**, ideal with fish dishes. Some of the liqueurs worth trying are **laurino** and **nocino**, respectively made with bay leaves and green walnuts.

Festival and Country Fairs

For over thirty years in **Borgo Taro**, in the province of Parma, the **sagra del fungo porcino** (Festival of the cep mushroom) has been held. This small town in the Valle del Taro is in fact the Italian capital of this fragrant fruit of the earth, and one of the stops on the "Emilia food trail" dedicated to the cep mushroom. The festival, which takes place in September, includes public tastings in the streets, cultural events and various shows.

9. Tuscany: art and taste

[top](#)

Splendid cities of art, at the heart of the Italian Renaissance. Rolling green hills and mountains. Fine sandy beaches and excellent tourist facilities. A great gastronomic tradition, a rich array of typical products, representing the raw materials of a cuisine with echoes of the past and rural influences, today rediscovered in the search for high quality, unadulterated foods. Last but not least, the wines: Tuscany is home to some of the best wines in the world, which are a marvelous accompaniment to a cuisine which it is well worth getting to discover.

Bite into a slice of Tuscan bread drenched in olive oil and you will have captured in a mouthful the essence of this region's cookery, since **bread** and **oil** reflect its sober tradition, simple but extraordinarily unique. Tuscan bread is even mentioned in the lines of the Divina Commedia, where Dante Alighieri highlights its essential quality when he complains in exile about how salty he finds "il pane altrui" ("other people's bread"). Tuscan bread, with its hard crust and compact crumb, is in fact made without the addition of salt, making it the ideal foil for intense flavors, such as that of oil from the Lucca hills, one of Italy's finest. Tuscany is a marvellous world, loved by anyone who is an expert on art or simply an enthusiast. The cookery of Tuscany may be simple, but has an important strength: the raw materials are all of the highest quality. A perfect example can be found in one of the region's hallmark dishes, **bistecca alla fiorentina** (Florentine steak),



which to be "original" must be taken from the highly prized Chianina breed of cattle, bred in Val di Chiana, on the border with Umbria. Like bread and oil, it has become a symbol of Tuscan cookery. It consists of a whole loin, cut thick, which should not weigh over 700 grams and should be grilled with the absolute minimum of interference: it should not be turned over frequently, nor should it be forked, because it would lose its tasty juices. Once cooked, it can be seasoned with salt and served with oil, pepper and lemon wedges. The whole gastronomic tradition of inland Tuscany is influenced by country life. There are sausages, salami and hams (such as the typical **prosciutto** with its intense and penetrating flavor); antipasti such as **panzanella**, a salad of dried bread softened in water and served with tomato, onion, basil and vinegar; and unusual first courses, such as **pappa col pomodoro**, based on tomatoes cooked with oil, garlic, basil and pepper. Then there are vegetable soups cooked for hours, adding a drizzle of oil just before being served, such as the famous **ribollita fiorentina**. There are of course also pulses, and in particular **beans**, which are cooked "all'uccelletto",

according to a traditional Florentine recipe, or "al fiasco", using a technique widespread in the province of Pisa, where the beans are placed in a flask with water, oil, rosemary and other herbs and then cooked in hot embers. These delicious dishes are best enjoyed in the region's exceptional "agriturismo". The landscape of Tuscany is famous, with the Maremma, land of the "butteri", the green hills of Chianti, and its cities of art. Here, the specialities of traditional cookery bring the flavors of the past to the present. In Siena, the city of the Palio, the traditional Christmas speciality is the delicious **panforte**, a cake made with almonds, flour, hazelnuts, cocoa, cinnamon, spices and candied peel. From the Apuan Alps, in the north of the region, comes

lardo di Colonnata (cured belly pork), which was once eaten by marble quarry workers as an accompaniment to bread, and has now become a delicacy much sought after by connoisseurs. The cuisine of the coast is completely different. The most famous dish is **cacciucco**, a fish soup from Livorno, which includes whichever fish takes the cook's fancy, ranging from shellfish and crustaceans, eels and flying squid, to mantis shrimp, moray eel, mullet, cod, lobster, octopus and cuttlefish. The result is a fantastic spicy dish, a sort of hot red soup with tasty ingredients poured on top of a slice of toasted country bread, seasoned with garlic and fried tomatoes and red hot chilli peppers. Tuscany also boasts an excellent mixed dish of fried seafood, based on red mullet and the so-called "cieche" ("blind"), newly born elvers which owe their name to the fact they cannot yet see, and which are therefore easily caught.



FOCUS: WINES AND LIQUEURS

Tuscany is a wine lover's paradise, as is evident in the presence of no fewer than 14 wine trails. Any brief summary is bound to mention one of the most famous wines in the world, the ruby-coloured, dry **Chianti**, with its intense aroma. Chianti is produced in much of the region, and the highest quality Chianti Classico bears the Gallo Nero ("black rooster") trademark. Nor should we forget dry red **Montepulciano**, or **Brunello di Montalcino**, the strong velvety, full-bodied red produced in the hills around Siena. Fine white wines include the elegant dry **Vernaccia di San Gimignano**, and **Galestro**, which is excellent with fish.

• Festival and Country Fairs

The **festa del Calderone** (Cauldron festival) of **Altopascio**, in the province of Lucca, combines religious elements with gastronomic curiosities. Altopascio was, in around the year 1000, an important stopover point on the road to Rome. Some monks from Lucca thus decided to found the order of the Hospitalers, and provided a building in which pilgrims could rest and take refreshment. The "cauldron" was the large pan in which the friars cooked soup for the pilgrims. The festival is mentioned by Boccaccio in the Decamerone, and on the day dedicated to San Jacopo, 25th July, evokes a medieval atmosphere with good wine and huge plates of pasta.

10. Umbria: echoes of the Middle Ages [top](#)

Umbria is not only the green heart of Italy, the cradle of the Franciscan tradition, and the setting for beautiful medieval towns. It is also like a jewellery box which holds, alongside marvellous artistic, religious and cultural treasures, an incredible heritage of aromas and flavors. In such a limited space (Umbria is one of the smallest regions in Italy, with only two provinces - Perugia and Terni - and is entirely landlocked) there is practically everything you could ask for in a great gastronomic tradition: fine wines, skilful farming, treasures of the earth such as truffles, and unmatched expertise in the art of meat preservation.

There are parts of some Umbrian cities where you feel catapulted back into the Middle Ages. Not just because of the appearance of the streets and piazzas, the palazzi and churches, but also because of the aromas and colours of the food. It is in fact not unusual to enter a restaurant, perhaps with tables outside under a



wisteria pergola, and see meat cooked in the same way as it was eight centuries ago: a hearth in the middle of the room, burning charcoal, roasting spits, and the sizzling of meat over the fire. Some cities in Umbria are real "sanctuaries" of gastronomy. Norcia, for example, in the southeast of the region, is recognised as the birthplace of Italian **salami and ham production**. It is no coincidence that the word "norcino" (inhabitant of Norcia) has become a synonym of grocer. However, Norcia is not the only place in Umbria with a tradition of meat preservation: Bastia Umbra is in fact considered one of the homes of **porchetta**, a whole small pig spit roasted and flavored with herbs and spices. At the other end of the range of meat specialities that the visitor can taste, there is not only pork, but a whole array of other specialities: beef (often served with sauces), game and poultry. When visiting Umbria, and above all the valleys, with their rolling landscape of green hills, pink rocks, and small towns, you will discover how the region has always been involved in heated rivalry with another region of Italy, Piedmont. The bone of contention is the **truffle**. Umbria, in fact, is home to a variety of the fragrant "tuber" called the black truffle of Norcia, a rival of the white truffle of Alba in Piedmont. The dispute to establish which of the two is better has been going on for centuries, and is unlikely ever to be resolved. One thing is for certain - the Umbrians are very proud of their truffle and every year between October and late March (the period when most are picked), dedicate a whole series of events to it, from the Mostra Mercato in Valtopina and Tartufo d'Oro in Gubbio, to the Premio di Umorismo in Città di Castello, which is centred on the truffle, in addition to other events in Norcia, Fabro and Scheggino. A good lunch in one of the splendid cities of Umbria, perhaps on the occasion of one of the many historical festivals (such as Calendimaggio in Assisi, the Corsa dei

Ceri in Gubbio, or the Giostra della Quintana in Foligno), or in one of the many "agriturismo" (farmhouse structures) in the hills, would not be complete without one of the region's traditional pasta dishes. These include **ciriole**, which are tagliatelle sautéed with oil and garlic or meat ragù; **spaghetti**, served with bacon and marjoram or anchovies and black truffles; maccheroni, here known as **strascinati**, with sausage, egg and cheese; and **embrici**, small homemade spaghetti, served with tomatoes, garlic and abundant pecorino sheep's cheese. There are also delicious soups, such as **acquacotta** from Cascia, based on dried bread and tomatoes. Lovers of fish need not feel left out, however: although Umbria has no coastline, there is a rich tradition of dishes using freshwater fish, mainly from Lake Trasimeno. There is also a rich tradition of cakes and sweets. In Perugia, **chocolate** enjoys cult status, and traditional cooking also offers a range of extraordinary delights such as **pignoccate**, with pine nuts and sugar, **serpentone**, a snake-shaped sweet bread with almonds, and **panpepato**, which marries the flavor of honey with that of pepper and other spices.



•FOCUS: WINES AND LIQUEURS

The best known Umbrian wines come from the zones of **Orvieto** and **Torgiano**: the white is dry and fruity, ideal for fish dishes, and the red dry, excellent with game and meat in general. In Torgiano new wines such as **Rubesco** and **San Giorgio** are produced. Other wines of the region to look out for include **Rosso di Montefalco**, **Bianco del Trasimeno** and **Bianco di Città di Castello**. In addition to the four wine trails which pass through some of the most picturesque landscape in Umbria, wine lovers cannot miss the appointment with **Cantine Aperte**, which is held on the last Sunday in May in the associated wineries of the Movimento del Turismo del Vino (Movement for Wine Tourism). Set up in 1993, around a thousand wineries participate in the event, which gives visitors the chance to taste fine wines and local specialities.

•Festival and Country Fairs

For ten years now, chocolate lovers from all over the world have been meeting every October at Eurochocolate in Perugia. The regional capital of Umbria is transformed for the occasion into a giant open-air sweetshop. The event is extremely popular, attracting 800,000 visitors every year, and has earned a place as one of Italy's major food, wine and social events, with tastings, exhibitions, shows, conferences, and art, all centered around chocolate.

11. The Marches: the pleasures of a "plural" cuisine top

The Marches: a region with a "plural" name, and rightly so, since here we find a variety of territories, cultural influences, traditions and ways of life which cannot be considered as uniform and indistinct. This also holds true for the region's food. We could simplify by saying that the region has been subjected to two great influences, Romagna to the north and Abruzzi to the south, although it is nearer to the truth to say that the classic cookery of the Marches is a well-constructed mix of foods which exploits both the products of the land and those of the sea.

What did the Roman consuls and the generals of the Carthaginian Hannibal have in common? Apart from sharing a place in ancient history and fighting in bloody battles throughout the Italian peninsula, they all loved the large **olives** of the Marches. And still today, this tasty fruit is appreciated: the symbol of the region's cooking is in fact **olive all'ascolana**, olives which are stoned and then stuffed with a mixture of mince, eggs, parmesan cheese and various herbs, then dipped in



beaten egg and breadcrumbs and fried in oil. Links with history are not that unusual for cookery in the Marches: another great historical figure, Napoleon, is involved with a traditional dish of the Marches, called **vincisgrassi**, lasagne with mushrooms, truffles and chicken livers, covered with béchamel sauce and then baked in the oven. When fighting against Napoleon in the Marches, the prince of Windisch-Graetz, who was an officer in the Austrian army, tasted this dish prepared for him by a local cook, and expressed such appreciation that the dish was given his name, albeit somewhat distorted and Italianized. Putting history to one side, food and wine represents for the Marches an essential aspect of its attraction for tourists, which is based on a number of seaside resorts and many places of interest inland. A well-preserved artistic and natural heritage, together with a flair for tourism and good hotel facilities, are supported by a flourishing tradition of good food. The Marches is home to an excellent breed of cattle, similar to Tuscany's Chianina, whose meat is an important part of a number of regional specialties. The symbolic dish of Pesaro is **tournedos alla Rossini**, in memory of the great musician, who is celebrated every year in August in his native city with an important festival. This sumptuous dish of haute cuisine consists of a braised fillet of beef with ham,

mushrooms, parsley, lemon and a pinch of pepper. In Urbino, meanwhile, the local specialty is another tasty meat dish, **braciola**, a stuffed rolled joint of beef braised in white wine. There is also a great deal of choice as far as regards other types of meat, and there is a great variety of salami and hams on offer. Fabriano has a worldwide reputation for its production of high quality paper, and there is even a museum dedicated to this traditional product. But the town is also a favorite with gourmets, for its splendid **smoked ham**, while in Macerata the unusual **ciaùsculu** is produced, a traditional sausage made with finely minced pork, and flavored with garlic, salt and pepper, which the local trattorias serve spread on slices of toasted bread. In every corner of the Marches it is also possible to find **porchetta** (sucking pig) turning on a spit, with its traditional flavoring of wild fennel seeds. There are also treats for vegetarians, though, or simply for those who love their greens. A tasty local specialty is **misticanza**, a mixed salad of wild leaves. Visitors to the coastal towns can discover the specialties of fish cookery, such as **brodetto**, a fish soup. This dish is cooked in two main versions, one from Ancona, and the other from Porto Recanati.



•FOCUS: WINES AND LIQUEURS

Viticulture was probably introduced into the Marches by the Greeks, who colonised the area in the 4th century BC. Sangiovese, Montepulciano trebbiano and Verdicchio are all widely planted. The most famous wine is **Verdicchio**, a white wine which is an ideal accompaniment to seafood. There are a number of varieties, such as that from Matetica (to which is dedicated the "Verdicchio di Matetica wine trail"), from Jesi, and from Pian delle Mura. Mention should also be made of the **Bianco dei Colli Maceratesi** and the **Bianco del Metauro**. Reds include **Conero** and **Piceno**. Lastly, there is the local **Vernaccia**, produced in Serrapetrona. Enthusiasts will be fascinated by the International Wine Label Museum in Cupramontana (Ancona), which has a collection of over 40,000 wine labels from all over the world. The Marches also has a flourishing tradition of distillation, and the most important products are **anisetta** and **mistrà**. There are also many industrially produced liqueurs, but even these are very popular and based on traditional recipes.

Festival and Country Fairs

One of the oldest popular food festivals of the Marches is the **sagra delle frittelle** (Fritter festival) of **Massignano**, in the province of Ascoli Piceno. The festival, which has taken place for almost fifty years in the month of August, associates tastings in the square with shows and entertainment, according to the traditional pattern of the great Italian folk festivals.

12. Lazio: ancient and popular tastes top

If we think of Roman cookery, what comes to mind is an image of the people. More than elsewhere, in Rome and Lazio, food brings with it the aromas and noises of the taverns, recipes using simple ingredients, and robust strong flavors. These "humble" origins created a tradition based on the principle of using whatever was available, from the cheapest cuts of meat to offal, in simple recipes without frills. Together with this is an extraordinary range of products from the market garden and countryside which give the traditional dishes of Lazio unequalled colour and aroma. Today, "popular" cookery is experiencing a revival, paradoxically becoming refined in the process, despite its country roots and reputation for hearty food.

Sitting down at table in Rome and Lazio means embarking on a journey through centuries-old traditions, in a whirlwind of extraordinary aromas and flavors. What better place to start than the most famous antipasto in the Roman repertoire, **bruscheta**, a slice of toasted bread rubbed with garlic and doused with olive oil. As is well known, the Romans are passionate about pasta, which is the classic way to start any Italian meal. The best known regional recipe is **bucatini**



all'amatriciana, originally from the town of Amatrice, in the province of Rieti. Bucatini, a type of thick hollow spaghetti, is served with a sauce of bacon, tomatoes, chilli and white wine, and then covered with grated pecorino romano cheese. Another famous dish is **gnocchi alla romana**, which tradition dictates should be eaten on Thursdays, although the explanation for this is unknown. The gnocchi are made of semolina, milk and eggs and then sliced: the discs thus obtained are arranged in layers in a dish with grated cheese and butter and then browned in the oven. **Spaghetti alla carbonara** is another classic: the spaghetti is served in a sauce of raw eggs, bacon, pepper and pecorino cheese. Lastly, there is a dish that visitors should try at least once: **rigatoni alla pajata**, pasta tubes served in a sauce of veal intestines cooked with tomatoes, peppers, parsley, oil, garlic and white wine. While the Romans love pasta, and have even dedicated a museum to it (the Museo Nazionale delle Paste Alimentari), there is no doubt that they positively adore meat, which here is tasty and strong-flavored, and often served with vegetables. Their favourite dish is **abbacchio** (sucking lamb), a preference which derives from the city's deep-rooted rural tradition. There are many different ways

of cooking this, the most traditional of which is baked in the oven, but it can also be prepared "alla cacciatora", i.e. pan fried with garlic, rosemary, anchovies, chilli and white wine. There is also a vast array of recipes for pork, although the pièce de resistance is without doubt **porchetta**, sucking pig flavored with wild fennel and stuffed with fatty bacon, liver and heart. Beef dishes include **coda alla vaccinara**, i.e. oxtail cut into sections, sometimes together with the animal's chaps, cooked in a rich ragù and flavored with celery, sultanas, pine nuts and dark chocolate. The list of popular Roman dishes based on meat is practically endless, but two others that spring to mind are **trippa alla trasteverina**, tripe stewed in an earthenware dish with lardons, and **saltimbocca alla romana**, slices of veal rolled up with a slice of ham and flavored with sage leaves, cooked in butter and served piping hot. Lazio and Rome also have a great tradition of cooking fish, both of sea and lake varieties. Vegetables are also central to the region's food, and globe artichokes are particularly popular. The local variety is called "mammola". A famous recipe using artichokes is **carciofi alla giudia**, a dish whose Jewish origin is evident in its name. It is based on artichokes stewed in abundant olive oil. Lazio is also home to extremely tasty cheeses, such as pecorino and ricotta. Ricotta is also used in some of the region's traditional cakes such as the **crostata di ricotta** (ricotta tart), made with short crust pastry and a mix of ricotta, sugar, eggs, orange zest, sultanas, candied citron peel and cinnamon. There are also **frappe**, which are special sweets for carnival time, fried in oil. Another favourite are **maritozzi**, sweet rolls containing raisins, pine nuts and candied peel.



FOCUS: WINES AND LIQUEURS

In the Castelli Romani hills, viticulture achieves one of its utmost expressions. The "Castelli Romani wine trail" passes through places whose names are well known to connoisseurs: Frascati, Albano, Velletri and Castelgandolfo. The most famous wine is undoubtedly the dry white Frascati. There are also excellent wines from **Marino**, **Colli Albani** and **Colli Lanuvini**. Other areas famous for their wine production are Viterbo and Frosinone. Montefiascone, near lake Bolsena, is the city of origin of a white wine whose strange name has become something of a legend: Est! Est! Est!

Festival and Country Fairs

Every year in June **Nemi**, on the shores of the lake, hosts a **sagra della fragola** (Strawberry festival). A great cup is filled with strawberries and then doused with sparkling fragolino wine (made with a variety of strawberry-flavored grapes). Not to be missed is the vanilla ice-cream garnished with strawberries and the wines and liqueurs flavored with strawberries, which can be tasted at stalls in the town's main streets.

13. Abruzzo: loyalty to tradition top

Among the regions of Italy, Abruzzo is probably the one which is most loyal to its past. Also in the most characteristic products it safeguards to the utmost the traditions, rituals, mysteries and magic of its culture. The region is strongly characterized by its mountains, which for centuries almost completely cut it off from the rest of Italy. This period of isolation is now over, but the region's customs, heritage and culture, not to mention its cookery, are still intact, despite the onslaught of industrialization and mass tourism. This means, for example, that local food products are of excellent quality. Here, loyalty to the past is expressed in a great gastronomic tradition.

The people of Abruzzo give prime importance to food, feeling that while it is certainly a joy for the taste buds, it is also the best way of socialising. This attitude is seen in the **panarda**, a banquet that is a wonderful way to socialise and in which food is transformed into an effective means of communication. This is a real food ritual, celebrated in honour of Saint Anthony Abbot. The tradition is common to a large number of towns, but is observed above all in Villavallelonga, a small town in the mountainous area of the Parco Nazionale d'Abruzzo. The most incredible feature of the panarda is the quantity of dishes, which may even be over



fifty, and the etiquette which forces the diners to do honour to the table by eating everything. Its origin is the popular devotion to St Anthony. It is recounted that many years ago a woman left her baby in its cot and went out of the house to go and fetch some water; on the way back, she met a wolf carrying the child between its jaws. The woman invoked St Anthony, at which the wolf put down the child and fled; she then promised to celebrate the Saint's help every year with a great festival dedicated to him: namely, the panarda. This is not the only ritual of Abruzzo which brings together magic, spirituality and food. Another example is **minestrone delle virtù** (soup of the virtues), so called because it uses seven ingredients of each type, like the seven cardinal virtues, and the seven virtues that a good housewife should possess. According to tradition, its preparation requires seven types of vegetables, seven types of meat, seven types of dried pulses, seven types of fresh pulses and seven types of pasta. Even the herbs must be seven in number. Still today, in

houses in the area of Teramo (but also in dozens of restaurants), the minestrone is cooked on 1st May, a custom which derives from celebrations dedicated to the goddess Maia (who the month is named after) in propitiatory rites to ensure the fertility of the land and an abundant harvest. The provinces of Abruzzo offer a rich sample of the landscapes, flavors and cultural features of central and central-southern Italy, which can be seen by driving for little over half an hour, from the coast up into the hills, through historic towns of great interest. In the vast array of eating places, ranging from elegant restaurants to homely trattorias, visitors can run the gamut of Pantagruelian delights. The obvious place to begin is with the extraordinary abundance of pasta dishes, with place of honour going to **maccheroni alla chitarra**. This type of spaghetti is prepared using a small frame across which metal wires are stretched. A sheet of pasta is passed through this "chitarra" (guitar), which cuts it into square-section strips. The pasta is cooked in salted water and served with lamb ragù or tomato and basil sauce. Other Abruzzo specialities are related to the region's sheep farming tradition: lamb, cooked simply, such as in the recipe of the **catturo**, where the meat is cooked in a large copper pot with fatty bacon, onion and chilli; or **sheep's cheeses**. Many of these foods are best tasted in the towns of the Parco Nazionale d'Abruzzo, one of Italy's most important national parks, a jewel of nature set in some of the highest mountains of the Apennines. Also worth tasting are the salami and hams, such as **mortadella di Campotosto**. Those with a sweet tooth must try the **confetti** (sugared almonds) from Sulmona, not only delicious, but also beautiful, considered by some to be real works of art.



FOCUS: WINES AND LIQUEURS

The Etruscans were also responsible for introducing viticulture in Abruzzo. Today the region's best known wines are the dry red **Montepulciano**, perfect for accompanying pasta and meat dishes; **Trebbiano**, a smooth white, ideal with antipasti, fish and soft cheeses; and red **Cerasuolo**, which is excellent with salami and hams. The traditions and quality of regional viticulture can be discovered on six different wine trails. A vast array of bitters and digestive liqueurs are also produced, most of them flavored with mountain herbs.

Festival and Country Fairs

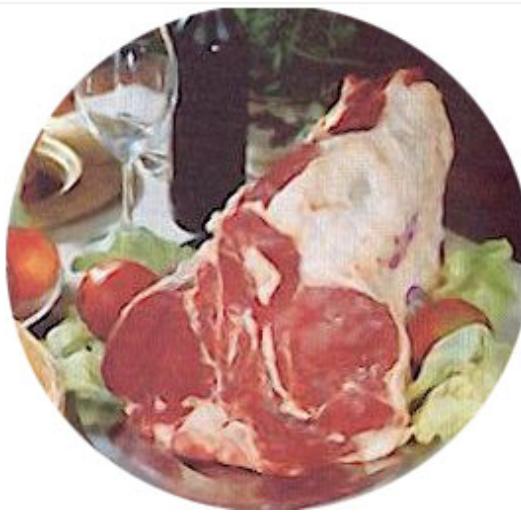
In **Fara San Martino**, a small town in the province of Chieti every year on 29 June, the feast day of Saints Peter and Paul, the **sagra della pasta** (Pasta festival) is celebrated. This popular festival is held on the day on which an important agricultural fair used to be held, and includes characteristic banquets on the banks of die Verde river.

14. Molise: the heritage of an ancient culture

[top](#)

Vast green pastures alternated with the hills and mountains of Matese and Majella: this is the landscape that characterizes Molise, a region in the centre-south of Italy which still preserves many traditions of the country life of the past. Today, more than in the past, the region cultivates its proud sense of identity, defended tenaciously from any attempt at standardization. This spirit also dominates the attitude to food. Sheep farming and agriculture are thus at the basis of typical Molise cookery, which is simple and strongly flavored, based on jealously guarded recipes which are passed down from one generation to the next.

Molise is one of the most secret, secluded and least known areas in Italy. It has a romantic and magical atmosphere, and recalls parts of northern Europe, such as Scotland or Ireland. The gastronomic tradition of Molise is closely related to that of Abruzzo on one side and of Apulia on the other. What unites these three worlds is the culture of the "tratturi", the routes along which the flocks were once led from the mountains of the Apennines to the plains of Apulia. For thousands of years, these "grass roads" allowed flocks and herds to periodically move and take advantage of pastures in different seasons at different altitudes. In autumn, they left the mountains, which had become inhospitable with the arrival of the cold, to head for the plains, where winter was milder, to then return to the



mountains in spring, when in turn the plains had become clammy and inhospitable. This phenomenon is called "transhumance". Today, the tracks are used by horse riders and mountain bikers, and form a spider's web of routes which are an ideal way to discover the region's history, and a gastronomic tradition which has remained almost intact. The heart of Molise cookery is thus to be found in its sheep farming past, and traditional food is now on offer in a vast number of town and country restaurants. The tasty meats of **kid** and **lamb** are the most popular. The preferred method of cooking is obviously spit-roasting, which gives a unique taste to meat. Excellent lamb dishes include escalopes with olives and barbecued intestines. Sheep farming and livestock breeding do not just provide excellent meat, but also dairy products appreciated throughout Italy: Molise is famous for its **pecorino**, **scamorza** and **burrini** or "butirri", small cheeses stuffed with butter. They can be eaten fresh after only one week's maturing; after a month their taste becomes much stronger. In Agnone in the north of Molise, a town known for the manufacture of handmade bells, the dairy products have a particularly high reputation. There is widespread production of salami and hams: ranging from **smoked hams** (those from Rionero Sannitico are excellent), to various salami, such as **capicollo**, **ventricina** and **soppressata**, made using lean and fatty pork, spices, salt, pepper and red wine.

There is also **pamparella**, bacon flavored with chilli and baked in the oven, and the typical **salsiccia**

ferrazzanese, a sausage flavored with chilli and fennel seeds. Ferrazzano, in the bay of Tappino, has become famous for its sausages, which make use of pork from pigs fed on acorns. As in Abruzzo, homemade pasta in Molise is of great importance, and also here we find **maccheroni alla chitarra**. The many types of stuffed pasta include **calcioni**, filled with ricotta, ham and scamorza cheese. Molise's historical and artistic beauties include many castles, and while they were being built in the 15th century, the shepherds and farmers together created what is still considered one of the region's most characteristic recipes: **zuppa di ortiche** (nettle soup). After being boiled in water, the nettle stems are cut into sections and fried with tomatoes. The flavor is incredibly delicate. But despite the fact that most of Molise is inland, it is not dedicated only to farming: there is also a beautiful coastline, which is now discovering seaside tourism with interesting resorts such as Termoli and Campomarino. It is here that you can enjoy delicacies such as mullet, cuttlefish and sea bass. There is also abundant seafood. Another delicacy is **calamaretti all'olio**, which are freshly fished small squid, eaten raw and served with oil, vinegar, salt and chilli.

FOCUS: WINES AND LIQUEURS

Molise has two main wines, which bow come in white, red and rosé versions: in the area of Isernia they drink **Pentro**, and in the zone of Campobasso, **Biferno**. Also worth trying is the somewhat unusual **crema di pondo**, the region's most famous liqueur, whose name and ingredients recall the punch drunk in England. It is made by mixing an infusion of orange and mandarin zest in alcohol with whipped sugar.

Festival and Country Fairs

For the feast day of the Saints Peter and Paul, on 29 June, hernia celebrates the products of the land in an ancient ritual, dating back to 1254, the **fiera delle cipolle** (Onion festival). While being centred particularly around onions, it is also a celebration of fruit and vegetables in general. According to tradition, the onions bought in Isernia during the festival (which are tied together in large garlands) are considered to be tastier and to have great medicinal powers. On the day of Corpus Domini, in June, the 13 **Macchine dei Misteri** (Machines of the Mysteries) are taken in procession on the shoulders of around 200 men along the streets of **Campobasso**, following a ritual route which starts in the old town. The festival is also an opportunity to try specialities of regional cuisine.

15. Campania: birthplace of the Mediterranean diet [top](#)

The story of the Neapolitans is a strange one: since time immemorial they have eaten that "Mediterranean diet" which is now recommended by nutritionists the world over. But they had always been completely unaware of the fact: the food on their tables was not the result of trying to balance proteins and carbohydrates, but of using what was available: vegetables, bread and pasta, cheese and fish - whatever could be bought cheaply at the market. The region's cookery is thus based on "humble" ingredients, with little use of meat, but vibrant with flavor and colour; it is no surprise that it is considered the archetype of Mediterranean cooking.

In terms of cooking, Campania is characterized by respect for the traditions which have their roots in Magna Grecia and Sannio. Neapolitan cookery, which for historical reasons is influenced by that of the ancient Greeks, the Spanish and the French, has influenced to an extent all Campanian cooking, which tends to preserve the food's natural flavors, exalting its freshness and quality. Campanian gastronomic culture has been consolidated over the centuries, and handed down

from generation to generation. Any discussion of Neapolitan cooking is bound to involve a celebration of its most famous dish, which more than any other has introduced the taste and simplicity of southern Italian food to the rest of the world: **pizza**. Pizza was invented by the local people in their constant search for a cheap way to satisfy their hunger, and corresponded perfectly to their needs, being simple to prepare, but at the same time filling and nutritious. It started life as a simple disc of dough scattered with mozzarella and flavored with oil and garlic; the only dressing was probably a handful of seafood. Then tomatoes arrived from America and the pizza assumed the form we know today. It slowly became a dish of mass consumption, and was successfully exported beyond the region's confines. It was also popular with crowned heads: the Bourbons, kings of Naples, loved it, as did the Savoias, kings of Italy. When Queen Margherita arrived to visit Naples in 1889, an inventive pizza cook, Raffaele Esposito, had the idea of dedicating a pizza to her. The result was pizza Margherita: tomato, mozzarella and basil, whose colours celebrated the tricolour flag of the newly unified Italian State. Another lynchpin of Neapolitan cookery is **pasta**. The regional capital of this food was Torre Annunziata, whose expert pasta makers used the durum wheat imported from America. The art of drying and storing pasta, which led to industrial production, was perfected in Gragnano, a town to the south of Naples. Neapolitan creativity has led to an incredible variety of pasta shapes with fantastic names: vermicelli, fusilli, spaghetti, tortiglioni, rigatoni, ziti, maccheroni, to mention but a few. There is also a vast range of sauces and dressings served with pasta. The simplest are perhaps also the best, and a plate of spaghetti served with tomato and fragrant basil is a delight on a par with any sophisticated rich sauce. An exception to the Neapolitan simplicity in food preparation is ragù, or to use its full name, **ragù del guardiaporta** (porter's ragù). The name of this wonderful dish originates from the fact that it takes a long time to cook and also requires constant supervision - it was supposed that only porters, with their mainly sedentary and relaxed way of spending the working day, had the necessary time available to prepare it. Ragù is a hearty, substantial dish, and constitutes a meal in itself. In this elaborate recipe, slices of veal are rolled up and stuffed with cheese, parsley, garlic, pine nuts and sultanas. The rolls are then cooked with fat, tomatoes and red wine. The sauce thus obtained is used to dress the pasta, while the meat rolls are served as the main course. In the Neapolitan tradition every self-respecting housewife has the secret of her own ragù: but obviously this gastronomic marvel can also be enjoyed in the region's many traditional restaurants and trattorias.



Campania's culinary tradition, as said, is extremely varied, ranging from the simple and popular dishes of the Caserta area, the country cooking of Sannio with vegetables, cheeses and sausages, the Mediterranean diet typical of the Cilento area, not forgetting the traditional specialties of Salerno, such as ravioli stuffed with eggs and ricotta. There is of course an amazing myriad of seafood specialties to be found in the beautiful coastal towns of the region, from the peninsula of Sorrento to the islands of Capri and Ischia.

FOCUS: WINES AND LIQUEURS

Viticulture began in Campania two thousand years ago with white and red **Falerno**, a wine produced in the area of Caserta and still drunk today in the region. **Greco di Tufo**, a white wine perfect for accompanying crustaceans, lobster and mussels can also boast ancient origins. At present, the grape varieties grown in Campania are Trebbiano, Malvasia, Sangiovese, Greco and Aglianico. The most popular reds are **Procida** and **Vesuvio**; while whites include **Lacrima Christi**, **Ischia** and **Capri**. You should also try **Epomeo** and **Don Alfonso** from the island of Ischia. Campania also produces an excellent lemon liqueur, **limoncello**, particularly in the area around Sorrento.

•Festival and Country Fairs

The **sagra dei fichi** (Fig festival), which has been held for over twenty years in **San Mango sul Calore** (Avellino) in late July, is an opportunity to discover a much appreciated and exported product, the fig of San Mango. These sweet fruits are handed out free, and over the two evenings visitors are offered the chance to taste traditional country dishes accompanied by the excellent local Aglianico wine.

16. Apulia: sea, plains and hills [top](#)

The people of Apulia have never been wealthy, and have lived on agriculture and sheep farming, since nature blessed them with a mild climate and fertile soil. But the Apulians have exploited their imagination to create that endless source of joy and flavor which over the centuries has become their traditional cuisine. This tradition is based on simple elements: pasta (great quantities of wheat were produced in the Tavoliere plains, near Foggia), cheeses, hearty country salami and hams, and fragrant and tasty vegetables. A unique range of food in a land which is like a bridge reaching out from Europe into the deep blue of the Mediterranean.

Apulia, a wonderland which is the crossroads between East and West, the land of a thousand churches, Romanesque cathedrals, castles and grottoes. A cocktail of art and culture that attracts visitors from all over the world, attracted by the historical, artistic and natural attractions of the region, but also by the food. Three different culinary traditions coexist here, originating in 1222, when Federico II divided Apulia into Terra di Bari, Capitanata and Terra d'Otranto. These three districts were the forerunners of the present-day provinces of Foggia, Bari and Lecce, and their three styles of cookery basically present the same dishes with



slight variations. Bread and pasta food, oil and wine represent the pillars of popular Apulian cookery, and there is a vast range of quality products. The golden wheat of Apulia is used for the many types of **pasta**, whether produced industrially, in fresh pasta shops, or by housewives. The various types of pasta (the most famous shape is orecchiette, shaped like small shells) are served with a wide variety of sauces, ranging from vegetables and pulses to meat. An absolute must is **orecchiette con cime di rapa** (orecchiette with turnip tops); Another speciality is **ciambotto** (fish ragù), invented in Bari, and prepared using various fish. The cuisine of the coastal regions is full of fish dishes, although fish is also cooked in the interior in a number of elegant recipes. The recipes are extremely simple: there is no point in covering, or worse, altering the flavor of the excellent **fish and seafood** with complicated preparations. For example, in Bari freshly caught **baby octopus** and **anchovies** are often eaten raw, and sometimes still alive. The **oysters**, are also excellent, and should also be eaten as fresh as possible with a squeeze of lemon juice and freshly ground black pepper. In Taranto the **mussels** are exquisite, and their excellence is explained by a curious legend. From the seabed of the bay of Taranto rise "cetri", jets of fresh water which encourage the breeding of mussels. The largest of these, whose vortex is visible on the surface, is called San Cataldo. It is in fact said that one day the saint

threw his ring into the sea to calm a tempest. The source appeared in the exact place where the ring sank to the bottom, and this is why the mussels of Taranto are so good. While on the subject of fish, visitors to Gallipoli, the splendid city in the Salento area, must try **scapece**. This is a fish dish with a wonderfully aromatic flavor.

The recipe involves small fish, which are then left to marinate in vinegar and saffron. There are many ways of discovering the Apulian gastronomic tradition. Some of the most enjoyable involve following one of the region's wine trails. There are also dairy trains, which give visitors the chance to try ricotta and the region's other cheese. Another gastronomic masterpiece is **tiella**, a soup which is a legacy of Spanish domination. There is no official recipe, and every area has its version. The dish dates back to the region's rural past, when families returning home from work in the fields put whatever they could find in the cupboard in the pot. More or less everywhere, in the small towns of the interior, and along the seafronts, there are many shops where you can buy **Apulian bread**,

a product with a deserved reputation. Dark and full-flavored, it is a perfect foil to strong-tasting food. Equally appetising are the many types of **focaccia** bread available.



•FOCUS: WINES AND LIQUEURS

Apulia was once famous in the winemaking field above all because it provided excellent blending wine, used to beef up the wines from northern Italy, which were considered a little weak. The region was in fact known as "Italy's winery" because of the vast quantities of wine it managed to produce (around a third of the national production). Over time, Apulian viticulture managed to earn a reputation not only for quantity, but quality. At present it is distinguished for the production of distinctive roses such as **Rosato del Salento**. Whites worth mentioning include **Locorotondo** and **Castel del Monte**, alongside the **Martino** and **San Severo** reds. **Moscato di Trani**, meanwhile, is an excellent dessert wine. Among the various wine trails in Apulia, the "Murgia Carsica DOC wine trail" introduces visitors to the typical wines and food of the Bari area.

Festival and Country Fairs

Orsara di Puglia, a small town in the province of Foggia, is considered the home of the traditional cookery of the Tavoliere and Daunia areas. Every year in late June it hosts an important **festa del vino** (Wine festival), dedicated to Tuccanese, a red table wine. The festival takes place in the streets and piazzas of the medieval old town, and seven wineries offer wine tastings together with conferences and traditional folk music. h

17. Basilicata: a pearl between two seas

[top](#)

Basilicata, a small region set between two seas, the Ionian and the Tyrrhenian, has a centuries-old gastronomic tradition. The recipes often have roots in the distant past. Few people know, for example, the reason why in many Italian regions sausages are called "lucaniga". The word comes from the Latin lucanicam, i.e. "sausage of Lucania", and the production of this sausage began in the times of the Romans, or maybe earlier, here in Basilicata, when the region was known as Lucania, its Latin name. It is mentioned in the works of Apicius, Martial and Varro. The secrets of this ancient farming civilization have been passed down to the present day, to become a resource for us all.

Basilicata is a land rich in tradition, where the cuisine is a skilful combination of simple and genuine products, shunning the sophisticated preparations of modern gastronomy. An example of this is the fact that only olive oil is used in cooking, while butter is used as if it were a kind of cheese. Despite the similarities of some dishes with those of neighbouring regions, the originality of Basilicata's cuisine is to be found in its capacity to extract flavor from even the simplest ingredients,



and to use spices to make even the humblest dishes tasty. **Vegetables** are often eaten as a first course, either on their own or accompanied with pulses or pasta, in dishes such as broad beans and chicory, fresh almond shells with turnip tops, and wild chicory in beef stock. The pulses, cereals, vegetables and aromatic herbs are at the basis of strongly flavored and yet balanced dishes. **Pasta**, traditionally handmade using durum wheat, salt and water, is one of the pillars of the region's cuisine, and comes in a vast array of different types, where shapes and names are limited only by the cook's imagination. There are also interesting types of stuffed pasta, such as **ravioli alla potentina**, stuffed

with ham, ricotta, parsley, egg and pepper. From Matera meanwhile, come **calzoncini**, small semicircular pastry parcels filled with ricotta, sugar, cinnamon and nutmeg. **Cheeses** also represent a recurrent motif on tables throughout the region, and are all of excellent quality, especially those made using sheep's and goat's milk. **Pecorino lucano**, produced with 70% sheep's milk and 30% goat's milk, matured for between three months and a year, is a cheese of exceptional taste and quality. A famous gastronomic invention from the region is the **sausage**, already known in ancient Rome. Excellent sausages are produced throughout Basilicata, and can be eaten fresh or matured, or even conserved in oil or lard. **Soppressate**, sausages of pork cut by hand using the tip of a sharp knife, dried and then preserved in extra virgin olive oil, are an excellent example of the care dedicated to sausage production. When you have the chance to taste local specialties in a restaurant or farm, make sure you try **pezzenta**, a sausage made using pork off cuts. Mutton and goat are traditional favourites, barbecued, stewed or roast. The preparation of stews requires a certain skill on the part of the cook, who must ensure the correct proportions of the ingredients and understand when the dish is ready to be served. **Cutturidd** (stewed mutton), a traditional shepherd's dish, is prepared in a terracotta dish, or in heavy aluminum pans. **Ragù**, the ideal sauce for many types of pasta, is cooked using three different types of meat: lamb, pork and kid, which are first sealed and browned and then cooked in tomato sauce. The result is a real delicacy. **Chilli**, whose use is widespread throughout the region, is always used with moderation, so that its taste is pleasant even for those who don't like spicy food. Another specialty peculiar to the region is **lampascioni**, a variety of wild onion with an unusual taste, which is eaten on its own or in combination with other foods. The traditional sweets and cakes of the region exploit simple ingredients and original flavor combinations. Examples of this creativity include **casoncelli**, filled with chickpea puree mixed with bitter cocoa and sugar, and **sanguinaccio**, which is prepared with pig's blood, cooked wine must, bitter chocolate, raisins, lemon zest, cinnamon and sugar. These products are usually prepared for home consumption, but luckily for tourists, they can also be found in many of the region's wonderful patisseries and agriturismos.



FOCUS: WINES AND LIQUEURS

The three most famous wines of Basilicata all come from the Vulture district (near Melfi and Rionero): red **Aglianico**, sparkling white **Moscato**, and **Malvasia**, a characteristic dessert wine. Aglianico, excellent with meat, is the only one to have achieved DOC recognition. Other wines worth mentioning include **Aleatico di Rionero**.

Festival and Country Fairs

In Basilicata, folklore, gastronomy and history are closely related, and in a visit to an important city such as **Matera** (with its characteristic Sassi) in the month of July is a perfect opportunity to enjoy the **festa della Bruna**, a festival intended to try and ensure a good harvest, with an impressive procession led by a carriage pulled by oxen. Throughout Matera during the festival period, traditional regional dishes are prepared.

18. Calabria: mountain farmers and fishermen [top](#)

In Calabria the cookery reflects the environmental conditioning of a harsh land, squeezed between high mountain ranges and a dazzlingly beautiful sea. The food is simple, humble and flavored with the strong and robust flavors of a long farming and fishing tradition. This sun-kissed land offers fragrant citrus fruits, olives, vegetables and wines. Chilli, also called "the spice of the poor", which was brought to Calabria in the 16th century from America, gives life and an unmistakable flavor to simple dishes. The farming tradition, and that of the coast, have passed down over the generations the secrets of preserving vegetables, meat, and in particular pork and swordfish, which is abundant in the waters off Scilla and Bagnara. The region's traditions are a hybrid of strong influences from the East and from the Albanian and Greek communities which began to settle in Calabria in the Middle Ages.

Calabria, an ancient land with a rich history, with white beaches, green woods and pine forests, and small towns clinging to the mountainsides, is situated between two seas on the southern tip of the Italian peninsula. The cookery reflects the environment, and the so-called **caviale dei poveri** ("poor man's caviar") is the dish which more than any other expresses this. It is a paste made with anchovies' eggs, spiced up with abundant chilli and conserved in oil. The recipe bears witness to a culinary tradition based on humble, simple ingredients, with strong, almost violent flavors and aromas. This is the harsher side of the famous

Mediterranean diet. This "caviar" also introduces another particular characteristic of Calabrian food: the processing of foods with the aim of preserving them. In



the past, daily sustenance was not something that was taken for granted in Calabria, as it may have been in other, more wealthy regions of Italy. The harshness of the terrain and the often difficult climate made it important not to waste any of the products of sheep farming and fishing. The women thus created many methods for the long-term conservation of food, both from the land and the sea: an art which has been developed in sausages and foods conserved in oil, and which today evoke the flavors and aromas of a bygone age, and are still found on restaurants menus in the cities and picturesque towns along the coast. The Calabrian diet is well-balanced, with a good variety of dishes based on mutton and pork, vegetables (aubergines are particularly popular) and fish. Calabria is also the homeland of the hottest **red chilli** in the whole of southern Italy, which brings heat to any dish in which it is included; yet, incredibly, it manages to enhance other flavors without overpowering them. One of the constant features on Calabrian tables is **pasta**, homemade naturally. Perhaps in no other region is the preparation of this food so much a part of daily life.

For example, it is said that a woman is not ready for marriage until she knows at least fifteen different ways of making dough: knowing how to make good pasta in a variety of ways means being a good wife and hostess. There are as many different types of pasta as there are meat and vegetable sauces with which to serve them. The meat sauces are nearly always based on beef, veal, pork or lamb, slowly cooked in a sauce of locally grown tomatoes, pureed and conserved under a layer of olive oil. In the mountain areas of Sila and Aspromonte, there is a whole range of dishes based on **mushrooms**, especially the fragrant cep. They are used in a wide repertoire of tasty recipes, whose "humble" origins are only apparent and which exploit the flavors of the ingredients without distorting them. Meat is generally cooked in sauce or grilled. An extremely tasty specialty is **capretto con le patate** (kid with potatoes) baked in the oven and accompanied with peas and artichokes when in season. There are innumerable vegetable dishes which often seem to outshine the main courses they are supposed to accompany, such as **melanzane ripiene** (stuffed aubergines) and **peperonata** (stewed peppers), not to mention many types of vegetables conserved in olive oil. **Fish** also holds a prime place in Calabrian cooking, in the coastal zones of the Tyrrhenian and Ionian Seas. Tuna and swordfish are cooked in thousands of different ways: fried, in soups, in sauces and baked as involtini (slices of fish rolled up and stuffed).

FOCUS: WINES AND LIQUEURS

The Phoenicians and Greeks brought viticulture to Calabria. It was they who began to produce wines with the region's splendid grapes. At present, the most widely planted varieties are Gaglioppo and Greco. Among the best known wines are **Grò**, which comes in red, white and rosé varieties, and **Savuto** and **Dormici**, which are dry reds. With fish, white **Esare** is recommended. For those who like wine but also love nature, there is vie "Wine and woodland trail", which runs through the Sila mountain park near Catanzaro.

Festival and Country Fairs

For over ten years, in September, **Diamante** (in the province of Catanzaro) has hosted the **Peperoncino festival**, organized by the Italian Chilli Academy, which brings together lovers of the tasty Calabrian product, and which has over fifty branches in Italy and more than five thousand members. The festival offers the chance to taste many specialties prepared using this ubiquitous ingredient.

19. Sicily: a journey back in time

[top](#)

There are few places more than Sicily where talking of cookery means making a journey within a journey. Here we find a cuisine with a rich and tasty variety of products which displays a fantastic balance between land and sea, and a gastronomic tradition which is quintessentially Mediterranean. However, Sicilian cuisine is not a single entity, since differences originating from a variety of cultural influences have been mixed with the differences between the food of the coast and that of the interior. Sicilian cookery is thus like an artist's palette, juxtaposing strong colours and pastel shades, in a play of highly evocative echoes and references.

"It is impossible to understand Italy without seeing Sicily: the key to everything is to be found in Sicily". Thus wrote Goethe in Palermo on 13 April 1787 on the occasion of his first trip to Italy, in the search for the roots of western culture. The largest island in the Mediterranean is a wonderful place, whose natural beauty is fused with the artistic heritage of the many peoples that have settled there. They have all left their mark on the region's food, and it is for this reason that



Sicilian cuisine is today considered one of Italy's richest and most appreciated. First to arrive were the Greeks, who founded Siracusa, Catania and Gela and introduced into these areas the characteristic foods of their homelands: **olives**, **salted ricotta** and above all **barbecued lamb**. The Romans introduced **maccu**, broad bean puree flavored with aromatic herbs, excellent with pasta or simply spread on bread; stuffed cuttlefish; baked onions; pasta served with beaten eggs, parsley and cheese ("riquagghiu"). After the Romans came the Arabs, and with them rice, sugar, spices and almonds. A dish clearly derived from the Arab tradition, also in its name, is **cuscusu**, a fish soup served with couscous, typical of Trapani. The dish originates from the north-African couscous, but differs from it in its use of fish. The Arabs are also responsible for the island's two most famous sweets, **cassata siciliana** (a sponge and ricotta cake topped with fondant icing and candied fruit) and **sorbetto**. The Normans, meanwhile, taught the Sicilians how to prepare stockfish. The period of French domination saw the introduction of **rollò** (a stuffed veal roll), while the Spanish brought the so called pan di Spagna ("bread of Spain", a sweet sponge cake), along with chocolate, tomatoes, and above all aubergines. The Spanish influence is also behind many dishes with contrasting flavors, such as pasta with sardines and raisins, and orange salad seasoned with chilli. **Caponata** is a perfect

example of how the Spanish tradition combined with the Sicilian taste for sumptuousness. This hearty salad is based on vegetables, and contains aubergines, celery, capers, olives and sweet and sour tomato sauce. The original recipe also included octopus, scampi and a small lobster. In restaurants and agriturismos you can naturally find foods that are common to Sicilian and Italian cuisine in general, such as **pasta** prepared in a variety of ways. But even here, you will find traditional and unique flavors. Siracusa is famous for its spaghetti with anchovies, and in Trapani pasta is served with lobster. Apart from fish, many pasta dishes are based on vegetables and cheese, such as spaghetti with courgettes, or pasta with ricotta and semolina. Catania's speciality is **pasta alia Norma**, with aubergines and tomatoes, named in honour of the Catanian composer Vincenzo Bellini after one of his famous operas. The series of towns lining the interminable Sicilian coast offer fish and other seafood of astounding quality. In Trapani **tuna** is prepared in a huge variety of ways: fresh, conserved in oil, or salted and dried ("noseddu"). Messina, meanwhile, is famous for **swordfish**, and a local speciality is **impanata**, which consists of a sweet pastry case filled with swordfish and then baked. All along the coast, **sardines** are fished in large quantities, and served with currants, pine nuts and anchovies.



•FOCUS: WINES AND LIQUEURS

*First the Greeks, and then the Arabs and Normans, praised the strong Sicilian wine. The island's king of wines is without doubt the sweet and unmistakable **Marsala**, created by the Englishman John Woodhouse. He had the idea of strengthening the Marsala's local white wine cooked grape must, grape syrup and distilled alcohol. The result was an excellent dessert wine which also went well with ice-creams. Other wines worth trying include **Alcamo**, **Moscato di Pantelleria**, **Malvasia** from the Aeolian Islands and **Etna**, which comes in white, red and rosé versions. One of the various wine trails in Sicily, the "Etna wine trail" is dedicated to this wine, the first in Sicily to obtain DOC status.*

Festival and Country Fairs

For almost 400 years the most important festival in **Palermo** and Sicily has been that of **Santa Rosalia**, the "festino" as the people of Palermo call this festival dedicated to the city's patron hermit saint. The festival takes place in mid-July and involves great religious celebrations (starting with an impressive procession), shows and naturally endless occasions to taste the specialities of Sicilian cuisine.

20. Sardinia: aromas of the Mediterranean

[top](#)

The variety of the cookery in Sardinia is comparable to the variety of its landscapes. Sardinian cookery, in fact, juxtaposes the flavors of the sea and the strong aromas of Mediterranean herbs, and offers dishes from both the pastoral and coastal tradition. The repertoire of recipes also reveals the willingness to integrate the culinary traditions of past invaders and more recent rulers or guests (such as Catalans and Arabs and, in the period of the Marine Republics, Pisans and Genoans from the Italian mainland).

Almost all the coastal towns of Sardinia boast a rich tradition of seafood, which is often imaginatively combined with food from inland areas. The meeting of coastal and interior areas, of flavors, traditions and cooking techniques, often leads to unusual and surprising results. A case in point is the **minestra di verdure** (a soup of seasonal vegetables) prepared in Alghero, to which small morsels of sea bass and bonito are added; or pan-cooked fish and potatoes, a speciality of Porto Torres and Stintine. In Olbia, seafood enjoys almost cult status, above all **mussels**, which are eaten in soup or with pasta, in herb or tomato sauce, in a gratin, or as the filling for crispy fritters. One of the most beautiful tourist areas in Sardinia, the Costa Smeralda, is also a paradise for the taste buds: summer dishes include salads



with crustaceans and seafood, pasta with bottarga (dried salted eggs) of grey mullet or tuna, and carpaccio of sea bass or swordfish. Cooks also use some of the traditional recipes of the Gallura area, such as **zuppa gallurese**, whose ingredients are bran bread, beef stock, fresh pecorino cheese, grated mature pecorino cheese and chopped parsley. And while on the subject of marrying flavors of the sea and those of the land, Gallura is also a good place to make gastronomic discoveries, such as its dishes based on **mushrooms**, which grow in profusion in the woods and meadows. To find other traditional food, you will need to go to Porto Torres and Sassari, where they prepare an extraordinary dish using the tuna's reproductive organs, called **lattume** or **lattante**. Sassari is famous for its dishes of **snails**: in spicy tomato sauce, in herb sauce, pan fried, or baked. There is also a wide range of interesting seafood recipes, especially those dedicated to crustaceans in Alghero, a town which, in addition to its many natural and architectural beauties, boasts a

Hispano-Catalan past. There are also some interesting ways of cooking the abundant **eels** from the pools around Oristano, which may be pan fried with white wine and raisins, or baked with pecorino cheese. Alongside seafood recipes, the other great Sardinian culinary tradition derives from sheep farming. From the pastures of Logudoro, and the many modern dairies spread over the territory, comes a vast array of **sheep's cheese**, ranging from soft pecorino to mature versions. From the mountainous area in the heart of the island, Barbagia, comes **pane frattali**, which is based on the typical thin crunchy Sardinian bread, seasoned with stock, tomato sauce, poached eggs and pecorino cheese. Barbagia is also home to **sanguinaccio di pecora**, a sausage which is considered the world's oldest and which is still prepared today. Naturally, pasta dishes are also found in Sardinia. In fact, along with Genoa and Palermo, the city of Cagliari is attributed with inventing pasta. The most popular form in Sardinia is **gnocchetti sardi** (also called "mallorreddus"), served with plenty of tomato sauce, chopped sausage and grated pecorino. The area of Sulcis, south west of Cagliari, has felt the strong influence of the fish cookery of Carloforte, with its north African and Genoan influences: here you can taste pasta with **pesto carlofortino** (very similar to pesto from Genoa) or **casca**, a local version of couscous, served only with pulses.



•FOCUS: WINES AND LIQUEURS

Among Sardinia's most famous wines are **Vernaccia** from Oristano, with its characteristic aftertaste of almonds, and **Cannonau** from Cagliari, a red wine which is an ideal accompaniment to the intensely flavored local meat, while the white version is excellent with cheeses, especially pecorino. Excellent dessert wines include **Moscato di Sardegna** and **Malvasia di Bosa**. Berchidda (province of Sassari) is home to the Museo del Vino di Berchidda (Wine Museum), which introduces visitors to the fascinating world of wine production with its exhibits of old presses and utensils.

•Festival and Country Fairs

In **Tonara**, in the province of Nuoro, the **sagra del torrone** (Nougat festival) is held every year on Easter Monday, and is one of Sardinia's oldest traditions . The town is considered the home of this fine confection and the festival is a perfect opportunity to taste nougat of all types: with almonds, walnuts, hazelnuts, lemon. In addition to nougat, other Sardinian sweets are on offer, together with wine and local crafts. The festival is brought to life by folk songs and traditional dancing.

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