

Food Travels in Italy

By Barbara Radcliffe and Stillman Rogers

Most travelers to Italy remember the flavors of dinner in that little village trattoria long after details of the Grand Canal and Leaning Tower have faded from memory. For foodies, Italy is pure paradise, and even those whose lives don't revolve around the table find themselves swept up in the Italians' passion for food.

Indulge the inner foodie in your clients by leading them to the regions where Italy's most famous delicacies are grown or produced (think Gorgonzola, Parmesan, Neapolitan pizza, Parma ham and Modena balsamic) and markets brimming with the freshest seafood and just-picked fruits and vegetables. They'll mingle in the markets with chefs who can turn those prime ingredients into a meal they will savor that night in a local restaurant or osteria.

New in the Piedmont

Food makes a good theme for exploring almost any part of Italy. Whether your clients are looking for a tour with like-minded people or are FITs seeking advice for their own foodie trip, you can make sure they find the best of Italy's food and wine experiences. While no one region has a monopoly on gastronomic traditions, none has a greater concentration of food and wine attractions than the Piedmont, in northwest Italy around Turin. Home to the exceptional Barolo and Barbaresco wines, hazelnuts, Nutella and precious white truffles, the Piemonte is also the headquarters of the Slow Food movement.

In April, **Perillo Tours** (www.perillotours.com) and Slow Food Italia launched a new set of culinary and cultural tours in Piedmont and the nearby Italian Riviera. These 12-day tours include unique opportunities to sample high-quality, traditional foods and wines; featuring visits to wineries, bakeries, confectioners, farms and markets for tastings of wines, sheep-milk cheeses, wedding-cake-shaped Montébore cheese, typical grissini (breadsticks), Baci di Cherasco chocolates and the Riviera's acclaimed Monterosso al Mare anchovies.

Meals are at Slow Food-recommended restaurants, and a cooking lesson followed by dinner focuses on regional cuisine.



Savory snack

The tours can also be booked as individual trips.

Suggest that FIT clients travel to the Piedmont in the late fall for the rarest harvest on earth—the famed white truffles of Alba—and the gastronomic extravaganza of the White Truffle Fair. Here the colorful and often flamboyant trifolai (truffle hunters) sell their precious “white diamonds” to chefs, who pay hundreds of dollars just to add a few parchment-thin shavings to a signature dish. Amid the truffle-mania, regional cheese-makers offer generous chunks of Gorgonzola and tangy Chevrin, butchers coax passersby to sample salami and prosciutto from nearby Bra, and confectioners urge samples of hazelnut cake from Cortemilia and fat Piedmont hazelnuts in rich dark chocolate. For a one-of-a-kind experience, book clients a private truffle hunt at the tiny (but grandly named) University of Truffle Hunting Dogs in Roddi, south of Alba (www.universitadeicanidatartufo.it).

Mark Your Calendar

FIT clients will appreciate knowing about food and wine festivals, a good way to sample local specialties, from polenta to snails. These often include markets or expositions that showcase or sell many more foods than the one being celebrated. Local cheese makers, bakers, olive presses, wineries and confectioners will likely have booths offering samples.

Food festivals are so frequent in Italy that it's almost impossible to avoid them—from early spring celebrations of asparagus or artichokes to November fairs featuring cinghiale (wild boar). Wines, too, are celebrated, and each region has its strada del vino (wine trail). The first of these was in the Veneto, where today there are more than 20 DOC wine zones. Near

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