



LA QUERCIA ESTATE

South of Florence, on a 20-acre property, the Cooking Studio at La Quercia Estate focuses on Tuscan dishes.

Getting Schooled In Italian Cooking

The first thing I learned to cook after moving to Italy in 2007 was pesto Genovese, blending fragrant basil with pine nuts, olive oil, cheese and salt in the kitchen of a complete stranger. I'd tagged along with a neighbor to a cooking class organized by the International Women's Club of La Spezia, which was led by a local with an astoundingly vast collection of mortai, the marble mortars in which pesto is traditionally made. The final dish, lasagne al pesto, was among the most delicious things I had ever made — or tasted. Travelers to Italy seeking a similar experience will find an overwhelming number of cooking classes offered across the country. You don't have to commit a solid week of your vacation to learning the secrets of Italian cooking. There are plenty of classes that demand only a few hours of your time. Here are five. *INGRID K. WILLIAMS*



Students at Felsina Culinaria enjoying a meal they prepared; and tagliatelle with Bolognese ragù.

Bowled Over in Bologna

On a hilltop overlooking Bologna, Felsina Culinaria is a cooking school in a former hunting lodge where, for the past two years, Bianca Cavazza has been teaching tourists from around the world to prepare Bolognese classics like tiny tortellini and traditional friggione (stewed onions and tomatoes) with a little help from her husband, Antonio, and son, Luca Bazzoni.

"I had classmates in school who I think were friends with me just so they could try my mother's cooking," Luca Bazzoni said, and now, "people are coming from L.A. and Seoul to this little town, Castel San Pietro Terme, to try her cooking."



ABOVE AND LEFT: MATTEO DE MAYDA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

In a departure from the typical cooking class model, where the price is per class and dishes may vary according to the season, Ms. Cavazza offers an à la carte menu from which students can choose which dishes they'd like to learn to cook, from ragù alla Bolognese (€55 per person, or about \$65) to wild boar stew with polenta (€105). There's also pumpkin tortelloni (€89), lasagna Bolognese with green pasta and ragù (€98), and balanzoni (large tortellini-like pasta) filled with ricotta and mortadella (€85), as well as prix-fixe packages that include a couple of recipes with wine (from €159). *Private cooking lesson: Prices vary.*



A master pizza maker teaching the basics; and a calzone, baked in a wood-fired oven.

Slinging Pizza in Naples

The nonprofit Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana, or the True Neapolitan Pizza Association, has been training aspiring pizzaioli from around the world since 1984. Ten years ago, the professional school added an offering geared toward tourists looking to up their pizza-making game at home, called Pizzaiolo Napoletano per un Giorno (Neapolitan Pizza Maker for a Day).

"It's a very practical experience during which everyone can learn more about Neapolitan pizza and can try to repeat at home," said Gianluca Liccardo, the marketing manager.

Three-hour group classes of up to 10 students are held in a professional kitchen at the school.



LEFT AND ABOVE: EMANUELE DI CESARE

Led by master pizzaioli, students are taught how to mix four basic ingredients — flour, water, yeast and salt — into a smooth dough, and the rules for proper leavening. Since it takes hours to rise, leavened dough is prepared in advance so the class can practice stretching and shaping the dough with traditional Neapolitan techniques before adding toppings and cooking the pizza in the oven for 60 to 90 seconds.

Then comes the best part of the class: sampling a warm Margherita pie in the very city from which modern pizza hails.

Group pizza-making lesson and tasting, including nonalcoholic drinks: €94 for adults, €49 for children (5 to 14 years old).



Veronica Clemente showing how to make tomato sauce; and bruschettine with cherry tomatoes.



LA QUERCIA ESTATE

Family-Style in Tuscany

The former art studio of Francesco Clemente, a contemporary Italian painter, is today the Cooking Studio at La Quercia Estate, a 20-acre property in the Tuscan hills south of Florence.

"The property itself dates back to the 17th century," said Margherita Leosco, Mr. Clemente's granddaughter, who now runs the estate with her mother, Veronica Clemente.

In addition to the cottage where cooking classes are held, there's also a rental villa, olive groves, a small vineyard, a kitchen garden and chickens that provide many of the ingredients.

"Everything that we ate that day was either from their land or picked up from a farmer that they have a relationship with," said Niki Griggs, a Chicago native who took a class in May with

her husband, Cade, while honeymooning in Florence.

On the menu that day, she said, was focaccia baked with sage and a fava bean salad with fresh Pecorino and mint from the garden. Pasta dough was made from scratch and kneaded, then cut with a special instrument into spaghetti alla chitarra, and paired with a simple tomato sauce. Before lunch, the group, which included another American couple, was served an aperitivo of the estate's own white wine. "They left room for us to mingle and have conversation and just be natural about the whole process," she said.

Group cooking lesson with a four-course lunch, including wine: €250 per person.



Gioia Tiozzo, the founder of Accademia di Cucina Italiana; and tagliatelle with seafood sauce.



MATTEO DE MAYDA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Vegan (or Gluten-free) in Venice

The idea for Accademia di Cucina Italiana began 11 years ago when Gioia Tiozzo wanted to improve her English and decided to invite visitors into her apartment in Venice's Dorsoduro district for cooking lessons.

A trained psychologist with a specialization in nutrition, Ms. Tiozzo offers private classes that can be tailored to dietary needs.

"I can organize any kind of classes, even if people have diet restrictions, especially those who follow a gluten-free diet but still want to enjoy a pasta class," she said. "And I have an increasing number of people who want a vegan class."

The three-hour classes begin with cappuccino and Venetian cookies in her apartment while the

menu is decided.

"It's usually something related to the seasonal produce," she said. "In the Veneto area, we are very well known for the way we cook rice," so often there will be a traditional Venetian fish risotto.

"I can also share everything I know about my city," she said. "I was born in Venice, I'm from a Venetian family, so if someone has a question about the city, I have the answer." And that's a rare ingredient in a place that often feels populated solely by tourists.

Private cooking lesson with lunch, including wine: €200 per person.



After taking Italian cooking classes, left, making a favorite like cannoli, right, should be easier.



ATL TEAM

On the Farm in Sicily

Anna Tasca Lanza began offering cooking classes at her family villa in rural Sicily, an hour-and-a-half drive southeast of Palermo, in the late 1980s, at a time when many Americans knew little about the island beyond "The Godfather" movies.

"The idea we always had, my mother and I, was to establish a relationship between farming and cooking," said Fabrizia Lanza, who took over the school before her mother died in 2010.

Dedicated to Sicilian ingredients and family recipes, the school is on a small farm where, Ms. Lanza said, "we produce nearly everything we eat." There's Swiss chard, lettuces and artichokes from the garden, farm-raised pork and tomato paste dried beneath the Sicilian sun. Overnight guests often stay (and eat and cook) for several days, but the school also offers lunch lessons, a four-hour cooking class of up to 12 participants that concludes with a family-style, four-course meal at the kitchen table.

Typical recipes might include an appetizer of panelle (chickpea fritters), bruschette or fried sage, followed by a pasta course.

"It could be homemade pasta such as cavatelli or busiate, which is a type of pasta from the area around Trapani," Ms. Lanza said. "Or we could make timballo, a big cake of pasta, with anelletti, which is a very typical Sicilian type of pasta made in the shape of a small ring."

The second course might be meat or fish, maybe sardines, mackerel or whatever the fishmonger happens to have that day. And for dessert, it's often classic cannoli with ricotta cream, or marzipan-covered cassata, but, she said, "we could also have more local desserts such as cassatelle, which is a little raviolo deep fried and stuffed with ricotta."

Group cooking lesson with a four-course lunch, including wine: €230 per person.