



# Exploring Epicurean Italy

Eat—and learn about—delicious food and drinks in the country where the culinary tradition is of utmost importance

**BY BRENT CRANE** | ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED ON MARCH 25, 2020 | [MANSION GLOBAL](#)



*Vineyards in Italy's Chianti region at sunset.*

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There are few countries as consistently satisfying to the palate as Italy. Around every

corner throughout that boot-shaped land is a life-changing meal, a dish to write home about. And there would seem to be something for every kind of eater, whether vegan or carnivore, seafood lover, sweet tooth, or pasta hound. Then, of course, there are the liquid pleasures: the fernet, amaro, grappa, limoncello, and vino.

It would be a good idea, then, when planning a trip to Italy, to construct your itinerary with your mouth in mind. But if you want to dig a little deeper, and actually educate yourself on the food's provenance, its cultural meaning, and the lives of the people behind it, one definitely needs a guide.

Below are several such tours that bring the Italian culinary experience to life, providing travelers with not just the epicurean delights of Italy, but illuminating their significance.

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This much-loved boutique travel agency, with its focus on high arts such as classical music and fine dining, offers two culinary tours of Italy that are bound to please. With “Italy’s Gastronomic Heart,” travelers explore three cities—Bologna, Lucca, and Florence—across seven nights, alongside Italian food expert Valentina Harris, a writer, broadcaster, and chef. Highlights include a behind-the-scenes tour of Bologna’s famous Paolo Atti & Figli delicatessen and bakery, sampling liqueur and coffee from a monk-run distillery inside a 14th-century monastery, and wine tasting in the Chianti hills. On the 10-night-long “Wines of Sicily” tour, travelers are led across the Mediterrean island by British wine expert Tim Clarke.







Tortine Bolognese con le tagliatelle, an almond-based tart covered in pasta.

*Getty Images*

## Exodus Travels

On offer from this high-end tour operator is the newly launched, seven-night “Walking the Prosecco Hills,” an on-foot exploration of one of Italy’s best kept wine secrets. Just an hour north of Venice, nestled in the foothills of the Dolomites, the Prosecco Hills are entirely focused on the grapes that make up that famous sparkling wine, Prosecco. Keeping a home base at a four-star hotel, guests will walk along Prosecco Road, one of Italy’s most ancient wine routes, sampling local fare and plenty of bubbly. Visits to the medieval villages of Cison, Follina, and Asolo are also in the cards.

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## Tuscookany

Through this Tuscany-focused tour operator, one can lodge at Casa Ombuto, a Tuscan villa dating back to the 17th century. Perched on a hilltop within an 80-acre estate in the spectacular and wooded Casentino Valley, the villa provides cooking classes. Choose from the Italian Cooking Course or the Mediterranean Cooking Course, each a week long. And with a spa, sauna, massage area, hiking trails, and the small village of Poppi nearby, there are plenty of other things to do as well. Each evening includes a dinner comprised of your own handmade creations paired with regional wines.





Porcini mushroom ravioli being made in a school in Tuscany, Italy.

*Getty Images*

## Katie Parla

Nearly 20 years ago, not long after graduating from Yale University in the U.S. with a degree in art history, Katie Parla moved to Rome to launch a career as a travel writer. She has since written guidebooks for Fodor's, Time Out, and National Geographic, along with two cookbooks. Several of her small, private walking tours, each around three hours, centers on Roman cuisine—often focused around an area or market of the city, such as Centro Storico, Testaccio, or the Esquilino.

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## Salt & Wind

This boutique travel agency launched in 2015 by Food Network personality Aida Mollenkamp offers tours in three Italian locales: Milan, Florence, and Turin. The trip to the last city, located in the Piedmont region in northern Italy, was just launched in 2019. The area is rich in culinary significance, known for its red vermouth, grissini, espresso, and gianduja, the chocolate-hazelnut spread that Nutella popularized. And the region's truffles, mushrooms, chestnuts, and hazelnuts are among the most sought-after in the world. The seven-day "Sip Piedmont" guided tour includes cooking classes, market visits, and wine tastings.

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