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50

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ENTERTAINING

Gorgeous table settings

SIMPLE RECIPES FOR FAMILY FEASTS

INSPIRATION FOR 2011

- PLANNING A KITCHEN ISLAND
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- LEARNING TO COOK IN ITALY

A sparkling Christmas

The magic of fairy lights...

RECALL: 05/01/11

Cooking in... **ITALY**

The rich cultural heritage of this country makes it the perfect destination for soaking up Italian culture and discovering the secrets of its world-famous cuisine

Italy may be known for its Renaissance art and the greatness that was the Roman Empire, but hearty and colourful cuisine has been a theme of its culture throughout its long history. Italians enjoy sharing their rich culinary heritage with friends and family and that philosophy is still in evidence today, from the rolling hills of Tuscany to the verdant terrain of Le Marche and the Mediterranean scrubland of the country's southern heel.

Local specialities from various regions (not until 1861 did Italy's city states finally achieve unification) and a wealth of culinary influences underpin Italian food. These are not just home-grown ones but also those from early Greek colonists as well as Arab and

Byzantine traditions. Whatever the provenance of an Italian dish as we know it today, the principle of fresh seasonal cooking lies behind it.

Italy is an ideal destination to hone your culinary skills alongside friendly chefs happy to impart their expert knowledge. With so many idyllic settings to choose from, whether coastal resorts or rural retreats, you can combine your cooking lessons with visits to nearby villages and cities as well as exploring the nearby landscape and culture. At bolt holes from grand villas to rustic Puglian trulli you can indulge your senses along with your appetite. As a frequently quoted Italian proverb maintains, "A tavola non si invecchia" ("At the table no-one grows old").

The landscape of Italy is as enticing as the food and wines produced there.



One of the specialties at Masseria, with its beautiful pool (this picture) and sweeping palm-lined vistas to the Adriatic (far left), is orecchiette (left) – a traditional pasta in Puglia.



Produce arrives fresh from Masseria's kitchen garden daily.

The fruits of your labour (left) can be eaten in the bougainvillea clad garden.



Seghetti Panichi is set in beautiful gardens – to admire or eat in (below).



WHERE TO GO

BORGO STORICO SEGHETTI PANICHI
Via San Pancrazio 1, 63031 Castel di Lama,
Ascoli Piceno, Le Marche, Italy, 0039 0736 812
552, seghettipanichi.it. From £611 for two nights
in junior suite, one-day class, meals and wine.

Italy's most unspoiled region offers hidden treasures. Just ten kilometres from the beautiful Adriatic coast, this country home, dating back to 1600, is a peaceful haven enclosed by a botanic garden and views of the Sibillini mountains. Classes are held in the former crypt of the estate, and the kitchen garden provides most of the ingredients, supplemented by local farms. The Marchigiani take their food seriously; the emphasis is on funghi, game, nuts, field herbs and truffles. You'll learn how to fashion these into brodetto (fish stew), vincisgrassi pasta and grilled meats. The owners tailor each class to your needs, offering the generous hospitality of a welcoming family home, where elegant spaces provide tranquillity and each suite is furnished with carefully chosen antiques. A walk round the grounds reveals exotic palms and terraced citrus trees typical of the regional landscape, fully stocked orchards and a large pool to relax by. There's plenty to see in nearby villages, but the gentle pace at this estate is so seductive you may never want to leave.

DON'T MISS The beautiful city of Ascoli Piceno, eight kilometres away. Known as the travertine city, its origins date back to the 6th century BC.

MASSERIA TORRE COCCARO
C. da Coccaro 8, 72015 Savelletri di Fasano,
Brindisi, Puglia, Italy, 0039 0804 829310,
masseriatorrecoccaro.com. From £118 per
person per night based on two people sharing;
classes £70 per day including lunch.

Surrounded by olive groves and orange trees, this 16th-century Puglian bolt hole, close to the Adriatic, prides itself on a zero-kilometre policy on food. Under the direction of owner Vittorio Moretti the garden of this former fortified watchtower produces fruit, herbs and vegetables, while his own fishing boats trawl for daily delicacies. Cooking classes, in a converted stable, start with a morning visit to the market in Monopoli and a walk around the estate to source ingredients. You'll cook typical Puglian dishes including orecchiette pasta, fish soup and meat dishes; you can also learn how to make mozzarella and create wood-oven pizzas, before relaxing on the veranda over lunch. The restaurant menu offers inventive dishes including tartare of Gallipoli violet shrimps marinated on a bed of buffalo mozzarella. Walk to the local beach where the hotel will prepare a fish supper for you al fresco, relax in the Aveda spa or unwind in the elegant interiors complete with haylofts, original fireplaces and a 17th-century chapel.

DON'T MISS: The nearby town of Alberobello to see *trulli* (whitewashed circular dwellings typical of the area) or the coastal village of Savelletri. ►

L'ANDANA

Tenuta La Badiola, Località Badiola, 58043 Castiglione della Pescaia, Grosseto, Tuscany, Italy, 0039 0564 944800, andana.it. From £240 per night for two people sharing; morning class from £149, including lunch.

This Tuscan hunting lodge is infused with a Provençal feel thanks to French chef-at-large, Alain Ducasse. Located in the wilds of the Maremma and a few kilometres away from the Tyrrhenian coast, this vast estate boasts its own vineyard, herb garden, landscaped grounds and Michelin-starred restaurant housed in an ancient granary. It's an inspiring setting in which to hone your pasta-making skills and classes take place in an intimate kitchen in the main villa. Under the expert eye of a resident chef, you'll be able to make typical Tuscan treats such as tortelli stuffed with Swiss chard and ricotta, and desserts including a decadent chocolate fondant cake. Even if your culinary skills don't quite match up to the exacting standards of the Michelin-trained team, enjoying the fruits of your labour over lunch amid the rolling landscape will make the experience sublime. **DON'T MISS** Excellent wines, produced here and at the villa's sister vineyard, Petra. There's also a luxury spa, offering a host of relaxing treatments.

GETTING THERE

■ **When to go** March to October offers a warm climate. Avoid high summer if you want to escape the heat and crowds.

■ **Flights** Ryanair, ryanair.com, flies from London Stansted to Ancona and Pescara (Le Marche) from around £29 each way and Bari and Brindisi (Puglia) from £32 each way. Easyjet, easyjet.com, flies from London Gatwick to Pisa (Tuscany) from around £40 each way.

■ **Getting around** Hiring a car is the best way to explore Italy's regions. Book online with Hertz, hertz.co.uk, or contact a local company via your hotel.

■ **Package** Scott Dunn, 020 8682 5080, scottdunn.com, offers seven nights on a b&b basis at L'Andana, Tuscany, including British Airways scheduled flights from London to Pisa and a hire car, from around £2,600 per person based on two adults sharing.



L'Andana (this page) boasts its own vineyard and chapel, and the restaurant is Michelin-starred.



Hare (*coniglio*) in Chianti is a regional Tuscan dish.





At Ballymaloe students select fresh herbs from the garden.



Nick Nairn inspires a keen student at his cook school.



Chefs at La Bastide de Moustiers in the foothills of the Alps are trained by the renowned Alain Ducasse.



After your culinary masterclass at Villa Kennedy relax in the JFK Bar.

EUROPE'S FINEST *H&G rounds up the best of the rest...*

BALLYMALOE COOKERY SCHOOL

Shanagarry, County Cork, Ireland, 00353 21 4646 785, ballymaloe.ie.

Located on its own organic farm, Ballymaloe Cookery School's informal classes run by Darina Allen focus on sustainability and seasonality. Tutorials range from short home cooking courses to a 12-week masterclass. Stay at Ballymaloe House or in a self-catering cottage on the estate. Courses from £78, cottages from £39 per night including breakfast.

LA BASTIDE DE MOUSTIERS

Chemin de Quinson, 04360, Moustiers-Sainte-Marie, France, 0033 4 92 70 47 47, bastide-moustiers.com.

Hone your cooking skills among scented lavender, vegetable gardens and olive groves. Here you can cook under an expert team trained by Alain Ducasse, explore the nearby town of Moustiers-Sainte-Marie by bike or enjoy a picnic in Mediterranean parkland. Courses from £131, double rooms from £200 per night including breakfast.

CAP ROCAT

Carretera d'Enderrocat s/n, 07609, Cala Blava, Mallorca, 0034 971 74 78 78, caprocat.com.

This 19th-century military fortress on the bay of Palma has been transformed into a haven of laid-back luxury. Head to the local market with chef Victor Garcia to choose all the ingredients for a typical Mallorcan lunch, before feasting on the results at lunch overlooking the coast. Courses from £174, double rooms start at £392 per night including breakfast.

GRAND HOTEL LES TROIS ROIS

Blumenrain 8, 4001, Basel, Switzerland, 0041 61 260 50 50, lestroisrois.com.

One of the oldest grand hotels in Europe, this is the perfect place in which to revive

the art of cocktail hour by sharpening up your skills on a bar-mixing course. If chocolate is your passion, pastry chef Richard Oser will teach you how to create sublime pralines and chocolate eggs. Courses from £135, double rooms start at £230 including breakfast.

JNANE TAMRNA

Douar Abiad, La Palmeraie, Marrakech, Morocco, 00212 524 32 84 84, jnanetamsna.com.

Experience the vibrant souks and exotic architecture of this ancient fortified city from this discreet boutique hotel 15 minutes from the walls of the old medina. You'll create dishes including classic chicken tagine with preserved lemons, or Moroccan desserts from cinnamon oranges to apple briouats. There is also an excellent vegetarian course here. Day courses from £44 per person, double rooms start at £218 per night including breakfast.

LE MANOIR AUX QUAT' SAISONS

Church Road, Great Milton, Oxford OX44 7PD, 01844 278881, manoir.com.

Try cooking a seasonal dinner party in the legendary kitchens of Raymond Blanc's two-Michelin-starred restaurant in this historic English country house set in lavender-scented grounds. You'll be taught simple recipes, from Swiss chard tarts to the perfect chicken stock. £325 per person for a one-day course, including an informal lunch and afternoon tea.

NICK NAIRN COOK SCHOOL

Port of Menteith, Stirling FK8 3JZ, Scotland, 01877 389900, nicknairncookschool.com.

Located in the breathtaking setting of Scotland's Trossachs, this is an inspiring place to extend your cooking repertoire. Acclaimed chef Nick Nairn's school offers

courses that cover every cuisine from Indian to Spanish. Day courses with Nick Nairn start at £295 per person.

PESTANA PALACE

Rua Jau 54, 1300-314, Lisbon, Portugal, 00351 21 361 56 00, pestana.com.

Combine the culture of Lisbon with the grandeur of a country estate at this beautifully restored 19th-century palace. Typical Portuguese food is the forte here, and the sweet-toothed will love the pastry class in which you can discover the history of chocolate as well as make your own sweet treats. Courses from £52, double rooms start at £157 per night.

THYME AT SOUTHPROP

Southrop Manor, Southrop, Gloucestershire GL7 3NX, 01367 850174, thymeatsouthrop.co.uk.

At this Cotswold estate classes focus on the story of food, from sourcing and production to the pleasure of serving, eating and drinking. Day courses, which include Sowing and Growing and The Art of the Table, take place in sleek Bulthaup kitchens. Unwind afterwards with a stay in a luxurious adjoining cottage. Courses from £165, cottages from £120 per night based on two sharing.

VILLA KENNEDY

Kennedyallee 70, 60596, Frankfurt, Germany, 0049 69 7171 20, villakennedy.com.

In the heart of Frankfurt, this traditional European villa prides itself on fine dining with an emphasis on Mediterranean cuisine. Combine a trip to the bustling city with a masterclass focusing on main courses or desserts, before relaxing with a cocktail in the JFK bar. Courses from £43 per person, double rooms start at £218 per night including breakfast. ■