

Vitality + Vikings + Vittles

European Sabbatical 2017

Tuscookany

OCTOBER 25, 2017OCTOBER 26, 2017 / EUROSABBATICAL

Since our sabbatical had a focus on food (“Vittles”), Jill and I splurged a bit and enrolled in a seven-day cooking school at a villa in the hills of Tuscany called Tuscookany (www.tuscookany.com). The villa is set on a hilltop overlooking beautiful valleys. To get there we had to traverse a gravel road and then put the car in first gear for a twenty minute ascent on a narrow, though partially paved, path. Driving across one-vehicle bridges and past wild boar hunters, we wondered if someone would stop us and with an Italian accent say, “You ain’t from these parts are you boy?!”

At long last, an hour south of Florence, 30 minutes out of Arezzo, we arrived at the most splendid, beautiful villa we could have imagined. We, along with the nine other guests, got introduced over a wonderful four-course meal. Each of our five cooking days looked pretty similar: breakfast buffet, free-time for reading, hiking, or whatever. Lunch, followed by more free-time. Then at 3:00 we reported to class. The kitchen was once the stable of the villa. It had a long (20 foot) center table. We were divided into groups of 2-3 and each group was assigned a dinner course: appetizer, first course, main course, or dessert accompanied by digestives. The groups would make each of their courses plus things for lunch the next day, etc. Usually each team made about three items and each day the teams and courses would change. After cooking from 3:00 to 7:30, we would clean up and feast on our sumptuous meal from 8:00 on. Each course had a wine-pairing and transpired in a beautifully

appointed dining room with a magnificently set table. It was always a great way to finish out our day. Even though we'd been the cooks, we still felt incredibly spoiled.

Since so many have asked what it is we learned to cook (and, in some cases, learned to eat), here is just (!) a partial list:

homemade pasta, semolino gnocci, tiramisu, semifreddo with zabaione and vin santo, farmer cake with olive oil and rosemary, truffle risotto (from truffles we hunted on the villa grounds ourselves), white duck ragout, artichokes sformato, rack of lamb, eggplant pudding, monk fish medallions with pancetta, parmesan gelato, squash tart with pesto and onions, pan-fried sea bass with tomatoes, cantucci di prato, pasta e faioli, wood-fire pizza, homemade limoncello, and more. The tomato soup with parmesan gelato was a favorite combining both hot and cold in one dish.

The middle of the week we went on a field trip where we visited several places throughout the Tuscany area — first a place that served wild boar, followed by a villa and winery owned by a local psychiatrist (he named his excellent wine “psycho”), then a tiny olive oil mill where a family has been producing olive oil since 1421 (see pic with the guy hugging me), and finally a textile manufacturer.

Obviously, when we were cooking we worked closely together with one another (see the kitchen picture). Unfortunately, one of the guests had gotten a bad cold / flu on her trip to the villa and throughout the week her sickness spread to 9 of the 11 of us.

There were three doctors there as guests and they were interested in watching the rapid spread. On our free day we all sat around the pool and there was so much coughing and hacking going around the whole area it was like being in a TB sanitarium. Only myself and an ophthalmologist from L.A. survived unscathed. Tiger-blood, we claimed! Jill got it so badly that she was bedridden for a day and it's taken her a couple of weeks to shake it. Sad that people came all that way (from the US, Canada, and England), spent a fair bit of money, only to get so sick. On the other hand, we all bonded over the experience and even had some good laughs about our “plague.”

Overall we had a great time in a very relaxing setting. Never have we eaten so much in such a beautiful setting and, apart from the illness, we found it a very restful way to wind down from our European travels. And, yes, we will try to cook for some of you over the coming year!



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Uncategorized

One thought on “Tuscookany”

1. *Dorothy & Moose*

OCTOBER 26, 2017 AT 7:35 AM

The scenery is incredibly inviting & the pictures of the Italian dishes brings an anticipation for your cooking event....

Continued Blessings,
Dorothy & Moose

REPLY

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