



Susan Van Allen in Florence

INSIDE:

- In Celebration of the Madonna 3
- Female-Focused Tours 4
- The Magic of Italian Cuisine 5
- Carciofi Alla Giudia* Recipe 7



signordelfazio, flickr.com

Carciofi alla Giudia

DREAM OF ITALY®

Dream Of PUBLICATION

Volume 19, Issue 1

www.dreamofitaly.com

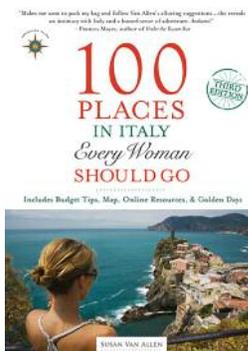
February 2020

Author Susan Van Allen on Why Women Love Italy

I first met the vivacious and adorable Susan Van Allen in Abruzzo in 2007. We were both part of a huge symposium sponsored by the Italian National Tourist Board and a consortium of companies that run travel to Italy. Two hundred of us piled into buses to follow an ambitious itinerary through the mountains and seaside of the region of Abruzzo.

During our considerable bus time, I sat with Susan and we found that we had so very much in common, not the least of which was our profound love for Italy. Susan and I both grew up in New Jersey and as she says “fell in love with Italy around a dining room table”; in her

case in Newark, in my case in Springfield. Both of our beloved mothers were special education teachers. Susan even had a grandmother named Helen McCabe!



In 2010, Susan published one of my favorite Italy travel books ever, *100 Places in Italy Every Woman Should Go*, that will be celebrated with a 10th anniversary edition to be released in June 2020. Since meeting in Abruzzo, Susan and

I have met up many times in Italy, including with my late mother. For years now, Susan has invited me to be part of her Italy panel.

continued on page 2

ROME: STOP AND TASTE THE ARTICHOKE

“Order *carciofi*,” is what I tell travelers who ask for advice about *Rome*. Sure, you can run around *ooing* and *ahing* over the Forum, Colosseum and Sistine Chapel, but for the true Roman experience, you have to stop and taste the artichokes.

From late February to early May, overflowing crates of these green and purple-tinged beauties from surrounding farmlands begin to appear in the Eternal City. *Signore* in smocks sit in the open-air *Campo dei Fiori* market, peeling *Carciofi Romaneschi* with their tiny knives, as if they’re made of butter.

In season, every traditional restaurant has artichokes on their menus. They prepare them two ways: *Alla Romana*, stuffed with garlic and herbs, then slowly braised, to savory, tender perfection, or *Alla Giudia*, flattened and deep-fried, transformed to glistening deep gold flowers.

It’s the *Alla Giudia* I’m dreaming of when the plane lands, just in time for lunch. It’s a warm enough April day, a few suspicious clouds, but nothing dims the thrill of my first sight of umbrella pines, burnt orange stone buildings, broad Roman faces...

continued on page 6

Women gained full suffrage in Italy in 1945.

Susan graduated from Hofstra University, Long Island with a BA in theatre, and moved to San Francisco, where she acted in a traveling Shakespeare company and avant garde ensembles. Her writing career began with *Jersey Girls*, a one-woman play, which she performed in San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York. The play's success led to a staff job on the sitcom, *Everybody Loves Raymond*, where she penned episodes including the classic "Marie's Meatballs," based on family kitchen memories.

Inspired by her roots, Susan has been traveling regularly to Italy for over 40 years, visiting relatives, going on hiking and biking adventures, taking cooking and language classes, and immersing herself in all the culinary, cultural and historical pleasures of the country.

With her passionate focus on Italy's appeal to women travelers, Susan has written four books, including the aforementioned *100 Places in Italy Every Woman Should Go*; *Letters from Italy: Confessions, Adventures, and Advice*; *50 Places in Rome, Florence, and Venice Every Woman Should Go*; and the recently released *Hungry for Italy: Culinary Adventures in the Bel Paese*. She's also written for NPR, and magazines, including *AFAR* and *National Geographic Traveler*, and is a regular contributor to *Tastes of Italia* and she has loved contributing to *Dream of Italy!*

Putting her writing advice for female travelers into action, Van Allen designs and hosts *Golden Weeks in Italy: For Women Only* tours, run in collaboration with Perillo Tours. These small group adventures give travelers authentic,

immersive and joyful experiences, with a femme-friendly focus. Trips are based in locations such as Sicily, Southern Italy, Florence, the Italian Riviera and the Italian Lakes. Since they began in 2012, *Golden Weeks* have received rave reviews and loyal fans, who happily return year after year to experience Italy with Susan's entertaining guidance. There are still spaces available for *Golden Week in Venice* in September 2020. For more information, visit www.susanvanallen.com

When Susan isn't in Italy, she lives in Los Angeles with her husband and makes an amazing lasagna. As usual, I had a great time chatting with her recently.

—Kathy McCabe



Kathy and Susan with friend in Positano



Susan's grandparents



Postcard from Susan's grandfather

Dream of Italy: Susan, why Italy?

Susan Van

Allen: I've loved Italy my whole life! It all started with Sunday dinners at my grandparents' house in Newark, New Jersey. Nana was from *Vinchiaturio*, a village in *Molise* near *Campobasso*, and Papa from *Potenza* in *Basilicata*. It was at their dining room table where I first experienced the loving, delicious heart of Italy.

It came to me through steaming bowls of pasta, opera blaring in the background, spirited conversations with hands flying through the air. There were gorgeous visuals — lace

tablecloth from Venice, giant jar of cherries marinating in syrup, a *Capidomonte* lamp with fancy porcelain ladies fanning themselves under the shade, and of course all those Madonnas surrounding us!

Every summer my grandfather would get on a ship to visit his sisters who lived near Naples, and I remember wistfully waving goodbye to him as I watched him board. He'd send back postcards of extraordinary sights: fountains, statues, piazzas. He'd return by Labor Day with beads from Venice, rosaries blessed by the Pope and rocks from Mount Vesuvius.

I needed to get to this magical place as soon as I possibly could, so I saved up

money from babysitting and working the counter at Dunkin' Donuts, and right after high school, in 1976, arrived in *Roma Termini* Train Station with a backpack and bursting anticipation.

The trip was a joyous blur of standing awestruck in the Sistine Chapel, tasting my first gelato, getting my bottom pinched, and winding up at my Roman cousins' house, where they sat me down at their dining room table, brought out steaming bowls of pasta, and that blissful feeling of my childhood Italy expanded beyond my imaginings.

The spell was cast. From that first trip, Italy has called me back again and again. I am forever enchanted, embraced and fascinated by this amazing country.

DOI: What is it about Italy that attracts women?

International Women's Day

SVA: There's something wonderful about landing in a place where women have been worshipped since the earth was cooling! From the minute we step off the plane we're surrounded by images that glorify the feminine. The two major ones are Venus, Goddess of Love and Beauty, and Madonna, Mother of Compassion. Together they embody the essential spirit of Italy. Venus beckons us to slow down and totally enjoy sensual pleasures, while the Madonna embraces us with an abundant loving heart that brings us peace.

Whether we're experiencing them directly — at an ancient Temple or church (many Santa Maria churches were built right over Venus Temples!), or simply having a *la dolce vita* moment as we sip *Prosecco* and enjoy a sunset — we women especially feel their presence.

I believe this is why women tell me, "I feel so at home in Italy." They feel this strong, nurturing feminine spirit that inspires them to let go, enjoy themselves and be at peace. Add to that the masterpieces that celebrate females, handsome men who are expert flirts, plus so many sensual pleasures — from thermal spas to delicious wines and gorgeous shops...it seems as though Italy was made just for us!

DOI: *You and I have a particular love for the Madonna, who is revered in various forms all over Italy. What role does she*

play in Italian culture? Where do you like to pray to her?

SVA: I love the familial-style relationship Italians have with the Madonna. Their faith is free-flowing, without pious separation, as they call on their Big Mamma to help out in matters from finding a parking space to heartbreaking events. It's wonderful to see her image in so many places outside churches and museums — dangling off taxi mirrors, in surprise altars in Naples' alleyways, on a hiking path.



Madonna



Madonna Altar in Capri

And I love Madonna celebrations in Italy, big and small. It's great to be there in May, the month of Mary, where flowers surround her statues, there are processions and feasts in her honor.

Also, I was lucky on a September 8th a few years back to be in *Prato*, a town outside Florence, where Mary's Sacred Girdle (actually a belt) is kept in the *Duomo*. The whole town was out to celebrate Mary's birthday, with a grand parade in historic costume, fireworks, music and a special opening of the chapel holding the relic, where I could kneel before it for a powerful moment.

DOI: *I refer to your book 100 Places Every Woman Should Go often and I know it is something of a bible for travel in Italy for many women. What are a few of your favorite suggestions in the book?*

SVA: I'm so grateful to hear from such a well-traveled woman like you and other wonderful readers that this book has enhanced their travels to Italy! (By the way, an updated, refreshed 10th-

Anniversary Edition will be published in June 2020).

It's always challenging to pick just a few favorites, but here are three off the beaten path that I've loved turning women on to:

Tarot Garden, Capalbio, Tuscany

In Tuscany's western *Maremma*, you'll discover this "Garden of Joy," created by *Niki de Saint Phalle*, filled with 22 exuberant mosaic sculptures that represent her take on the major characters of tarot cards. This incredible garden was featured in the May 2012 issue of *Dream of Italy*. For more information, visit www.ilgiardinodeitarocchi.it

continued on page 4

DREAM OF ITALY®

Kathleen A. McCabe
Editor in Chief and Publisher

Associate Editor: Elaine Murphy
Design: Kim Leaird
www.leaird-designs.com

Dream of Italy, the subscription travel newsletter covering Italian travel and culture, is published 10 times a year. Delivery by mail is \$87 in the U.S., Canada and abroad. A digital subscription (downloadable PDFs) costs \$77 per year. Subscriptions include online access to more than 170 back issues and regular e-mail updates.

Three ways to subscribe:

1. Send a check to *Dream of Italy*, P.O. Box 2025, Denver, CO 80201
2. Call 202-297-3708
3. Subscribe online at www.dreamofitaly.com (Visa, Mastercard and American Express accepted)

Editorial feedback is welcome.
E-mail: kathy@dreamofitaly.com

Advertising opportunities are available.
E-mail: kathy@dreamofitaly.com

Copyright © 2020 *Dream of Italy*, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Reproduction in whole or part without permission is prohibited. Every effort is made to provide information that is accurate and reliable; however, *Dream of Italy* cannot be responsible for errors that may occur. ISSN 1550-1353 www.dreamofitaly.com

is celebrated on March 8th.

Oplontis, Torre Annunziata, Campania

One stop away from *Pompeii* on the *Circumvesuviana* train, you'll find ruins of the elegant villa of the Empress *Poppea Sabina*, which was also buried in the 79 A.D. eruption. Unlike Pompeii, the structure is free of tourist crowds, and wonderful to wander

around to ooh and ahh over rooms of beautiful frescoes, where much Imperial fun ensued. For more information, visit www.pompeiisites.org

Church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli, Cannaregio, Venice

This jewel-box of a church looks like it should be kept under glass in a museum. *Santa Maria dei Miracoli* was built from marble left over from *San Marco*, and dazzles outside as well as in, where a portrait of the miraculous Madonna sits at the altar, surrounded by a gilded ceiling and fabulously sculpted pillars. No wonder it's the first choice for brides around the world who want to get married in Venice. I wrote about it in the April 2013 issue of *Dream of Italy*. It is one of a group of 15 churches in Venice, designated as Chorus churches. For more information, visit www.chorusvenezia.org

DOI: *Tell us about your Golden Week Tours in Italy for women only.*

SVA: During my book tour, when *100 Places* was first published, women in the audience would raise their hands and ask, "Can you take me with you?" I'd never really thought about creating a group tour before, though for decades I'd been arranging everything when I traveled with my family or girlfriends to Italy, and those trips were fabulous adventures, so I

thought, I'll give this a try.

I joined forces with Perillo's Italy Vacations (the division of the company that does custom small group travel), and with their 75 years of Italy business expertise



Chiesa dei Miracoli



Chiesa dei Miracoli

and my 40-plus years of exploring, we were off!

I design Golden Weeks exactly as I'd planned trips with my loved ones — with a balance of group time and free time to discover on our own, a beautiful location and hotel where we can feel at home and immerse ourselves for an authentic Italian experience, and an itinerary that mixes culture, history, art, great food, fabulous wine, artisan shopping and activities (cooking, craft classes, spa time) so we LIVE Italian traditions, with my Italian friends.

And everything is done at a relaxed pace and is female-focused, with thanks to my fabulous local guides/girlfriends who love customizing their museum and city tours so we discover Italian heroines of the past and present, and art that glorifies females.

Over the past eight years, it's been an absolute joy to introduce women to places I've long loved, and to watch them form friendships in the small group (14 guests) that last well beyond our time together. Women from all over the USA and Canada have joined in, bonding over a range of life

experiences. We've celebrated milestone birthdays and reunions between sisters and friends and women who have experienced losses in their lives have come to find the Golden Week profoundly healing.

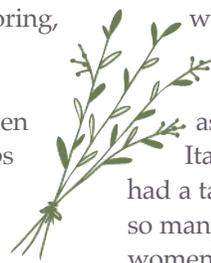
It's a thrill for me to see again and again how Italy transforms travelers — women who range in age from 23 to 83, mothers and daughters, solo travelers,

girlfriends on a getaway — in just one week become more radiant, more joyful — all caught up in that bliss and enlightenment I felt as a kid when I first experienced Italy. Also, like me, once they've had a taste, they want more! There are so many returnees on these trips, women who love traveling in this Golden Week style come back to experience another part of the country and are happy to reunite with other women they've met on these trips.

So far I've designed and hosted Golden Weeks in northern Tuscany, Southern Italy and the Amalfi Coast, Florence, the Italian Riviera, Venice, Milan and the Italian Lakes, and this year we've added Sicily. The choices are infinite, and I look forward to showing these wonderful women more and more of this amazing country.

DOI: *You've just released a new book, Hungry for Italy: Culinary Adventures in the Bel Paese. How did that come about?*

SVA: Like so many other Italophiles, food was how Italy first seduced me. Growing up with an Italian-American *mamma*, the kitchen was always the best place to be — where Italy's *Magic Spell* embraced me with deliciousness and comfort. Over so many years of travels, I've headed straight to kitchens



February 2020
4
www.dreamofitaly.com

Madonna is translated in the

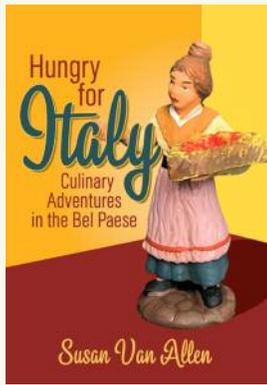
in Italy, exploring traditions and it's been great to go beyond my first kitchen to discover the great variety of regional specialties in Italy, to get to know chefs who bring them to life and take cooking classes with locals, which feels like getting a backstage pass to the country's soul.

The quest is ongoing, and with *Hungry for Italy* I reflected on some of my

favorite Italian food experiences, including meeting *Gino Sorbillo*, aka The King of Pizza in Naples, and learning the secrets of *risotto* making in Milan.

Food is a jumping-off point for so

much more — from personal revelations to deepening connections with *The Italian Way*. And as always, because I love to give advice, I ended the chapters with my favorite restaurants to taste these specialties and recipes to recreate the deliciousness at home.



Susan Van Allen

I have so much more to discover and write on this topic, and about the infinite wonders of *Bell'Italia*. In a few weeks I'll be back in Venice. I'm looking forward to seeing dear friends, eating my favorite *bigoli in salsa*, drinking *Amarone*, getting to San Marco for early mass — when, by the way, you can enter the side door for free and get a look at those dazzling mosaics!

And I'll get to places I've never been and dreamed of — the town of *Bassano del Grappa* with its famous wooden *Palladio Bridge*, the quaint fishing village of *Chioggia*...I'm not planning

every moment, as I've learned when Italy leads the way, surprises beyond my imaginings come forth. Stay tuned!

DOI: *Let's face it, women do love to shop. What are some of your favorite shopping experiences in Italy?*

SVA: With Venice in my dreams, here are a few places I can't wait to take women to when they join me there for our September Golden Week. Here's where we meet expert artisans and experience centuries-old traditions first hand...



Susan with Gino Sorbillo

Pillows and tassels make great gifts. For more information, visit www.bevilacquatessuti.com

Venetian Dreams

Calle alle Madonna (San Marco)

Kathy, I know you know the sweetheart *Marisa Convento* who is a



Susan with risotto

charming *impiraressa* (beadstringer), creating gorgeous jewelry, and designs on handbags and slippers using *Murano* glass beads. I know you took a bead stringing lesson with her in the Venice episode of your PBS show. Marisa

also generously shares her passion for everything about her native city, always there to give you advice for just the right restaurant or art exhibit to visit. For more information, visit www.marisaconvento.it

Paolo Olbi

Ponte di Ca Foscari (Dorsoduro)

Classically designed leather and paper-bound journals are the specialty here, along with picture frames, and desk sets, handcrafted by the esteemed artisan Paolo Olbi. For more information, visit www.olbi.atspace.com

Tragicomica

Calle dei Nomboli (San Polo)

One of the oldest mask-making workshops in Venice, packed with fantasy-inspiring goodies, it's run under the direction of master artisan *Gualtiero Dall'Osto*, who is internationally acclaimed and also designs for major opera houses, such as *La Scala* in Milan. If you'd like to immerse yourself even more deeply in the fun, sign up for a couple of hours of mask painting. For more information, visit www.tragicomica.it

Emilia

Via Baldassare Galuppi, 205 (Burano)

An ultra-elegant shop with a great variety of highest quality lace — from scarves to bed linens to table runners, and antique displays on the top floor. For more information, visit www.emiliaburano.it



Venice shopping

Italian language as “my lady.”

A CAMERIERE IN WHITE TUXEDO JACKET BALANCES PLATES OF GOLDEN CARCIOFI ALLA GIUDIA ON HIS ARM. WHEN HE SETS ONE BEFORE ME, I MURMUR ALLELUIA TO IT, LOVING THAT FIRST CRISP, FULL FLAVORED BITE, RAISING MY GLASS OF PROSECCO TO SALUTE THE MOMENT. THIS IS THE TASTE THAT DEFINES MY ROME EARTHY, NUTTY AND SIMPLY DELICIOUS

I drop my bags at my *Trastevere* apartment, rush across my favorite bridge — the *Ponte Sisto* — and head to the *zona* where all who seek the best Carciofi alla Giudia go: The Jewish Ghetto.

The Ghetto is one of Rome’s most enchanting areas — with a mix of such architectural stars as the crumbling *Portico of Octavia* from Imperial Roman days, to the Renaissance Turtle Fountain. Much of it is closed to cars, so it’s lovely to zig-zag through alleys under medieval archways, past tempting bakery windows.

This enchantment is in stark contrast to the ghetto’s bleak origins. It was created in 1555 by order of Pope Paul IV — a walled and gated seven-acre plot of low land, often flooded by the Tiber, the only place in Rome where Jews were permitted to live. Overcrowding caused them to build up, and today some of their six-story buildings remain, shading narrow passageways. The ghetto existed for about 300 years, until Italy was unified in 1870.

During those dark centuries, despite poverty and oppression, a rich culture

developed within the walls. That culture lives on in a special dialect (a mix of Latin, Italian and Hebrew), and most strikingly, fantastic food, known as *cucina ebraico*. Since Kosher laws

ruled that meat could not be combined with dairy, butter was

A *cameriere* in white tuxedo jacket balances plates of golden Carciofi alla Giudia on his arm. When he sets one before me, I murmur *alleluia* to it, loving that first crisp, full flavored bite, raising my glass of *Prosecco* to salute the moment. This is the taste that defines My Rome — earthy, nutty and simply delicious.



Carciofi alla Romana



Jewish Ghetto



Carciofi at Campo Fiori



Da Giggetto

eliminated and the practice of frying in oil became popular. And with all those artichokes growing nearby, Carciofi alla Giudia naturally became the Jewish Ghetto’s signature dish.

Once I hit the Ghetto’s restaurant stretch, the abundant joy of the season explodes: Bouquets of artichokes in wicker baskets, tied with ribbons, adorn the eateries. I score a perfect table outside *Da Giggetto*, where an eight-foot-tall artichoke tower graces the doorway.

“Buono?” says the *cameriere* (waiter), sweeping my empty plate away.

I’m tempted to order 10 more.

Could he be the same waiter who wowed me decades ago when I came here and had my first ever Carciofi alla Giudia?

In my pre-Roman days, artichokes were just thorny, off-putting vegetables. They had played no part in my New Jersey kitchen childhood days. In fact, the first time I ever saw one was on TV, in a *Little Rascals* episode — the one where Stymie and Spanky are moseying around begging for food, and a kindly woman gives Stymie a box of dinner from her refrigerator, complete with artichoke.

He is baffled by the looks of the vegetable, but so starving he plops it in

Rome’s Jewish *Ghetto* is the oldest

front of him and says, “I can tackle it,” then proceeds to open it, leaf by leaf. When he finally flattens the artichoke open, he gives it a quizzical look like only Stymie can, then tosses it away, with the unforgettable line: “It might choke Artie, but it ain’t gonna choke Stymie!”

So I blame Stymie for turning me off to artichokes. That is, until I discovered the *alla Giudia* way. Thanks to advice from



Sagra del Carciofo

San Francisco foodie friends, Da Gigetto was on the restaurant list for the first trip I took to Rome with my husband.

We took our places and did what we often did during those early days of visiting Italy: pointed to what someone else was eating that looked good and said, “We’ll have that.” That (Carciofi alla Giudia) turned out to become the signature dish for our trip, ordered nightly, gobbled up with glee.

The *Little Rascals* faded away as Rome’s sexy take on the vegetable took over.

continued on page 8

RECIPE: CARCIOFI ALLA GIUDIA

The most challenging part of this recipe is finding artichokes like Rome’s Romaneschi. That is, artichokes without hairy chokes or thorny leaves, that still have their stems. With so many sophisticated small farmers in the USA these days, you may be lucky at your outdoor market to score artichokes similar to Romaneschi. If not, use the most tender baby artichokes you can find. You’ll have smaller flowers, but it’s the same idea.

INGREDIENTS:

- Large bowl of water
- 1 lemon
- 4 large artichokes with stems
- Extra virgin olive oil for deep frying
- Salt to taste

Special equipment: Deep fry thermometer

Prepare the artichokes:

Cut the lemon in half. Squeeze one half to make juice and add the juice to the water in the bowl. Rub your hands with the other half of the lemon to prevent your hands from turning black as you prepare the artichokes. Put both lemon halves in the bowl of water.



Clean and prepare each artichoke one at a time, and place them in the lemon water when you’re done. This prevents them from turning black.

Remove the tough outer leaves from the artichokes until you get to tender, pale green leaves. With a sharp paring knife, cut off the thorny leaf edges — you may be cutting the whole top half of the leaves off. Cut the stem down to about an inch and peel away the fibrous stem covering. If there is a choke, carefully remove it with a melon ball scooper.

Let the artichokes sit in the lemon water for about a half hour. Weigh them down with a plate if they bob out of the water.

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS:

In a heavy large saucepan, on medium heat, warm enough olive oil to reach two inches. Add the artichokes, turning them until all sides are browned, about 20 minutes.

On a work surface lined with paper towels, place the artichokes stem side up and press them gently so the leaves open. Let them drain for two hours.

Reheat the oil to 350 degrees Fahrenheit, checking with thermometer. One at a time, hold the artichoke by the stem with tongs and immerse it in the pan, pressing against the bottom of the pan, to keep the leaves spread open.

Fry until the leaves are stiffened and the choke is tender. Remove and drain on paper towels. Season with salt and serve while still warm.

Romans associate artichokes with Greek mythology — a legend where Zeus lusts after a young maiden, Cynara, who was so beautiful he declared her a Goddess. When Cynara turned down his advances, Zeus thought up a clever revenge to make her unapproachable to any other man: “Make this beauty...an artichoke!”

In Imperial days, artichokes were served at Roman orgies, praised by such wise men as Pliny the Elder, who wrote of their healing properties — the thistle that stimulates the bile, cleans the liver and, best of all, serves as a powerful aphrodisiac.

Only men were supposed to enjoy these libido-enhancing vegetables (God forbid women enjoy sex!) until along came Catherine de Medici, in the Renaissance, who took artichokes with her to France when she married Henry III. It caused much the scandal, with Catherine caring not a bit, letting all gasp around her as she artichoke-gorged.

Then there’s me, spending April in Rome, riding the final springtime wave of artichoke season with my friends. I timed the whole trip around a climactic event: the *Sagra del Carciofo* (Artichoke Festival) in *Sezze*, a medieval village about an hour south of Rome. My friend Joanie, an ex-New Yorker turned Roman, loves the idea of a Sunday drive. So we’re off in her Panda, on the route that was once the Appian Way.

As we get to the old village, tucked into the hillside, we hear jazz. In a courtyard we discover a handsome ensemble — clarinet, sax, trombone — blasting out a swoon-inducing “Taste of Honey.” Then it’s up the narrow, winding cobblestoned *via*, surrounded by baskets of artichokes on balconies and storefronts. Locals casually parade by in Renaissance costumes: men in



tonelav777, flickr.com

Sagra del Carciofo, Sezze

THE DETAILS

FAVORITE PLACES FOR CARCIOFI ALLA GIUDIA IN ROME

Da Giggetto

Via del Portico d’Ottavia, 21/a
(39) 06 6861105
www.giggetto.it
Closed Monday

The Ceccarelli family has been serving Roman classics here since 1923.

Ristorante La Torricella

Via Evangelista Torricelli, 2/12
(39) 06 5746311
www.la-torricella.com

A humble spot in the *Testaccio* neighborhood, that’s famous for its fabulous market.

Daniela’s Cooking School

www.danielascookingschool.com
Enjoy a market visit and cooking class in this lovely signora’s home on the Aventine Hill.

ARTICHOKE FESTIVAL IN UMBRIA:

Sagra del Carciofo in Sezze

www.comune.sezze.it
This festival usually takes place the 2nd or 3rd weekend in April.

tights and tunics, *signore* in long traditional skirts, holding artichoke bouquets, swirling to drumbeats and tambourines. *Bambini* dart about — sassy girls dressed like their mammas, thrilled to be posing for pictures.

The sharp, woodsy aroma of frying, roasting, grilling artichokes fills the air. Joanie carefully picks our lunch spot: a *fruttivendolo* (fruit store) where plastic tables and chairs are set up outside for the occasion. In the kitchen signore stir over steaming pasta pots, while their daughters in tight t-shirts and jeans bob and weave among us, serving overflowing plates of course after carciofi course — bread salad with artichokes, bow-tie pasta with artichokes, sausage and fried artichokes, artichoke liqueur...

Sated, we head back to the hilltop piazza, where a raven-haired signora, dressed in a traditional peasant wide black skirt, bursts into a spontaneous *tarantella*. She’s writhing, chest arched to the heavens, breasts heaving with passion, serenaded by an impossibly handsome mandolin player.

She’s the Goddess Cynara, come alive.

We join a circle that forms around them, all of us holding artichokes. Cynara throws her head back to the heavens; her eyes lock with the mandolin player. We gasp, caught up in the thunderbolt of passion. And I marvel that Italians can even turn an Artichoke Festival into a sexy experience — celebrating spring, delicious pleasures, and as always, *Amore*.

—Susan Van Allen



1€ = \$1.07 at press time

The *Sagra del Carciofo* began in *Sezze* in 1969.