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After all, this is the origin of the word "ritzy." — Johnny Oleksinski
The authors were guests of the hotels.

CIAO DOWN IN ITALY

True foodies should put underrated Modena on their bucket lists

By JENNIFER CEASER

OVERSHADOWED by powerhouse destinations like Rome and Florence, Modena flies under most travelers' radars. But given that this northern city is the birthplace of many Italian icons — from balsamic vinegar to Ferrari and Maserati cars to famed tenor Luciano Pavarotti — there's no shortage of cultural and culinary riches to discover. Thanks to its star turn in the most recent season of comedian Aziz Ansari's Netflix show, "Master of None," Modena is beginning to see some recognition. With picturesque cobblestone streets and many culinary delights, the UNESCO World Heritage site is ripe for discovery. Here's some of the best Modena — and its home region, Emilia-Romagna — has to offer.

To start, there's a four-month-long waiting list to taste Massimo Bottura's modern riff on traditional regional cuisine at the three-Michelin-starred Osteria Francescana (OsteriaFrancescana.it), ranked number two on the World's 50 Best Restaurants list. Just a dozen tables are set among three hushed, elegant dining rooms, each boasting top-tier art from Bottura's personal collection. Seasonal tasting menus start at \$260 for nine courses, not including wine. For a wallet-friendly meal, head to Boutique del Tortellino (Via Scarpa, 9; no Web site) for a takeaway cup of homemade tortellini, stuffed with pork and parmesan cheese and swimming in a rich, meaty broth (\$8.25). Owner Luca

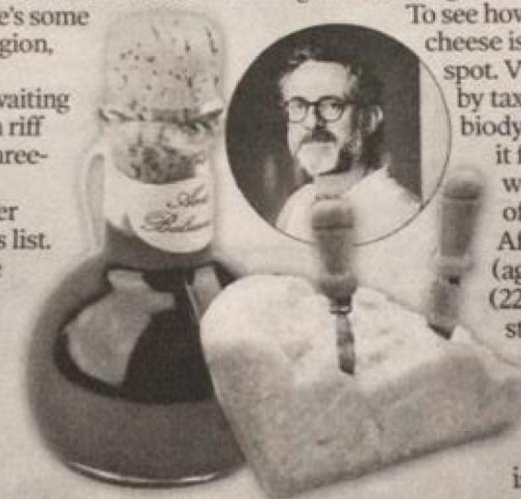
dall'Olio makes several varieties fresh each day; in fact, this is the place where Ansari's character, Dev, learns to make pasta.

Find out what goes into Modena's prized balsamic vinegar at Acetaia Villa Bianca (AcetaiaVillaBianca.com), a beautiful countryside estate where the venerable condiment has been produced by hand for six generations. Led by the property's current scion, dapper Emilio Biancardi, the tour takes visitors through the vineyards, whose Trebbiano grapes are used in the production of the vinegar, and into the barrel room, where the precious liquid is aged. Finish with tastings of wonderfully rich 12- and 25-year-old samples in the family's grand drawing room.

To see how the region's noble Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese is made, Bio Hombre (Hombre.it) hits the spot. Visit the idyllic farm, about 20 minutes by taxi from central Modena, to observe its biodynamic cheesemaking process. Follow it from cows at pasture to the ripening warehouse, where thousands of wheels of cheese are stacked floor to ceiling. Afterwards, sample the cheeses: fresco (aged 12 to 14 months), classic stagionato (22 to 24 months) and the intensely flavorful stravecchio (more than 30 months).

Modena is lacking in luxury and boutique hotels — one sure sign of its relatively few foreigners — but the four-star Best Western Premier Milano Palace is perfectly serviceable, with a small spa and a location just outside the historic city center (from \$150; MilanoPalaceHotel.it).

The author was a guest of the Emilia-Romagna tourism board.



Modena's local bounty includes balsamic vinegar, Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese and top chef Massimo Bottura.

Alamy, Paul Shio; Paolo Terz

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