

EUROPE

Il Salotto gets cooking in Bologna

By Matthew Wexler / November 23, 2016

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Tortelloni is made by hand at Il Salotto, according to the standards of the Accademia Italiana della Cucina. *Photo Credit: Matthew Wexler*



According to the World Travel & Tourism Council, nearly 49 million tourists visit Italy annually, many lured by its reputation as a coveted culinary destination. While that's great news for Italy, visitors -- especially in high-traffic destinations such as Venice, Naples and Milan -- may find themselves overrun by their fellow travelers.

Emilia-Romagna, a region north of Tuscany that spans from Piedmont and Liguria in the west to the shores of the Adriatic Sea, offers a respite for those seeking an authentic taste of Italian culture and history.

Visitors to Bologna, Emilia-Romagna's capital, will discover not only a plethora of regionally sourced ingredients but also the opportunity to learn firsthand some of the kitchen traditions passed down through the generations by way of Il Salotto di Penelope, a charming cooking school nestled on a quiet street in the city center.



The kitchen at Il Salotto di Penelope. Photo Credit: Matthew Wexler

Barbara Zaccagni and Valeria Hensemberger launched Il Salotto di Penelope, which loosely translates to "Penelope's living room," in 2012. (There is no namesake; they simply found the name charming.) The intention was to create a welcoming space where guests would feel at home while learning the core principles of Emilia-Romagna cuisine in a professional kitchen.

Participants can immerse themselves in three of the classics: tagliatelle, tortelloni and ragu alla Bolognese sauce.

Made by hand, tagliatelle and tortelloni are made from all-purpose flour, semolina (the hard part of durum wheat grain) and egg. With a bit of elbow grease, participants roll the dough into a thin sheet. You won't find a pasta crank or an electric pasta machine within sight. Per the exacting records of the Accademia Italiana della Cucina, tagliatelle is cut to a width of 8 millimeters.

The ragu is equally as meticulous, beginning with a saute of carrot, onion and celery and finished with ground pork and beef, wine and milk.

For the tortelloni, pasta sheets are cut into squares then filled with a combination of ricotta, Parmigiano-Reggiano and parsley, which are folded with delicate precision into the shape of a bishop's hat.

The class concludes with an abundant meal and free-flowing wine. Zaccagni and Hensemberger emphasize the importance of regional identity and also offer guided tours of the Mercato della Terra (Bologna Earth Market), a market organized by Slow Food, an international movement to preserve traditional and regional cuisine.

Il Salotto offers a 10% commission to agents. See www.ilsalottodipenelope.it.



Tagliatelle is one of the traditional dishes students learn to make at Il Salotto di Penelope cooking school in Bologna, run by Barbara Zaccagni and Valeria Hensemberger.
Photo Credit: Matthew Wexler

