

A Tasty Tour of Italy

Come travel through the beautiful regions of Italy. Learn about the distinctive dishes that have evolved from the many cultural influences across the country. From the mountainous northern region of Valle d'Aosta to the warm and sunny southernmost island of Sicily, the enchanting foods of Italy include much more than spaghetti and pizza!

NORTHERN ITALY

Valle d'Aosta cuisine gets its Bavarian influence from the bordering country of Switzerland. There is no pasta or vegetable oil here, but rather dark oat bread eaten with butter or beef shortening. Hearty soups, prepared with large dumplings, are the main staple in this region.

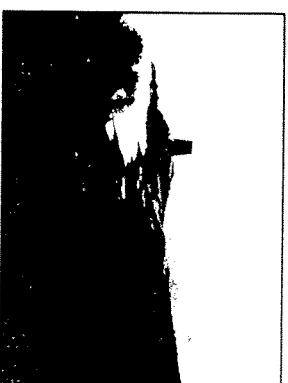


Piedmont, a wealthy region just south of Valle d'Aosta, is known for its gastronomic traditions. This agriculturally rich area prides itself on inventing and influencing many styles of cooking that have evolved in other regions of Italy and in other countries. Fondue, or fonduta, originated in Piedmont, as did chicken Marengo. Elaborate sauces and sparkling wines such as Asti Spumante come from this region.

Lombardy, the most affluent Italian region, stretches from the Alps in the north to the Po Valley in the south. Milan, located near the center of Lombardy, is the business capital of Italy. The cuisine of Lombardy, with its rich sauces, risottos and polenta

dishes, is easily identifiable. World-famous cheeses, such as Gorgonzola and Bel Paese come from this region.

Vento covers the area from the great lakes of Lombardy to the shores of the Adriatic Sea. Its capital is Venice, which for centuries was the crossroads for European trading. Fish is fundamental to Venetian cuisine and is frequently prepared with spices and wine. Risotto and polenta are made from the rice and cornmeal cultivated on the lowlands. And highly valued wines and cheese come from the mountains of this beautiful region.



Emilia-Romagna, a combination of two regions, includes two well-known cities: Parma and Bologna. Each region has its own distinctive style. Emilia gets credit for lasagne, tortellini and Parmesan dishes. Romagna is known for the classic ragu sauce and the use of fish and olive oil. Emilia-Romagna exports the world's largest wheels of Parmesan cheese.

Liguria is the crescent-shaped region between the Alps and the Appennine Mountains and the Mediterranean—the Italian Riviera. The most traditional version of pesto sauce is from this region, which is densely cultivated with flowers, herbs and pine and olive groves. From the grapes grown at high altitudes come robust red wines, and from the seaside comes seafood delicacies such as Cioppino fish stew.

CENTRAL ITALY

Tuscany natives speak the dialect considered to be the proper Italian spoken throughout Italy. Florence, the capital of Tuscany, is filled with stunning Renaissance architecture and art collections. Its world-famous cuisine is noted for its classic simplicity and the purity of its fresh ingredients.

Marche, although not well known, is one of the more appealing regions of the peninsula, since its four major cities sit atop the pretty Appennine foothills. Subtle spicing is typical of the cuisine, with seafood stews being common. Peaches, apples, white truffles and giant green olives grow in this predictably mild climate.



Lazio is known for its capital, Rome. The cuisine is simple and similar to Tuscany's. Pasta is very popular in this region, with Rome boasting the birth of spaghetti carbonara. Rome is also one of the best places for pizza, baked in its traditional form with wood fires.

Umbria is a small region tucked between Lazio and Marche. The food found in Perugia, Assisi and Spoleto rivals the arts, opera, crafts and architecture that make these towns famous. Mountain streams provide delicious trout and carp, which are marinated and cooked with fresh herbs. Traditional pasta dishes are molded and served as timbales, which are sliced and often served cold.

SOUTHERN ITALY

Abruzzi, with its rugged mountains, sunny plateaus and rocky seacoast, borders the Adriatic Sea. The region is primarily agricultural. The high-quality wheat grown in this region makes some of the finest pastas of Italy. Olive oils are also of excellent quality and are used to fry the seafood that comes from coastal waters.

Molise has similar cuisine and geography to Abruzzi, although it is smaller in size. Fresh seafood and pasta, served with hot pepper and tomato sauce, dominate the cuisine.

Campania, with its densely populated cities, is one of the most fascinating regions of Italy. With a climate similar to California's, this region produces a huge variety of vegetables. The rich volcanic ash

from the volcano Vesuvius makes the great valley around Naples the most fertile region in the world for cultivating tomatoes.

Puglia, the "vegetable garden" of the country, is the region where the freshest greens, seafood and meats provide a stunning combination. Puglia is a long strip of land that forms its own peninsula, the "heel" of the Italian boot. In this region, foods are generally baked, fried, marinated or drizzled with olive oil.

Basilicata cuisine has a hint of exotic spices, due to the influence of its neighboring region, Calabria. Seafood, olive oil and tomatoes are commonly used. Strong, dark, chewy goat cheese can be found in animal shapes, with each town having its own shape.

Calabria, the "toe" of Italy, shares the Oriental heritage of Sicily. Lamb, game and seafood play a major role in the cuisine of Calabria, as do capozello and cervellata (head meat). Hot peppers are commonly used, too.

ITALIAN ISLANDS

Sicily, the island that's the southernmost region of Italy, has been colonized by Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Normans, Spaniards and Arabs. The island has preserved a little of each of these cultures. Couscous, saffron rice, eggplant and olive dishes, seafood and desserts of Sicily also can be found in several other Mediterranean countries.



Sardinia is the second biggest island of Italy. Although invaded and colonized over the centuries by the Spanish and others, it has preserved its independent culture, language and gastronomy. The basic foods of this island include fish, lamb and hard-wheat pastas. Shellfish is served as an appetizer, and grilled or fried fish is served with succulent tomato and wine sauces.