



La Beppa Fioraia

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Dish by Dish:

RESTAURANTS OF FLORENCE'S OLTRARNO

Many first-time visitors to Florence stay and eat around the main sights and museums, which are concentrated on the north side of the Arno River. Unless visitors head across the Arno to the Pitti Palace and Boboli Gardens, they often miss a treasure trove of winding streets, artisan shops, excellent restaurants, and great wine bars. This area on the other side of the river is known locally as the *Oltrarno*.

My mission? To take you on a virtual walking tour of the Oltrarno area of Florence introducing a traditional or Tuscan dish in each spot along the

way. It is a progressive meal in print. And while we're together, why not learn to make a dessert at home for your friends and family?



Piazza Santo Spirito

Antipasto at La Beppa Fioraia

The Dish: *La Beppa Tagliere* (mix of salumi, cheeses, crostini and more)

This fun restaurant is tucked away in *San Niccolo*, far from crowds and the trappings of tourism, yet a convenient place to stop for lunch or dinner on your walk down from scenic *Piazzale Michelangelo*.

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Gli Scalzi Vineyard

A Vineyard to Wetlands:

Unusual Things to Do in Venice

While working to launch her *Prontopia* app — which allows travelers to request on-demand help from locals in walkable cities — in its first city, *Venice*, our friend co-founder Shannon Kenny got to know the city through her new local friends. Here are some of the *Prontopia* locals' favorite off-the-beaten things to do in Venice:

Visit an Ancient Vineyard

Just a few steps away from the *Santa Lucia* train station, right on the Grand Canal, there is a lesser-known gem of Venice known as *Gli Scalzi* — the site of the *Church of Santa Maria of Nazareth* and the attached Garden of the Monastery of the Barefoot Carmelites. The church was built in 1608, and is the only church on the Grand Canal with a façade of *Carrara* marble.

Today, the monastery garden includes a vineyard, one of only two vineyard remaining in the islands of the Venice archipelago. The Carmelite monks revitalized the ancient garden to now grow over 20 grape varietals as part of a city project to preserve the viticultural biodiversity of Venice.

The garden's design reflects the classic style of Italianate Garden

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48 million people visited Italy this past summer.



La Beppa Fioraia

courses, a beautiful union of traditional ingredients, often prepared with an unexpected twist.

AS THE OWNER,
MONICA SERAFINI
EXPLAINS: WE DO
THINGS WITH OUR
HEART, AND WE LOVE
WHAT WE DO.

Though the whole menu offers enticing choices, I'm highlighting the Beppa Fioraia for their antipasto since

their *taglieri* (cutting boards adorned with various specialties) are abundant, balanced, and offer a variety of classic, local and regional specialties.

I chose *La Beppa*, which includes cured meats such as *prosciutto crudo*, *salame*, *finocchiona*, *capocollo*, *pancetta* as well as gorgonzola, aged sheep and goat cheeses, fried dough called *coccoli*, *stracchino* cheese, mousse of *Lardo di Colonatta*, Tuscan liver pate and more.

La Beppa goes nicely with a 2015 *Riecine Chianti Classico*. It isn't easy to pair one wine with so many flavors and textures, but Monica recommended this wine and it truly complimented the antipasto.

La Beppa Fioraia

Via dell'Erta Canina, 6r

(39) 055 2347681

www.labeppafioraia.it

Open daily for lunch and dinner.

Primo at Trattoria la Casalinga

The Dish: *Tagliatelle al Ragù di Nana*
(Tagliatelle Pasta with Duck Ragù)

A few steps from the *Church of Santo Spirito*, *Trattoria la Casalinga* opened in 1963 and is still operated by the same family. Brother and sister team *Andrea* and *Cristina* run the dining room while their uncle *Paolo* is at the register, acting as a sort of gatekeeper who guards access to a land of excellent yet surprisingly affordable food. Mom and Dad, *Graziella* and *Ferruccio*, are in the kitchen. Graziella is the heir to recipes that date back to the opening of the restaurant by her parents and in-laws.

Graziella is referred to as the *Marascialla*, or marshall — and she rules the kitchen with passion and poise. Though she is over 70, Graziella darts around doing things usually assigned to the staff in other restaurants, but she knows only she can do up to her strict standards. I can barely catch a photo of her standing still, so instead I decided to photograph her moving about and unposed.

I've had many excellent meals at *Casalinga*, but when I think of a pasta in Florence that I truly crave, Graziella's *tagliatelle* with duck ragù comes instantly to mind.

I once dated a Tuscan whose mom was and will likely always be the best at making *ragù di nana* (duck). When we broke up, my friends even cried, mourning our loss of her duck ragù. It was so good that I generally turn my nose up at the duck ragù I try while eating out. For this reason, I was ecstatic when I first tried Graziella's, which is by far the best I've had in any restaurant in Florence, and fills the

Oltrarno means “on the other



Trattoria La Casalinga

"I CALLED AHEAD AND PLANNED MY WEEK AROUND THIS PLATE OF GLORIOUS PASTA."

duck ragù void left from that historic breakup.

It isn't always on the menu, since Graziella will only make it when she finds excellent duck to work with, and because duck is such a laborious ingredient to use in sauces.

I called ahead and planned my week around this plate of glorious pasta. Andrea, who has a talent for hospitality, made sure I'd find a plate of tagliatelle waiting for me. He served a 2013 *Chianti Classico Calcinaia di Conti Capponi*, which went beautifully with the duck ragù.

If your time in Florence is limited, you may have to cross your fingers and hope you are lucky enough to to snag a plate of tagliatelle al ragù di nana. Otherwise, on a cold day order the *tortellini in brodo* (broth) to warm up. Their steaks are reliably good, as are the more old-school dishes, like liver, or boiled tongue with green sauce.

It is hard to have a bad meal at *Trattoria La Casalinga*. Graziella just wouldn't accept such a thing!

Trattoria La Casalinga

Via dei Michelozzi, 9r
(39) 055 218624
www.trattorialacasalinga.it
Open daily, except Sunday, for lunch and dinner.

Secondo at Badali

The Dish: *Stufato del Castel di Sangiovanni* (Stewed Beef in San Giovanni Secret Spices)

Just off the *Arno*, you'll find *Badali*, which opened in December of 2017. *Nicola Schioppo*, who once wanted to be a dentist, was eventually lured by his love of food to become a chef.

Kathy McCabe herself urged me to go here and try the stewed beef dish that, surprisingly, neither of us had heard of before she tasted it at *Badali*. *Lo Stufato di San Giovanni* is tender beef stewed in a blend of spices you can only buy in a few drogherie, apothecary-type shops, in *San Giovanni Valdarno*.

Getting its name from this town further south in Tuscany, but not very far from Florence, the dish is as much a part of the identity of San Giovanni Valdarno as sour dough bread is to the residents of San Francisco. It has several names, but the most commonly used names are *Stufato di San Giovanni*, *Stufato del Castel di Sangiovanni* or *Lo Stufato alla Sangiovese*.

Call the dish what you like, but the spice mix referred to by locals as the *drogo*, is a secret recipe. From what my palate could decipher, I'd wager there are black and white pepper, cloves, nutmeg, and licorice, but the exact blend of spices is only known by

very few in San Giovanni Valdarno.

They suggested a 2015 *Fattoria Rodano Chianti Classico* as a pairing, which was a nice wine but I'd opt for a vintage with a little less alcohol, since it was in competition with the spices. This is a tricky dish to pair wines with, as one doesn't know the exact spices used in the mix.

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side of the Arno River.”

Osteria dell'Enoteca is in a spectacular location, offering a reasonably priced menu that changes monthly to feature fresh, seasonal ingredients that are sourced locally.

The produce is delivered from just up the road and meats come from historic butchers in Tuscany.

I didn't get to try much else- since the stufato is quite filling, and I devoured a basket of bread for an almost mandatory *scarpetta* in the sauce, but I'll certainly return to try more at Badali.

Badali Osteria

Via dei Renai, 11r

(39) 055 2264422

www.badaliosteria.it

Open daily, except Monday, for lunch and dinner.

menu that changes monthly to feature fresh, seasonal ingredients that are sourced locally. The produce is delivered from just up the road and

meats come from historic butchers in Tuscany.

It is hard to choose what to order from such a sumptuous menu, dotted with dishes like fresh double-yolk pastas, *crespelle* (Florentine crepes), local game and Italian beef. This is a menu *Catherine de' Medici* would have been proud to serve, but is still affordable and graciously offered in an elegant space with attentive service.



Osteria dell'Enoteca

Dolce at Osteria dell'Enoteca

The Dish: *Tiramisù di Cantuccini al Vinsanto (Homemade Tiramisù with Almond Biscuits and Vin Santo)*

Celebrating its first year in March of 2018, but not new to town, *Osteria dell'Enoteca* was created by *Enoteca Pitti Gola*, a popular but tiny enoteca across from the Pitti Palace. Faced with increasing demand and limited space, the Enoteca team branched out and opened a restaurant with room for more guests, while still serving high quality food and wine.

Osteria dell'Enoteca is in a spectacular location, offering a reasonably priced

"I'VE CHOSEN OSTERIA DELL' ENOTECA FOR THEIR DESSERT BECAUSE IT PLEASANTLY SURPRISED ME THE FIRST TIME I DINED THERE."



Trattoria Sostanza – opened 1869

I've chosen Osteria dell'Enoteca for their dessert because it pleasantly surprised me the first time I dined there. The dish blends classics *Tiramisù* and *cantuccini* with *Vinsanto* (biscuits with wine) to make a much more interesting dessert. Simply put, the entire meal I had here was incredible, and I was stuffed, but I still ate *two portions* of this tiramisù!

When *Lorenzo* saw my enthusiasm his face lit up, and he told me the story of how this dessert was born. Years back, Lorenzo had to stop drinking coffee, which is a key ingredient in traditional tiramisù recipes. His mom promptly traded the *savoardi* dipped in coffee with cantuccini dipped in vinsanto, and this brilliant Tuscan-Italian hybrid was born. Though I wasn't able to snag the official recipe, I did get some pointers that I will share with the recipe I've included.

Hats off to *Chef Nicola Chiappi*, and owners *Edoardo Fioravanti*, *Manuele Giovannelli*, *Lorenzo Ricci* and *Zeno Fioravanti*, as well as the director of The Wine Club, *Shannon Fioravanti*, who assists both the Enoteca and the Osteria.

Osteria dell'Enoteca

Via Romana, 70r
(39) 055 2286018
Open daily, except Tuesday, for lunch and dinner.

We've visited a Florentine neighborhood through its cuisine, and through some of the people who dedicate their lives to sharing local food and protecting its integrity. After all, isn't that the best way to learn about a place?

—**Antoinette Mazzaglia**

Antoinette Mazzaglia, of Taste Florence Food and Wine Tours, has lived in Florence for more than 15 years. She spends most of her time trying new places, testing recipes and tasting wine- and the remainder of her time with her Welsh Terrier, Teddy. For more information, visit www.tasteflorence.com

Recipe: Signora Ricci's Tiramisù

Here's a very close version of the one served at Osteria dell'Enoteca made by Signora Ricci. It is adapted from Chef Dennis Littley. This adaptation is made with cantuccini and Vinsanto. Lorenzo's mom makes her own almond cantuccini and bakes them only once, leaving them still chewy but not hard, so they have a lovely texture when dipped in Vinsanto and immersed in the zabaione.

SERVES ABOUT 8 TO 10 PEOPLE.
IT TAKES AROUND 30 MINUTES TO PREPARE, BEST IF SERVED THE NEXT DAY.

INGREDIENTS:

- 6 LARGE EGG YOLKS
- 2/3 CUP SUGAR
- 1 1/2 CUP MASCARPONE AT ROOM TEMPERATURE
- 1 1/2 CUP HEAVY WHIPPING CREAM
- 30 CANTUCCINI (ALMOND BISCOTTI) MAKE YOUR OWN ALMOND BISCOTTI FOR BEST RESULTS. BAKING ONLY ONCE, OR BUY THEM TO SAVE TIME.
- 1 CUP VINSANTO
I RECOMMEND A NICE VINSANTO FROM FELSINA OR SELVAPIANA, IF YOU CAN BUY THEM LOCALLY. (THE REST OF THE BOTTLE CAN BE SERVED TO SIP WITH THE DESSERT SO IT SHOULDN'T BE CHOSEN AT RANDOM).
- 2 OUNCES COCOA FOR DUSTING

INSTRUCTIONS:

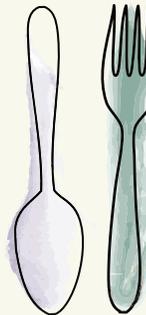
COMBINE EGG YOLKS AND SUGAR IN THE TOP OF A DOUBLE BOILER, OVER BOILING WATER. REDUCE HEAT TO LOW, AND COOK FOR ABOUT 10 MINUTES, STIRRING CONSTANTLY. THIS IS YOUR ZABAIONE. REMOVE FROM THE HEAT



AND WHIP YOLKS UNTIL THICK AND YELLOW. ALLOW TO COOL BRIEFLY BEFORE MIXING IN MASCARPONE.

ADD MASCARPONE TO WHIPPED YOLKS, BEAT UNTIL COMBINED.

IN A SEPARATE BOWL, WHIP CREAM INTO STIFF PEAKS.



GENTLY FOLD THE WHIPPED CREAM IN THE MASCARPONE/ZABAIONE MIXTURE AND SET ASIDE. THE MASCARPONE DOES NOT HAVE TO BE AT ROOM TEMPERATURE, BUT IT WILL MIX IN EASIER IF IT IS.

POUR A CUP OF VINSANTO INTO A SMALL BOWL, AND DIP THE CANTUCCINI INTO THE MIXTURE JUST LONG ENOUGH TO GET THEM WET, BUT WITHOUT SOAKING THEM.

SPOON HALF THE CREAM MIXTURE INTO SMALL INDIVIDUAL GLASS JARS OR CUPS.

ARRANGE A LAYER OF CANTUCCINI OVER THE ZABAIONE.

TOP WITH ANOTHER LAYER OF CREAM MIXTURE.

REFRIGERATE OVERNIGHT FOR BEST RESULTS.

DUST WITH COCOA BEFORE SERVING, AND GIVE GUESTS A SMALL GLASS OF VINSANTO TO ENJOY WITH THEIR TUSCAN TIRAMISÙ.

— is Florence's oldest restaurant.

originating in Renaissance ideas of symmetry of form and order, and is typical of the Venetian gardens style as it is built on an axis between the *palazzo* courtyard and a waterfront gate onto the canal.

In addition to the small vineyard, the monks maintained an herb garden for their apothecary. During the 17th century, the *Veneto* was renowned for its apothecaries. The Carmelite monks of Santa Maria of Nazareth in Venice became especially famous for their lemon balm remedy for curing anxiety and spasms.

In 1754, the Republic of Venice granted the Barefoot Carmelites the exclusive right to produce lemon balm water, which can still be purchased today at the monastery's apothecary shop.

Gli Scalzi

Fondamenta degli Scalzi
(39) 041 8224006

www.docvenezia.com

Guided visits of the garden can be reserved April through October.

Enjoy Spritz and Cicchetti On A Boat

Enjoy typical Venetian food in a charming local neighborhood in *Cannaregio* at *Al Timon* along the *Fondamenta dei Ormesini*. The lively local setting along the Ormesini canal has ample outdoor canalside tables, and a large wooden boat moored on the canal where locals convene in the evening for drinks and *cicchetti* (Venetian tapas) on the water.



Al Timon

Join local Venetians for occasional live jazz concerts, a drink of prosecco or *uno spritz* with typical *cicchetti*, and a stroll throughout this enchanting area of the city.

Al Timon

Fondamenta dei Ormesini, 2754
(39) 041 5246066

www.altimon.com

Open daily from 6 p.m. to 1 a.m.

Climb Snail-Shaped Spiral Stairs

The 15th-century *Palazzo del Contarini del Bovolo* is a small *palazzo* in a hidden area between the *Rialto* and *Campo Santo Stefano* with a unique external spiral staircase in the shape of a snail. The design of the stairs represents a distinct blend of the Gothic, Renaissance and Byzantine architectural styles of Venice through the centuries.



Scala Contarini del Bovolo

When you reach the top of the stairs, you are rewarded with a charming view over the rooftops of Venice from the palazzo's balustraded terrace. The *Sala del Tintoretto* on the second-floor loggia of the *Bovolo* staircase is also worthy of a visit for its collection of Venetian paintings and sculpture from the 16th to 18th centuries.

Scala Contarini del Bovolo

San Marco, 4303

Corte Contarini del Bovolo

(39) 041 3096605

www.scalacantarinidelbovolo.com

www.fondazioneveneziaservizi.it

Open daily from April to October between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Explore Venetian Wetlands

The Venetian wetlands between the islands of the lagoon and the river deltas of the mainland comprise the largest wetland area in Italy. The interplay of canals, swamps, marshland and sandy beaches produces a diverse and unique ecosystem that is breathtaking to explore. Because of this diversity, the area is world famous for its population of birds, including several thousand flamingoes that migrated from Tunisia.

A guided ecological visit to some of the lesser-visited islands in the lagoon offers a chance for a nature visit in a beautiful setting, and a deeper understanding of the ancient history of life in Venice. Enjoy one of these excursions with local guide *Marino Cacciatori*.

Compare the birds you see in the famous art throughout Venice to the birds populating the lagoon today for a fun treasure hunt! This is a great way to see Venice as its locals do today, and as Venetians inhabitants have experienced the rich land for centuries.

It's also possible to eat a very local seafood lunch on some of the outer islands, such as *Pellestrina*. Try *Ristorante da Celeste* for lunch on the terrace perched upon the lagoon: *Ristorante da Celeste*, Vianelli, 625B, Pellestrina, 39-041-967355; www.daceleste.it

Marino Cacciatori

(39) 0426 380314

www.marinocacciatori.it

Rates: 13 to 17€ for guided boat excursions

More than 25 million travelers

Visit A Silk Factory

A visit to the *Luigi Bevilacqua Silk Factory* in the *Santa Croce* quarter is a chance to experience an ancient tradition of Venice still thriving today — weavers producing famous Venetian velvets from silk threads. The factory was established on this site in 1875, and is still run by the *Bevilacqua* family, whose roots in the Venetian textile industry date to the late 15th century.



Silk weavers

The original site for the factory was an old weavers school purchased by Luigi Bevilacqua in 1875 in the *Castello* quarter of the city. The new mill restored the site's 18th-century hand looms and revived production of ancient decorative patterns. The headquarters were then relocated to the current site in Santa Croce 17 years later.

The silk industry played a significant role in the rise of Venice as powerful mercantile republic during the Renaissance. Venice acquired the knowledge of silk fabric production techniques from the Ottoman Empire after the siege of Constantinople in 1204, and over the following centuries, developed their own techniques for producing sumptuous velvet, brocade, damasks and satins.

Today the factory preserves these ancient traditions by producing gorgeous fabrics and products using hand-crafted methods on restored ancient looms, a talent that was almost lost with the mechanization of weaving technique during the Industrial Revolution in the late 19th

century. Visitors can schedule a self-guided visit of the weaving workshop with advance reservation.

To learn about the factory within the wider history of artisan craftsmanship in Venice, the Venice Arts and Crafts tour (www.seevenice.it) with *Luisella Romeo* of *See Venice* (see the article about her in the February 2018 issue *Dream of Italy*) includes an expert explanation of the factory's history and production. You will also enjoy visits to other

craftsman studios producing treasures such as gold leaf, mosaic tiles, handmade books and paper and shoes!

Luigi Bevilacqua Silk Factory

Santa Croce, 1320
(39) 041 721566
www.luigi-bevilacqua.com

Listen to A Vivaldi Concert

There are many nice venues in Venice to listen to Vivaldi, but perhaps one of the lesser known but most endearing is the church where composer *Antonio Vivaldi* taught music. The *Church of La Pieta* is in the neighborhood where Vivaldi was born in 1678. In 1703, Vivaldi was ordained as a priest, and appointed as violin master at the orphanage connected to *Santa Maria della Visitazione*.

During this era, Venice's four founding hospitals were central to the musical legacy of the city as the young orphan girls were trained by Venice's most renowned composers, a through

musical education programs that were supported by the *Doge*. They were also the site of popular musical performances, and thus the buildings were constructed for optimal acoustics.

The unique atmosphere of this dynamic musical environment is thought to have had a strong influence on Vivaldi's innovative and experimental style. The original church was rebuilt slightly after Vivaldi's death, however, the *Doge* insisted that the acoustics of the new building achieve the highest results. The building consists of an oval oratorio

encircled by an atrium designed to minimize external noise. The ceiling is adorned with a *Tiepolo* fresco.

Today, the site frequently hosts free choral and orchestral concerts open to the public. Visitors to Venice can thus experience Vivaldi's music in a distinctly local architectural setting likened to the environment in which his original music was composed and first performed.

Church of La Pieta

Sestiere Castello
(39) 041 5222171
www.pietavenezia.org

—Shannon Kenny

Shannon Kenny is the founder of the Prontopia app allowing visitors to request on-demand assistance from a local for any help getting where they need to go by foot. For more information, visit

www.prontopia.com



Church of La Pieta



Tiepolo fresco

visit *La Serenissima* each year.

The Sweet Farming Life



Agriturismo Casa Vallona is a 30-minute drive from Bologna, yet it feels a world away.

It was in risk of crumbling down until 34-year-old **Chiara Battistini**, a former marketing executive in Milan, returned to her ancestral home and transformed it, aiming to preserve the authenticity, the sobriety, the simpler ways of her ancestors, the **Vallona**, land owners who inhabited the tiny **borgo** of **Monte San Pietro** in the Bolognese Apennines since the 13th century.

Chiara decided to return it to its original use, a farm, and to add a B&B and rustic restaurant, which she calls **Locanda**. This is located in what was once the house's kitchen and, in remodeling it, she has maintained, as much as she could, original furnishings and objects; centuries-old oak beams, a large fireplace with old pots, the table where the family gathered for dinner.

Through the objects she found in the house and in the granary, she was able to reconstruct the family's and the village's history. Thus, the well inside the house points to the history of **Monte San Pietro** as a disputed post between **Bologna** and **Modena** in the Middle Ages; having a well inside the house meant having access to water in the case of siege. During World War II, this was an area where many battles played out, and Casa Vallona became the seat for the local school, whose premises had been bombed and another room served as refuge for local women and children.

"I like how the minor stories of a farmer's family intersect with the larger history of major events that took

place here," Chiara says.

Chiara manages all aspects of running the **agriturismo**. She is the cook, putting to use what she learned in the kitchen from her **nonne**, but also training herself into the principles of modern cuisine.



Chiara is strictly committed to working with small local farms, cheesemakers and winemakers who pay attention to sustainable practices. To produce the farm's wine, a red **Barbera** called **Vincenzo** in honor of her grandfather, she works with a winery near Modena which uses the 'ancestral method' allowing for natural fermentation in the bottle.

Chiara has become a **contadina** (farmer) herself, just like her ancestors; she works the land, grows lavender and old fruit trees which yield ancient versions of cherries and apricots, and she's especially committed to beekeeping.

"I brought back bees and, through pollination, they have given life back to my fruit orchard. Thanks to bees the trees and vegetable garden yield so

much more. I see apiculture as a symbol of the rebirth of this place."

Chiara is also the host, welcoming visitors into her B&B. The views from the room and from the Casa Vallona complex over the hills and **calanchi** (badlands) are beautiful and soothing.

The agriturismo stands in the territory of the valley of the **Lavino** river, an area inhabited since 2500 BC. It was the Romans who created a permanent settlement in Monte San Pietro, as a defense post against the Longobards.

Today, visitors can explore remnants of the area's ancient history in places such as the village of **Castello di Serravalle**, a strategic outpost during the

Middle Ages, which has preserved the fortress and parts of the fortifications; the fortified **borgo** of **Monteveglia**, home to a medieval pieve (rural church with baptistry); **Vignola**, the city of cherries, with its imposing medieval **Rocca**; **Bazzano** and the **Rocca dei Bentivoglio**, a medieval castle owned by one of the most powerful local families.

When you need to enjoy the slower, simpler rhythms of the farmer's life, Casa Vallona is the perfect spot to do just that.

—**Silvia Donati**

Silvia Donati writes about her hometown of Bologna and the region of Emilia-Romagna. Read her blog at www.bolognaucovered.com

Casa Vallona
Via E.De Nicola, 10
Monte San Pietro
(39) 346 2711243
www.casavallona.com
Rates: Double room starts at 60€ with breakfast.
Closed mid-December to mid-March.
Restaurant open Friday to Sunday.

1€ = \$1.24 at press time

There are 20,000 *agriturismi* in Italy.