



Dreaming in Tuscany

INSIDE:

Pasticciotto Pastry Lesson 2

Opera Memories in Verona 3

Florence's Most Unforgettable Sandwich 7

The Poppies of Manfredonia 12

SPECIAL REPORT: CROWDSOURCED ITALIAN DREAMS

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When I Dream of Italy, I DREAM OF...

I asked. You answered. For so many years, I've wanted to publish a crowdsourced issue of *Dream of Italy* where I ask readers to share their favorite people, places and experiences in Italy. I've often said that the Dream of Italy audience is a passionate bunch and they are very well traveled. I know so many of you have been to Italy again and again, always seeking out new treasures.

This spring as Italy entered its quarantine and in the U.S. we followed shortly thereafter, I knew



Kathy

it was finally the right time to publish this issue. We all need Italy right now.

I asked readers to fill in the end of, **When I dream of Italy, I dream of..** Your submissions were fantastic, descriptive and so very heartfelt. We can only publish two dozen in this special crowdsourced issue but will be publishing more of them in future issues as well as online. There are so many dreams to share and high hopes to return to Italy as quickly as possible.

—Kathy McCabe



L'Infiolata, Spello

When Spello Comes Alive with FLOWERS



When I dream of Italy, I dream of... the beauty and pageantry of *L'Infiolata*. Imagine carpets of flowers covering the village streets of a medieval hill town, *Spello*, in *Umbria*. A weekend of celebrations is held two months after Easter in celebration of the feast of *Corpus Christi*. The carpets of flowers have been turned into floral "paintings" depicting religious scenes or themes.

L'Infiolata is truly a colorful community spectacle constructed with careful planning, executed by local civic and school groups. Following months of preparations including flower-gathering and pet-prepping, locals work through the night on Saturday to create religious scenes on the pavement of the village streets using only flower petals. The floral "paintings" must be finished by 7:00 a.m. on Sunday.

Visitors and locals stroll through the streets taking in the floral paintings. Mass begins at noon followed by a religious procession on a grand scale through the streets and over the, until now, carefully tended "paintings."

The next *L'Infiolata* is scheduled for June 6, 2021.

—Brenda Lohry

Doesn't everyone *Dream of Italy*?

Dreaming of An **UNGL**E I Never Met

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... visiting the town near *Ancona* where my uncle's plane went down during World War II. My uncle, Corporal Robert Oliver, landed in *Bari* only a month before his last mission, a bombing raid over Linz, Austria. A tail turret gunner, his B-24 was hit, and the crew struggled to return the damaged plane to their base near Bari. Tragically, it crashed near Ancona on January 10, 1945, killing all 10 men on board.



Uncle Robert at far right

My uncle took pictures of his training days which were returned to my grandmother after he passed away. It

is comforting to know that he and his fellow soldiers looked happy and carefree before they shipped off to war. He died at just 21, several years before I was born, but he is often in my thoughts because of a scrapbook I found. My grandmother had lovingly memorialized Uncle Robert through those pictures, and he lives on through them still.

I lived in Italy, in *Greve in Chianti*, only a few hour's drive from Ancona, but had no idea my uncle died there. Family legend recalled his plane going down over the oil fields they were bombing, but after I discovered the scrapbook, I

tried to piece together his last flight.

The National Archives fire in St. Louis in 1972 destroyed many military records and trying to find information on one plane — on one specific day — that went down in Italy during World War II takes time. It is a labor of love and luck.

Although his body was ultimately returned to Illinois, Uncle Robert was initially buried in the American cemetery near Bari along with several of his crew members, a beautifully maintained spot that I visited last year.

—Kyle Ball

Author of *Altared: A Tale of Renovating a Medieval Church in Tuscany*,
www.kyletackwellball.com

Baking In **PUGLIA** With Luigi

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... making *pasticciotto*, a pastry with creamy custard filling, in *Puglia* with a handsome Italian named *Luigi*.

When a nicely dressed, handsome Italian with dark curly locks walks into the room, I smile at how much I never expected the person standing before me. Nothing about him says pastry chef and that is what I love about him most.

Everything is happening quickly and mostly in Italian as we go over the details of the recipe. The mood is a bit hurried as our guests were running late but it is comfortable and feels like an evening with friends. With upbeat background music, it is time for the show to start.

With a fork in hand, and a little mountain of flour before me, a few steps are given from Luigi.



Lonielle rolling the dough

Then a quick hand gesture and a very Italian *vai* (go). My hands move just as he told me, as we start off making the pastry dough. He chats with the others and somehow knows when it is time for the next step.

More instructions given and another *vai* as we move on to the custard filling. Sugar, eggs, flour, milk...*vai*. I am all smiles as my mind is trying to catch up with all that is happening. My heart and soul are already there.

The evening and Italian words flow as I work in a leisurely hustle. The soft egg-yolk-tinted dough is pressed into the form and then the custard is smoothed to Italian perfection. Another layer of dough, a

wash of egg and a sprinkling of sugar, and it's as pretty as I could have imagined.

When it comes out of the oven with golden flaky crust, luscious creamy filling, I am in an Italian heaven with the perfect amount of sweetness. We raise our glasses and toast to a pastry and a job well done. (Find the recipe at

DreamofItaly.com The pastry class was booked through VoomaGo.com)

—Lonielle De Haven,
lifelemonsitaly.com



Luigi instructing

Verona has been part of France,

My Grandmother, OPERA and Verona

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... my *nonna* singing *La Donna e Mobile* from *Rigoletto* or *Nessun Dorma* from *Turandot* while I sat at her kitchen table watching her cook. Nonna's passion for opera was by no means unique because it is the lifeblood of her hometown, *Verona*. Just walk downtown on a warm summer evening and you can hear opera emanating from the open-air amphitheater, *L'Arena*, in the middle of *Piazza Bra*.



Nonna and Maria

So while I may have first been introduced to opera at Nonna's kitchen table, it was actually everywhere. Many times I accompanied Nonna on visits to friends where, sitting around their kitchen tables, they would talk about a recent performance at *L'Arena*.



It was not uncommon for waiters in the outdoor restaurants, *muratori* laying bricks, or old men huddled around tiny café tables littered with wine glasses to start singing arias from well-known operas.

I was 12 years old when Nonna first took me to *L'Arena* to see *Aida*. After my *zio Silvio* dropped us off, we entered an ancient stone passageway that led us inside the 2000-year-old amphitheater where we were given a packet of tiny candles and directed to our seats.

The musicians tuning their instruments fueled an almost palpable, growing anticipation. As the vendors sold their wares, they sang popular arias and paused to bow theatrically when the

crowd cheered and clapped for them. The patrons sitting in the exclusive *poltronissime* section wore evening gowns and dinner jackets.

"Are they famous?" I asked Nonna in a whisper, swept up in the undercurrent of excitement a crowd exhibits as it settles in and waits for something wonderful to begin.

As soon as the sun completely set, the entire audience began lighting, one by one, the small candles given to them when they arrived. Thousands of tiny flames softly shimmered and glowed around

L'Arena as if the stars above had descended to twinkle among us. And then it began.

Sitting next to Nonna, who periodically explained the plot, I was amazed there were no microphones or large speakers, and yet the acoustics were such that the arias and melodies reached even the furthest seats.

It was a visceral experience, and for the first time I realized how opera was about entering into an experience that feeds the senses. And sitting under the nighttime sky, on ancient stone seats built by the Romans, I got it.

Years later our three sons were introduced to opera at the kitchen table of my mother — their Nonna. While we made our Christmas *tortellini*, my mother told the story of *Madama Butterfly*, my father rolled the dough

into thin sheets, two of our sons placed the filling onto the tiny dough squares, my mother and I folded the tortellini, and our youngest son lined them up with military precision on the countertop to dry.

We listened to the story of Lieutenant Pinkerton and *Madama Butterfly* and I realized how much my mother sounded like my Nonna from many years ago.

And just like that my memories hopped back through time to that little girl sitting at her Nonna's kitchen table in Verona, eating homemade pasta and learning about opera.

—Maria Novajosky



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Kathleen A. McCabe
Editor in Chief and Publisher

Associate Editor: Elaine Murphy
Design: Kim Leaird
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Editorial feedback is welcome.

E-mail: kathy@dreamofitaly.com

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Austria and now, Italy.

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... dancing in the streets at midnight to the beat of a DJ in the art town of *Acquapendente*. It's a special occasion, the first night of the *Festa dei Pugnalon*, which are mosaics made only from floors. A *Notte Bianca* or white night where competing teams open their doors, lights shining bright, while spectators wander in and out of workshops.



The festival takes place over three days in mid-May each year. The weekend kicks off with the white night on Friday night, public display, judging, and medieval pageantry with a parade, flag-throwers and drummers on Saturday with the winners announced at the celebration of *Madonna del Fiore* on Sunday. After the contest, the artwork is displayed for several months in the local church, so if you can't make it in

May, you can still enjoy the beautiful creations.

Pugnalon

Murals are added to the town each July during its

Urban Vision Festival. The goal is to "create an invasion of artistic and creative energy" inviting artists to literally paint the town with a kaleidoscope of artwork.



Acquapendente lies in the part of the region of Lazio that juts north surrounded by *Tuscany*

and *Umbria*. It was settled by the ancient Etruscans and first recorded as *Acquapendentem* in the 10th-century Latin for "town of hanging water."

It sits on the *Via Francigena*, the historical pilgrim route from Canterbury, England that crosses France, Switzerland, and ends in Rome, still used by intrepid hikers and pilgrims today. It is the perfect base to visit three regions in one trip.

—Lisa Voegel,
TravelYourTree.com



A FRIENDSHIP That Has Endured

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... the places I've been with my Italian friend, *Liliana*, who lives in Milan, and the places in Italy we have yet to see together.

Liliana and I were matched up, by happenstance, as pen pals in 1977. I was taking Italian in college, and the professor told us we must get Italian pen pals, so that we



Liliana and Teresa

could improve our written Italian. Liliana recalls that she was interested in America (being a big fan of Bruce Springsteen), and wanted an American pen pal. She went to the U.S. Consulate in Milan who told her about an organization to connect her. And the result is a strong and enduring

friendship that has now lasted more than 43 years!

Over the years, Liliana's family has become my family. I've attended family celebrations and parties, such as her parents' 50th wedding anniversary, traveling to Italy just after 9/11. I have also grieved with her in the loss of her sweet mother a couple of years ago. Her father, who is now 99 and served in *Mussolini's* army, used to always give me a bottle of his favorite *Pinot Grigio* right before I left to return to the U.S. I think he thought that this Italian wine was not available in the U.S.

Over the years, Liliana and I have had adventurous trips in Italy. We have visited Venice during a rainy November, and *Assisi* and *Umbria* in an equally rainy February. We have been to Rome together, and taken the train from there to *Taormina*, after which we toured Sicily by bus and train. Summer trips have included stays at small beach towns on the Adriatic, such as *Fano* and *Cattolica*, where I was the only American during the quintessential Italian beach week.

A highlight of our travels was a trip to *Basilicata* and to her hometown, *Rotondella*, where I enjoyed a 5-hour Italian "lunch" with extended family. This very personal connection of mine to beautiful Italy has made an incredible difference in my life!

—Teresa Statler

Anzio is also a departure

Escape to the **BEACH** in Historic Anzio

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... escaping from Rome to the beach at *Anzio*, an hour away by train.

Once part of *Antium*, the capital of the *Volsci*, an ancient tribe from pre-Roman times, it was named by the son of Olympus. The territory was then conquered by the Romans and emperors built their lavish villas here.

In World War II, Anzio was the site of important Allied landings and punishing battles. There are three cemeteries where you can pay tribute to Commonwealth and American soldiers in Anzio and nearby *Nettuno*. Don't miss the *Anzio Beachhead Museum* displaying artifacts from the war, and for more ancient treasures, visit the *Museo Civico Archeologico di Anzio*.

The real heart of Anzio is in the central *Piazza Pia* and in the working fishing port that highlights its personality of a delightful Italian beach town straight out of a Neo-realism film from the 1950s.

Beach clubs line the miles of white sandy shores that fan out from either side of the port. On *Riviera Zanardelli*, the stylish *Tirrenino* offers beach chairs and umbrellas to rent and also has regular yoga classes. The restaurant, *Il Barretto*, features a natural wine list and menu that changes according to what the boats brought in from the sea that morning.

Lido di Nerone on the *Riviera Vittorio Mallozzi* has a more old-fashioned vibe,

which makes sense since it is part of the ancient Roman port and incorporates grottos from Nero's villa.



On your evening *passeggiata*, shop cute dresses, beach bags and ceramics all from small designers and artisans at *Note di Marine* and stop for gelato at *Gelateria Treccioni 1936*.

Have a fancy cocktail next to elegant sailboats and working fishing boats at *Alceste Caffè* before you head to dinner at the boisterous *La Fraschetta di Mare*. If you decide to spend the night, book a room at *Hotel Riviera*.

—Gillian McGuire, GilliansLists.com

I Dream of **HOME**

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... *Udine* in the region of *Friuli*. As I slowly walk up *Via Manin*, crossing under the historic arched gate, the industrious and quaint store-fronts secretly witnessing my eagerness to feel, breathe and love this city, one more time, escort me towards the heart of town, *il Cuore di Udine* as it's commonly referred to by those, like me, who were born here.



Manlio in 2017

The cadence of my steps bounces back to me, as the quiet cobblestones reflect the heat of a hot summer Sunday. As I move towards the intersection of *Via Vittorio Veneto*, I can hear the clanking sounds of coffee cups and saucers coming from the *Bar Cotterli* and the discreet chattering of a smartly dressed older couple; they meet my approach with a peculiar gaze,

almost to gauge my very right to be there.

As I say *buongiorno* to them, they immediately retort with a courteous bowing of their head, reminiscent of Teutonic stern, yet noble, ways.

Two young lovers sit on the steps besides the gleaming water splashes from the round Renaissance-built, *Fontana del Carrara*. They appear totally oblivious, almost jaded, their romance framed in what is arguably, one of the most beautiful piazzas in the whole of Italy.

Piazza della Liberta', once known among the locals also as "Piazza Vittorio", in deference to the "Padre della Patria", King Vittorio Emanuele the Second, curiously the...first Sovereign of a united Italy.

I climb the steps to the main cobblestone *ter-rapieno*, almost a ritual. My heart pounds as my mind goes back to when as a young boy, hand in hand with my parents, I marveled at the sight of the beautiful clock tower.

My father, telling me about the imposing statues of *Ercole* and *Caco*, better known to us, *Friulani*, as *Floean* and *Venturin* hinted to a past that, to me, seemed ages away. Yet, not long ago, this very piazza had witnessed Napoleonic decrees, disastrous defeats and joyful times of resurgence. It will always remind me of where home is.

—Manlio De Monte, TravelsWithAudrey.com



point for the Pontine Islands.

Like An Episode of FRIENDS

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... *Francesco's* laughter when his businesslike reserve breaks and he says, "I feel like I'm in an episode of *Friends!*" Earlier in the day, Francesco told the four of us that he and his wife love this television show and that Joey is his hero!

Now, in his parents' kitchen in *Salerno*, we laugh with Francesco. At the opposite end of the table, *Pasquale*, his dad, asks for an Italian translation. Pasquale then chuckles, raises his glass of deep red wine from *Campania* and we all laugh. *Lina*, Francesco's mom and our patient cooking instructor, offers more *ravioli*, more *parmigiana di melanzane*, more *polpette*. Smiling, we extend our empty plates.

My husband Joel and I had a similar experience in 2014 during our first stay at *Salerno Centro Bed and Breakfast*, their small family-run business that Francesco manages. In 2017 we introduced our friends Patti and Gary to both the bed and breakfast and to the private cooking class with Lina.

During our lesson, Patti and I take notes, make ravioli under Lina's careful guidance, and laugh. To maintain clear communication, Francesco moves quickly between the kitchen and living room where the guys watch television. Joel comes to the kitchen to photograph our efforts as Francesco translates the next step of the recipe. Then, from the living room, we hear a mixture of English



Francesco and parents

and Italian followed by the universal language of laughter.

Soon we gather around the table covered by vinyl cloth stamped with pictures of pasta shapes, clusters of tomatoes, and *pepperoncini*. Still wearing our orange-trimmed yellow aprons, Patti and I tell the guys how hard we worked and we fill plates and glasses. Conversation settles into mumblings of "delicious" and "oh, wow!" I translate basic phrases, but Francesco easily involves all of us as shared stories invite laughter that flows among friends.

Francesco is right. *Siamo amici*. We are friends.

—Frances Daniel

The CASTLE and GARDENS of San Giovanni d'Asso

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... *San Giovanni d'Asso*. For those who love to cook, stroll gardens, and enjoy history, this needs to be a stop on your next trip to Tuscany.

There's a castle here that dates back to the 1500s, which occupies most of the town. At the top is a wonderful but simple restaurant and inn called *La Locanda del Castello* with a small outdoor patio. In the cellar of the castle, there is the *Museo del Tartufo* (Truffle Museum). The town also hosts a truffle festival in mid-November.

We enjoyed lunch on the patio of the castle restau-

rant after a visit to the *Bosco della Ragnaia Garden* (The Woods of Spider Webs).

This peaceful, thought-provoking garden was suggested by our friend *Isabella Moricciani*, who runs *Cretaiole Agriturismo* near *Pienza*. This is considered a new garden, completed in 1996 by an American artist, *Sheppard Craige*.

There are several sections of the garden, the Ravine, the open bowl, and the wooded area.



Each of the sections features a different meaning in life. For example, The Alter of Skepticism has an inscription that reads, *Que sais-je*, What do we know?

The center of the Universe has four columns in a circle, each with one inscription: Only here, only now, only this, only as it is, and the Column of Change, that is there for absolutely no reason. There are phrases and words on blocks and stones which challenges you to think and ponder as you wander through the gardens, but not so much that you won't enjoy a walk in the woods. The possibilities are endless and intriguing. The sign at the entrance of the garden states: *Se Non Qui, Dove...* if not here, where?

—Susan Liechty

73% of businesses in Italy

A Memorable SANDWICH in Florence

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... a sandwich...not just any sandwich but the world's most delicious sandwich.

After our morning tour in Florence wrapped up, my husband Carlo and I, along with our daughter Jessica, walked the steamy streets taking in all that Florence had to offer. By 2 p.m., we were ravenous. Each lunch spot we encountered had the perfunctory pizza slices on display.



This was Italy, where was all the amazing food? We continued on and finally happened upon a small, unassuming shop called *Il Panino del Chianti*. "Oh, this looks interesting!" I squealed.

The moment we stepped into the shop we were hit with the intoxicating perfume of perfectly-

cured meat and freshly baked bread, an irresistible combination. There was nothing fancy about this place. "How do you pronounce that...sca...schia...*schiacciate*?" I read from the wooden menu board.

After several minutes of



careful study, the three of us said in unison, "*Schiacciate e tacino piaceri.*"

Nothing could have prepared me for the profound bliss I experienced while eating that sandwich. Biting into the soft, pillowy layers of

the *schiacciate* I could taste the delicate balance between the Tuscan olive oil and the sea salt. Then I was hit by the peppery bite of the fresh made *pesto*.

Next my teeth broke through the rich creaminess of the fresh *mozzarella* and finally I tasted the turkey, perfectly roasted and juicy with a hint of rosemary. We ate in silence, as our taste buds processed every bite. It was like a religious experience!

Over the years, I have tried to replicate that sandwich at home. Baking my own *schiacciate*, making *pesto* from scratch, buying fresh *mozzarella* and deli turkey from my local Italian grocer. Never even came close. It was always missing the most important ingredient of all: the magic of Italy.

—Catherine Rossi

Lunch, AMALFI COAST-STYLE

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... basking in the sun on the veranda of *Hostaria di Bacco* in *Furore* on the Amalfi Coast for a long lunch.

The smell of freshly baked bread mixed with the laughter of locals draws me in as if being welcomed into a friend's home. I pass a few men engaged in conversation with voices raised and passionate hands, not in anger, but mutual excitement. I wonder, how long have they known one another? Do they fish the coast or cultivate the cliffs? How many generations have they brought here to dine together?

The blue-and-white-dressed terrace is so delicately perched on the cliffside that it appears to float above the coast. I turn my head to see the sprawling vineyards of *Marisa Cuomo* cascading

down the cliffs in the background and then to the sparkling Mediterranean Sea, which seems to go on forever and seep into the sky beyond to create a continuous watercolor of magnificent blue. I soak in the Italian banter that filters



through the air, while the sun warms my skin and the aroma of lemon and salt suspends me in an idyllic cocoon.

In true Italian fashion, each dish is paired with a different wine from the region. My tongue is first prepped with the sweet minerality of *Costa d'Amalfi*

Rosato. While the wine awakens all of my taste buds in preparation for what is to come, it simultaneously calms my mind and slows my thoughts in order to focus solely on the present experience.

A server sporting a charming wooden bow tie brings dish after dish of beautifully plated meals, featuring ingredients local to the area, both the cliffs and the sea. From simply prepared octopus in freshly pressed olive oil, to homemade *rigatoni* in a sweetly acidic tomato sauce and the most delicate white fish I've ever tasted. Finishing off with traditional *limoncello* and *biscotti*, I close my eyes and savor every last sensation with the anticipation of revisiting this very moment in my dreams for years to come.

—Taylor Lack

are private, family-owned.

Hiking to Due Sorelle

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... an unplanned adventure... A good night's sleep at the *Casa di Accoglienza Convent* in *Loreto* followed by a breakfast of bread, apple, and coffee, propel my husband and me into a new day of exploring *Le Marche*.

We head north in our car along the Adriatic coast and see an exit for *Monte Conero*, and following a winding road, we end up in a small parking lot in the *Parco Nazionale*. A wooded trail with ocean views leads to an iron railing guarding a precipitous drop to the water.

Below us sparkle the sun-dappled cobalt blue-seagreens of the Adriatic

with a pristine horseshoe-shaped beach, guarded by two monoliths: *Due Sorelle* — the Two Sisters.



We ask a local standing nearby, "How do you get there?" "Jump", he said.

Or the hiking trail descending 1600 feet... Not to be discouraged by a challenge, without hiking gear, we set down an unmarked path. When we realize we are no longer heading downhill, a fellow hiker guides us to the *Passo del Lupo*.

We see numerous *pericolo* (danger) signs. As we descend the cliff, walking becomes more difficult due to the loose stones. My feet keep sliding forward through the open toes of my

Teva sandals. But *Due Sorelle* indeed is getting closer.

After two hours, we reach the white pebble beach. I lurch toward the water, dropping my clothes on rocks. The swim in the refreshing surf makes me forget my tired feet and I swim into a beautiful sea cave.

Around 4 p.m., with a major hike ahead of us, there is no other way to leave but up. The ascent — the same 1600 feet — taxes me to my physical limits but at 6 p.m. we are drinking cold sodas at the *Monte Conero* bar.

—Kathleen Lucas

A Book Leads Us to SUTRI

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... *Sutri*, a tiny town near *Viterbo* in *Lazio*, which I discovered in the book *Pasquale's Nose* by Michael Rips. He wrote it in the piazza here.

Sutri is an Etruscan town with rows of tombs lining the hills and a 1st century B.C. Roman Amphitheater grown over with grass. Pontius Pilate was also born here. Tourists don't come here, so we stand out immediately.

I ask the waiter to speak to me in Italian and forgive me if I butcher his beautiful language. He not only promises to help me but overnight tells the whole town. Everywhere I go locals say, "Ah, there you are! What shall we talk about today?"

A lady unlocks a door built into the side of the hill, letting me into an ancient mithraeum, stretching deep inside the mountain. The frescoes in



this pagan temple are slowly eroding from moisture slipping through the walls. The tombs of the Etruscans are tiny and I marvel at how short they must have been.

Back in the piazza word gets around that I'm here because of Michael's book. They've only met one other

person who has read it and in the confusion, they think Michael and I must be friends. I try to explain I don't know him, but they whisk me across

the piazza to show me where he sat each day, working on his book. I feel guilty sitting in his chair but enjoy an icy cool *Prosecco* as another Sutrian sits beside me with a map and some ideas for what we should see tomorrow.



We somehow lose an entire afternoon at the "TV window," an enormous window high in the tower, looking out over the fields, hills and tombs and a spectacular dance of birds swooping and soaring and dipping for hours on end.

—Corinna Cooke

Galileo lectured at the Unive

Soul Knowing in An **OLIVE GROVE**

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... the soul knowing that happens on a warm September day, late afternoon. Bright sun, light breeze, *San Gimignano* rising on the hill like a beacon from the valley below.

Cypress trees line our view, framing the city on the hill as we arrive at *Il Segreto di Peitrafitta*. Grape vines — simultaneously plump with life, yet reaching, yearning for the sun even late in their season — hang lush in the vineyard. They know their fate is soon enough but yet, they too find time to rest on a beautiful fall afternoon.

What has the strongest draw, what pulls me, though, is the olive grove. I pull a lounge chair under the tree to

rest. A small glass of *Vernaccia* and a novel sit by the chair as sleep quickly finds me under the shade of the tree.

As I drift off, I suddenly realize these olive trees are more than a respite. They are deep knowing, soulful knowing, of a place in which my brain unequivocally knows I have never been but my soul immediately feels as home. It recognizes the sandy soil, the dry grass, the smell of the Italian countryside under the olive tree. It has deep knowing of that small glass of wine, a reclining chair and a delicious nap. The soul understands the intensity of the sun yet the coolness of the breeze, the

rhythmic song of the Italian language as I drift off.



Il Segreto di Peitrafitta

It must be the olive trees. You see, my great grandmother immigrated from Italy to the United States in the early 1900s and was named *Oliva*. She and my great grandfather settled in New York, passing down their traditions through our family. They instilled much of the *cultura* in our family — large dinners, homemade wine, love of family.

Somewhere, somehow, the DNA of place has been thoroughly embedded in me. It makes me deeply emotional, this knowing of the Tuscan terroir, this connection to this place that is me. The soul knows it is home.

— Rachel Verlik



Vernaccia and antipasti

PADUA. Venice's Hotter Younger Brother

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... Padua, Venice's hotter younger brother!

A rainy New York winter Sunday in 2017 sent me rushing into the *Rizzoli* bookstore on Broadway, where a red bound book, *Aperitivo* by Marisa Huff, called out to me with a photo of a *Negroni* I wish I was drinking.

Thumbing through the gorgeous pictures of the Italian *Veneto* cities piqued my interest in author Marisa Huff and her beloved home of Padua (*Padova* in Italian), land of the Spritz and *cicchetti*, the Veneto's answer to the perfect pre-dinner bite.

Five months later, I was on a train bound for Padua. Padua is definitely the Prince Harry, with Venice being Prince William.

Sure, Venice is the more attention grabbing king of the Veneto region, but Padua is definitely the more sexy one with a mind of its own.

This university city delighted beyond expectation. After settling into my ridiculously inexpensive cute Airbnb, I decided to take a *passaggiata* and do aperitivo. I came upon *All' Ombra della Piazza*, which was recommended in Marisa's book. The gorgeous little *crostini*, mini *pizzette* and the smell of warmed toasted *pane* and *formaggi* filled the little bar upon entry. I happily ordered three of the *piccolo crostini* and an amazingly affordable Aperol spritz. "New rule," I thought, "a spritz for each piazza!"



I visited *Piazza Della Frutta*, *Piazza Della Erbe* and finally *Piazza dei Signori*, each one filled with a sea of people and a sea of bright orange and red drinks lining every table. Finally sitting in the middle of *Piazza dei Signori*, sipping that third spritz, watching the Italian hotness all around, and realizing my morning train ride to Venice tomorrow was only 28 minutes away, I thought "best-kept secret of the Veneto!"

—Matt Rutledge



Matt with a Spritz



University of Padua for 18 years.

A PINE TREE TRAIL At The Beach

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... the many summers we spent on the beach in *Pineto*, in the region of *Abruzzo*. Not only is it one of the best beaches on the Adriatic coast, Pineto offers a hiking trail in the pine grove that runs along the beach.

From the north end of rocky shores to the medieval castle *La Torre del Cerrano* on the south end, *La Pineta* as it is often called, provided us with a beautiful trail underneath the canopy of pine trees. Many locals and tourists are often found jogging, riding bicycles or simply walking the three-mile distance. It's a refuge for those days when the temperature rises well into the mid 30 degrees Celsius range and the sea is as warm as a *brodino*.



Our day in Pineto always begins with going to the beach and taking walks along the shore and through the trail in Pineta. As we enter La Pineta, we can hear the sound of the ocean. We take in the fragrance of the coffee bars and small restaurants that line the beach. Around midday we take a break and enjoy a

picnic lunch in the many areas available under the canopy of pine trees.

Breezy warm winds cool us off as we venture back to the coffee bars for

an afternoon espresso or *rinfresco*. After lunch we take a walk along the paved part of La Pineta. The walkway winds its way throughout the north end of the town often passing by shops, outdoor fruit, vegetable and of course, a fish market.

We might rent a bike in the afternoon and follow the path to the larger and more touristy town of *Roseto degli Abruzzi*. In the evening, we take in a concert and most certainly take a

passaggiata in our favorite seaside town of Pineto.

—Fernando Venditti



WINE CELLAR Dreams

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... being in the award-winning wine cellar that holds the massive wine collection served at *Ristorante da Gigetto*, a family-owned restaurant located in *Miane*. We are truly in wine country, with the *Treviso Prealps* to the north, the *Montello* hills to the south, and the *Prosecco* region — *Valdobbiadene* — to the west.

We arrive without a reservation, dressed casually with two of our dogs. Three strikes against us, I wonder?

Not at all. The hostess greets us warmly and leads us to a table.

Eleven rows of copper pots line the wood-beamed ceiling of our dining room — more copper pots than I've ever seen. They remind me of Indian copper bells. Would they ring if a strong breeze blew through?



Our server *Irena* brings us menus and the 62-page wine list. How will we ever decide? We settle on a *Rosso 2016* from *Maeli*, a winery we have visited before in the *Colli Euganei*.

We start with salmon and octopus, then seafood pasta, and then *porchetta*. Dessert is three kinds of *crème brulee* served in petite cups — vanilla, coffee and *pistachio*. After dinner *Irena* brings our coffees and leans in close — asks in a conspiratorial tone — would we like to go downstairs and see the cellar?

The restaurant's cellar is a series of six rooms in the shape of an "O". We walk in a circle — like the rim of a giant wine barrel. There are wooden tables throughout where *Irena* says they sometimes serve *aperitivo*. There is a functioning well

in a corner and a stone-faced Bacchus watches over — happily at home here.

We see every conceivable way to store wine: racks, shelves, cabinets, and the upside down "V" boards used by riddlers. Every surface, every cubbyhole stores wine and spirits. Look inside a stone sink, there's wine there too.

—Nicole Dalrymple



Italy produces more wine

CHOCOLATE Spoons and Renaissance Performers

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... chocolate spoons. "I would like to purchase a gift for my adoptive Italian family. Will these chocolate spoons do?" I explained in my miserable Italian to the cashier at *Caffè Libertà* in Florence.



Slitti chocolate spoons

"Certo!" she said.

The following afternoon, I waited in the living room of the Pepperdine University villa in Florence until I heard the ring of the door on *Viale Milton* at exactly 8:06 p.m. It was my host father, *Nero Braschi*. He was a short, modest man who I would come to find had loved his family, beach trips to *Grosseto* and performing with his red-and-yellow clad *Sbandieratori* troupe.

The Braschis are a family of performers and

entertainers in the Renaissance tradition. I had been in awe that night at their performance to welcome us to Florence — the medieval costumes, the beat of the drums, the flags twirling in the air and the fire-dancing knights dressed in ancient Tuscan garb. It was even more surprising to find out that I would be paired with the family behind the show for monthly visits through our study abroad program.

Over dinner at the home of Nero and his wife *Patrizia*, we struggled to comprehend each other, given my limited Italian and what Nero referred to as his "survival English," but we made it work.

After we had eaten our fill of meat and beans, *Patrizia* brought out a cake. "Is that *pandoro*? No? *Panforte*? No?" I tried to remember other special occasion Italian desserts *Professora Nocentini* had drilled into us the previous week. "It is *La torta di Patrizia*," she said,



Nero and Patrizia Braschi

straightening her blouse and raising her chin. It was vanilla cake with powdered sugar and a thin layer of *Nutella* in the middle. After we ate, she gave me half to take home.

They invited me to join them on the Tuscan coast over the holiday and promised to take me to their flag-throwing rehearsals in the courtyard of the old church on the *Arno*.

By the way, they loved the chocolate spoons.

—Sheean Hanlan

Discovering A Love For Wine

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... the moment I wanted to learn more about the wonderful world of wine. My parents had recently passed away, almost five months apart. My sister was living in London at the time and I decided to go and visit for a while after taking a leave of absence from my job.



Dolomites behind vineyards

I worked at the LCBO, which stands for Liquor Control Board of Ontario. It is our government-run liquor stores in Toronto, Canada. Now, while I could sell wine I most certainly wasn't a fan. I could sell because I had taken and passed all three levels of the product knowledge courses required for all employees. Yes indeed, I could talk up a good storm. I had memorized

everything! Fake it 'til you make it! But did I really know what I was talking about? I knew I could repeat!

From London, I wanted to explore Europe and had always yearned to go to Italy, so started there.

The last thing I was interested in doing was being reminded of my job back home.

I was traveling north on a train heading to *Trentino-Alto-Adige*. Mindlessly looking out the window, I suddenly realized

what I had read about in books was staring back at me! It was the

contradiction of being surrounded by snow capped mountains, the Dolomites, and looking back at the valley floor with grape vines growing, trained on *pergola* trellises. The sunshine was absolutely glorious and suddenly I got it. My eureka moment!

You can grow grapes in the mountains. They are protected from inclement weather because they are

cradled within these beautiful mountains that has captured the warmth of the sun in its bosom. I will never forget this day. It changed my life forever. My world experience opened up in a way I never expected. I am now a certified sommelier

and member of the International Sommelier Guild.

—Jacqueline Corrigan



Jacqueline

than any other country.

Seeing the **POPPIES** of Manfredonia

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... the stunning poppy fields as the weather begins to warm. I am living the dream right now as an American expat in the *sud* (south) in a somewhat small town called *Manfredonia* along the azure shoreline of the Adriatic.

Time seems to stand still here. However, every spring on the sloping hill near my home, the poppies make their appearance in all their scarlet red, midnight black and lush green glory proving that time does indeed march on.

These gorgeous poppies begin showing off their colors in cracks of sidewalks and streets around here as early as January, proving that even in the dead of winter, hope does sustain us.



As I write this, it has been 64 days that I have been facing Coronavirus confinement here in the *Gargano*. Just a week ago was the first time I could go out for a walk. The anti-quarantine list I created during confinement included seeing the poppies in person.



As I rounded the corner from my home, I could see in the distance a blaze of fiery red and hope. Approaching the field, my breath was taken away. There surrounding the abandoned and rustic *masseria* (farmhouse) dating back to World War II, my magnificent poppies were waving and dancing for me in the gentle breeze.

Despite the gloom and doom of the world, the poppies still made their appearance. There is hope in the world and the poppies proved that one day we will all return to the Italy that we know and hold dear in our hearts.

—Sue Casey



When I left my house for the first time to set out to see them, I could feel my excitement growing. Would the poppies be shown in their splendor this year?

Taking in Turin's **PORTA PALAZZO**

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... returning to the *Porta Palazzo* in *Turin*. Turin itself is a beautiful city, rich in history, art and culture. But for me, the main event in Turin is the largest open-air market in Europe, called Porta Palazzo.

This colorful, boisterous market is open early every morning to early afternoon and is set against a backdrop of the historic center of Turin. Row after row of colorful red and white stalls sell every imaginable fruit, vegetable, wine, pasta, sweet treat, herb, cheese, oil, flower, meat, fish, bread, grain, egg... you name it, and if it is in season, it is there. At the periphery in historic buildings there are restaurants, a food court and shops that sell everyday items.

It is truly a local's market therefore,

being there is a total immersion experience into the most vital part of Italian life, the market. The vendors call out their wares in the beautiful melody that is the Italian language.

Not sure what that vegetable is or how to prepare it? Ask the vendor and you can walk away not only with a new culinary treasure but with a recipe to prepare it. The market is almost overwhelming, so plan to stay for the whole morning and then have lunch on the grounds.



Uva fragola

My most memorable experience was finding *uva fragola* (strawberry grape). The farmer let me sample one and I immediately had an out-of-body experience as I was transported back to my grandmother's backyard in Massachusetts where she had a grape arbor grown from a shoot she brought back from her family's farm in northern Italy. The taste, smell and juicy texture of her grapes, rediscovered in Turin, moved me to tears.

—Alice Curran



Alice

Share Your **DREAM**:

We're making your dreams of Italy a regular feature. Send us 350 words on *When I dream of Italy, I dream of...* or send us up to 1 minute for our podcast shareyourdream@dreamofitaly.com

Manfredonia is home to a Swabian castle.