



Roman

BY MEAGHAN

“Did you know,” my friend asks when I tell him that I am writing an article on traditional fare of Italy, “that Rome is the reason I don’t eat meat anymore?”

At first, I think he’s joking—but upon hearing his tale, I briefly consider going veggie myself. On his first visit to the Eternal City, he stopped at an off-the-beaten-path *trattoria* and innocently ordered something the menu translated as “mixed meat.” But the servers brought to his table an immense bowl of broth in which floated—he swears—a lamb’s head, a goat’s leg with the hoof still attached, and an *entire* frog, among other assorted animal parts. The elderly proprietor even came out from the kitchen to meet the brave tourist who wanted to sample what was obviously not the menu’s most popular item.

I share this story not to scare off would-be travelers (and food lovers) to Rome, but simply to illustrate the range of Italian cuisine that goes worlds beyond pizza and pasta. Thanks to a long, eventful history and the recent unification of its many disparate regions, Italy’s cuisine is in fact as varied and glorious as its landscape. Rome, a cosmopolitan capital that offers more varied and international dining options than perhaps any other Italian city, has managed to preserve a distinct culinary legacy all its own. Although some of the more hard-core, old-school Roman dishes might indeed seem geared more toward gladiator than gourmand, vegetarians, take note: The wide assortment of this city’s unique recipes guarantees appealing dishes for every palate.

Holiday

Come take a taste of al

MULHOLLAND

Not long after moving to Italy, I found myself increasingly involved in discussions about food. Topics like where to find the most exquisite pastries, which fruits were currently in season, and whether oregano should *ever* be added to tomato sauce took



The Colosseum

on a whole new significance to my life. Never before had I witnessed a roomful of sophisticated dinner-party guests arguing about ice cream flavors, but such episodes soon became commonplace—and I grew accustomed to the typical Monday morning banter centering less around what one had done over the weekend than on what one had cooked and where one had dined. In this land of epicurean pleasures, one learns quickly that food isn’t just for *eating*—it’s for seeing, smelling, touching and talking about, as important a part of the history and culture as the boundless artifacts and archaeological treasures.

LUCA TROVATOGETTY IMAGES

Though the city itself was influenced by a vast succession of rulers, traditional Roman cooking has its roots in the poorer neighborhoods, where little

all the Eternal City has to offer.

changed over the centuries and people made do with what ingredients were available. These rustic and deceptively simple dishes, still available on most authentic restaurant menus, use local vegetables such as *cicoria* (chicory) and *agretti* (similar to spinach) and rely heavily on the *quinto quarto*, or "fifth quarter"—spare animal parts such as brains and innards, left over when the best cuts of meat had been sold.

Both modern hub and ancient relic, Rome displays a unique juxtaposition of past and present in everything from graffiti-splattered Egyptian obelisks rising in the midst of morning traffic to impeccably dressed urbanites smoking cigarettes in the shadow of the Colosseum. A sampling of the city's lesser-known culinary treasures, from delicious golden-fried zucchini flowers to the hearty *coda alla vaccinara* (oxtail stew), will give the visitor a taste of Rome that is worlds away from the pizza and pasta of typical tourist menus.

You don't have to endure an extreme culinary adventure like my friend did in order to experience bona fide *cucina romana*. The key to getting the

most from your Roman holiday is in knowing what to order, and where. Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

Anyone who has spent time in Italy knows that the most memorable meals are often to be had in unexpected places, like that tiny back-alley *osteria* with paper tablecloths and the menu comprising whatever the chef felt like making that night. You'd be wise to avoid overpriced eateries near popular landmarks and seek out tried-and-true (if perhaps less aesthetically pleasing) establishments in neighborhoods such as **Testaccio**. This traditionally working-class area is a bastion of alleged *romani di Roma* (families going back at least six generations) and also of old school Roman cooking.

Da Felice (29 Via Mastro Giorgio, 06/574-6800) is a favorite among the aforementioned Testaccio locals for classics such as *coda alla vaccinara*, thick and tender oxtail stewed with celery and tomatoes. Enjoy a bottle of wine from the *Castelli Romani* hill towns and then

head to nearby Monte Testaccio, the city's biggest area for clubs and nightlife.

Augustarello (98 Via Giovanni Branca, 06/574-6585), another Testaccio haunt with a reputation for authenticity, serves up *animelle* (grilled sweetbreads) and *pajata*, a signature delicacy of seasoned and lightly fried lamb's (or calf's) intestines with the mother's milk still congealed inside. If such a visceral dining experience seems a bit over the top for your tastes, you can always try one of the excellent pasta dishes, such as *carbonara*—rigatoni tossed with egg yolk, *pecorino* cheese, *pancetta* and freshly ground black pepper.

Across the Tiber from Testaccio is the hip **Trastevere** neighborhood, where you can wander the enchanting (if crowded) medieval streets and learn more about local traditions at the **Museo di Roma**

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Penthouse view from the Rome Cavalieri Hilton



WHEN IN ROME...

At the deluxe **Rome Cavalieri Hilton** (Via Alberto Cadlolo 101; +39 06/35091; www.cavalieri-hilton.com; standard double, 240–590 euros), the idyllic 15-acre park setting will make you think you're on a resort-style retreat—yet sightseeing in the Eternal City's center is just a short complimentary shuttle ride away. Odds are, you'll be perfectly comfortable staying where you are, though—enjoying the stunning views, indulgent amenities and unparalleled cuisine at one of Rome's best restaurants, La Pergola, awarded three Michelin stars.

For those seeking a truly distinctive, designer experience, **Lungarno Portrait Suites** (23 Via Bocca di Leone; +39 06/693-80742; www.lungarno-hotels.com; standard double from 330 euros) is the latest specialty hotel from the fashion-house Ferragamo family. These 14 unique, elegantly appointed suites and studios offer a central location near the Spanish Steps, along with a luxurious respite from the bustling city with gorgeous roof terrace and exceptional hospitality services.

An increasingly popular alternative to hotel stays in Rome is an **apartment rental**—comfortable, functional and cheaper lodging that allows you to truly feel like a local. There are scores to be found in Trastevere or Testaccio; try www.roma.city-apartments.it or www.reallyrome.com.

The Rome Cavalieri Hilton



GETTING THERE

Daily nonstop flights to Rome, Italy, are available on United Airlines from Washington Dulles International Airport.

(Piazza Sant'Egidio, 06/820-59127). Be sure to check out **Ai Marmi** (53 Viale Trastevere, 06/580-0919), also affectionately called "the morgue" for its marble-slab tables. Here, Romans and tourists alike line up for pizza and *suppli' al telefono*—mozzarella-filled rice balls that, when warm and melting, can be stretched apart to resemble two ends of a telephone connected by a thin line of cheese.

Romolo (Via di Porta di Settimiana 8, 06/581-8284), also in Trastevere, has long been relied on for time-tested favorites like *trippa alla romana*, tripe with mint in a zesty tomato sauce. In the charming courtyard garden, you can contemplate the romance of the Italian master Raffaello and his model/muse La Fornarina, who is rumored to have lived here, while being crooned to by strolling musicians.

If a good Italian meal should involve every sense, Romans truly celebrate the total-immersion experience with dishes such as veal *saltimbocca* (literally, "jump in the mouth"), thin-sliced cutlets cooked in butter and white wine with slices of *prosciutto* and sage, and lamb *alla scottadito* ("burn your finger") chops to be eaten with the hands, straight off the grill. Both can be found at **Matricianella** (4 Via del Leone, 06/683-2100), called by Italians "the best value" in the historic city center and hailed by a Roman friend as "one of the few remaining authentic trattorie." It's surprisingly affordable, given its location near the Spanish Steps.

Another historic area known for cooking descended from the 2,000-year-old Roman-Jewish tradition is **the Ghetto**, or Jewish quarter. **Piperno** (9 Monte dei Cenci 06/688-

Roman Forum



06629) is considered the best place for *carciofi alla giudia*, succulent artichokes fried whole, making each petal golden-crisp. Also not to be missed are the *fiori di zucca ripieni e fritti*—fried zucchini flowers stuffed with anchovies and mozzarella. Round out the salty goodness with some sweet ricotta cheesecake, studded with chocolate chips. Pastries from the Ghetto are justly famous throughout the city.

When you're ready to eat again (it may take a while), slip down a narrow side street and climb a short flight of stairs to the quaint, wood-beamed dining room of **Al Pompiere** (38 Via Santa Maria dei Calderari, 06/686-8377), which gazes down on the Piazza delle Cinque Scole. The pleasant, informal atmosphere is enhanced by consistently good food, with rustic fare served on simple white plates. The menu even pays tribute to Apicius, the first celebrity chef of ancient Rome, with a take on his recipe for beef and citron stew.



Vittorio Emanuele Monument, Piazza Venezia

Near the glorious Campo de' Fiori marketplace is **Filetti di baccala** (88 Largo dei Librari, 06/686-4018), a local institution hailed for its namesake: battered, deep-fried salt cod fillets. The atmosphere is light and casual, and the flaky fillets are served wrapped in newspaper—the Italian version of fish and chips. Earlier-than-normal operating hours are worth noting if you're still on that American dinner-at-six schedule.

Hidden holes-in-the-wall can certainly provide excellent meals, but authentic dining isn't only to be had in out-of-the-way places. One shouldn't forget that in Italy, *la bella figura* (essentially, a good public image) is of utmost importance, and Italians love to see and be seen. The opportunity to people-watch at a coveted *al fresco* table on a swanky piazza might just be worth slightly inflated prices. At the stylish **Al Moro** (13 Vicolo delle Bollette, 06/678-3495), a former haunt of Fellini tucked away near the Trevi Fountain, you can hearken back to days of *La Dolce Vita* while feasting on true Roman fare such as roasted baby goat with rosemary, artichokes *alla romana* (with garlic and mint) or *bucatini all'amatriciana* (thick pasta with onion and tomato and bits of *guanciale*, cured pig's cheek).

In a town where traditions die hard, culinary innovation is still appreciated, as long as it's done right. To round out your tour of edible Rome with a truly divine dining experience, go to one of the city's best-loved restaurants, **Agata e Romeo** (45 Via Carlo Alberto, 06/446-6115, closed weekends), in the newly hip **Termini/Monti** area, where husband-and-wife team Agata Parisella and Romeo Caraccio offer fresh and sophisticated spins on classic Roman dishes. Try a gourmet version of *coda alla vaccinara*—here an oxtail ragout with celery root puree—or other delicious entrées such as *Piemontese* beef with a mustard and red pepper sauce. Top it off with Agata's famous *millefoglie*, puff pastry stuffed with custard. *Che delizia!*

Whether it's the stunning serenity of Michelangelo's *Pietà*, the sight of an entire family balanced on a single motor scooter, or a dark-suited lothario claiming you're the most beautiful creature he's ever seen, Rome is full of wonders both monumental and unexpected. Get a taste of life in this chaotic, complicated, captivating city, even if you aren't able to drive a Vespa while smoking a cigarette and talking on two cell phones at once. But if you eat with the locals, you'll be able to say you lived like a Roman—and that's saying a lot. ☺

Ciao, Giada!

BY GEORGE W. STONE

Ambassador of Italian cuisine **Giada De Laurentiis** brings farfalle to the Food Network and manicotti to the masses. But will she bring her bucatini to the Beltway?

IF GIADA DE LAURENTIIS IS AN EVERYDAY ITALIAN

—and who in Rome would question this gorgeous gourmand's hereditary claim—then Italy must be paradise. In fact, that's precisely her point. This Food Network star preaches the pleasures of Italian cuisine in her new cookbook, *Everyday Pasta*, and her long-running show, *Everyday Italian*.

Hungry fans eat up De Laurentiis' unfussy charm and you-can-do-it dishes. "My show's subject is recipes and food, but it's really about the Italian lifestyle and culture. I tell people all the time that if you love to eat Italian food, you're an honorary Italian," she says. Granddaughter of filmmaker Dino De Laurentiis, this Roman-born epicurean grew up in the kitchen surrounded by family and steeped in the sensual delights of a table loaded with fettuccine and friendly spirits. Her new travel program, *Giada's Weekend Getaway*, is an American road trip in which she savors the fantastic flavors of food-loving cities around the United States. Therefore, inquiring Beltway minds wonder ...

