

Pizza

A list of the most iconic foods to eat in Italy wouldn't be complete without the humble pizza. Easy, cheap, and filling, pizza has long been a common snack or meal, especially in Naples where tomato sauce was first added.

In 1889, during Queen Margherita's kingdom tour, she requested a dish she saw her subjects eating. An entrepreneur served her a mix of tomato sauce, mozzarella, and basil, what we know today as the iconic Margherita pizza. Its colors mirror the Italian flag and Naples' history with the Queen, and the city asserts its pizza birthright due to Margherita.



Bottarga

In August and September southern Italians take the roe from gray mullets, salt it, press it, and then leave it to air dry for six months. The result is a solid hunk of eggs the color of amber and blood oranges that, when sliced and eaten or grated over pasta, blossoms into a gloriously savory, smoky, and briny bouquet.

Though essentially a poor man's answer to preserving seafood in the days before refrigeration, it is now considered one of the most sought after and luxurious foodstuffs in Italy, right up there with truffles (more on those later). We recommend it grated over pasta, or simply sliced thinly and drizzled with lemon juice and olive oil.

Lasagna

Like most Italian dishes, the origins of lasagna are hotly contested, but we can at least say that its stronghold is in the region of Emilia-Romagna, where it transformed from a poor man's food to a rich meal filled with the ragù, or meat sauce.

Though you can find lasagna throughout all of Italy, there's nothing like trying the hearty dish in Emilia-Romagna with homemade pasta, fresh ragù, and a generous dollop of regional pride.



Fiorentina Steak

A bistecca fiorentina, or Florentine T-bone steak, covers all of the characteristics of Italy's best dishes: a specific cut of meat from a specific cow prepared in a very specific way all within the confines of a specific region—Tuscany.

In the case of the enormous bistecca fiorentina, it's a T-bone steak cut thick (at least 5 centimeters) from the loin of a Chianina cow raised in Tuscany. It's cooked for 5 to 7 minutes on each side, depending on the thickness, until the outside is cooked and the inside remains very rare. No sense in asking for a medium-well done steak here—the meat is too thick to even think about it!

Keep in mind that this dish is best enjoyed in Tuscany, either in Florence or the countryside, and it's also meant to be shared! When ordering, know that bistecca alla fiorentina is priced by weight; for two people you're typically looking at 1-2 kg (or nearly 2-4 pounds).



Polenta

Polenta is the perfect accompaniment to a wide range of meats, especially stewed meats, and it is arguably one of the most comforting foods you can eat when the temperatures drop in cities like Milan, Turin, and Venice. Look for it as a type of purée, or fried into fritters.



Ossobucco

The world-famous ossobuco alla milanese is a bone-in veal shank, cooked low and slow until meltingly tender in a broth of meat stock, white wine, and veggies. Traditionally, it's accompanied by a gremolata (lemon zest, garlic, and parsley) but that's optional, and served along with polenta. Although the Milanese like to claim this meaty masterpiece, there are so many varieties found throughout the Lombardy region.



Risotto

Risotto is a creamy, luxurious rice dish. Ironically, Italians aren't huge rice eaters, what with all the pasta and the polenta, but they are the largest producers of rice in Europe. While southern Italy is often called the country's bread basket, Northern Italy, especially Lombardy and Piedmont, are its rice bowl.

It's fitting then, that the Arborio and Carneroli varieties grown in the vast rice paddies of these regions are turned into one of Italy's most iconic dishes by being mixed with stock and stirred until they form a velvety semi-soup that perfectly conveys the flavors of anything cooked with it.

There are many variants of risotto, ranging from a simple creamy mushroom risotto to risotto al nero di sepia (risotto cooked with cuttlefish and ink).



Truffles

This pungent, elusive fungus is one of the most expensive and coveted foods in the world—and Italy is one of the few countries where they can be found in abundance! Grown only in the wild, they're found by hunting the forests and mountains of Umbria and Piedmont with dogs or pigs trained to smell them underground.

Truffles in Italy come in two forms, the rare and more aromatic white truffle, or the slightly less aromatic and slightly more common black truffle. They're undeniably popular and Italian tartufi are one of our all-time favorite fall foods in Italy. They're commonly sprinkled over pasta, risotto, and omelets, or used in sauces for steaks or other meat dishes.

Truffles grow naturally throughout Umbria, Tuscany, and Piedmont, so you're more likely to find fresh truffles in local dishes in these areas, but only if you go in the autumn. During any other time of the year the truffles you get will be imported or frozen and they won't be anywhere near as good.



Focaccia

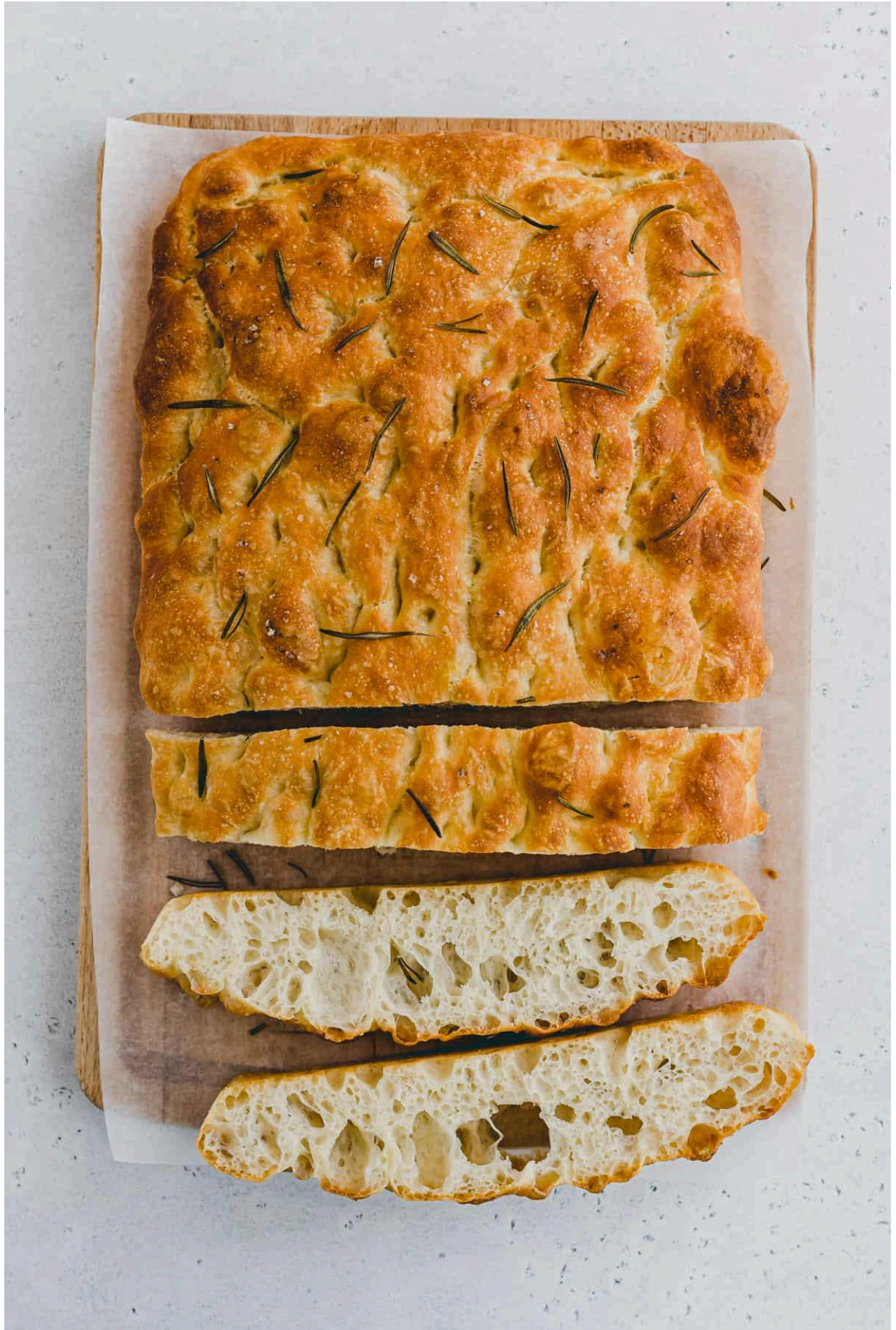
There are a few key things to know about breads in Italy:

- There are hundreds of types of bread throughout the country
- Not all bread is made with salt (like Tuscan bread)
- The best type of bread is the one baked locally that morning
- One of the most famous Italian breads is the beloved focaccia

Focaccia originates from Liguria, a region located in northwestern Italy, along the Italian Riviera. Reminiscent of a thick pizza dough, classic focaccia is salty, drizzled with olive oil and delicious either by itself, or made into a sandwich. It's often served open faced, with toppings like rosemary, zucchini, cheese, and olives.

Off the coast of Italy, in Sardinia, the classic bread doesn't look much like bread at all, instead appearing much more like a pita. Pane carasau, was named for the word carasare, which means to toast. Unsurprisingly, this bread paper-thin bread it always toasted after baking, giving it its wonderful crunch.

In Italy, you'll find bakeries everywhere, from big cities to tiny towns. Don't miss the chance to grab some local bread, (or Italian pastries and cakes); it's a simple joy no matter where you are in the world.



Arancini and Supplì

- *Arancini are bigger and rounder in shape and come in a variety of flavors. In fact, its name means "small orange", for its resemblance in shape and color to the fruit. Common flavors you'll find include ragù and cheese, or some with veggies like peas, mushrooms, eggplant, and zucchini. You can also find specialty arancini like carbonara or cacio e pepe.*
- *Supplì is a Roman specialty usually found in pizzerias and served as antipasti. They're more oval in shape and traditionally contain only rice, tomato sauce, and a large piece of mozzarella in the middle. Their playful nickname "supplì al telefono" originates from the idea that when you break them in half and pull them apart, a delicate cheese string bridges the gap between the two pieces.*

For top-quality, steer clear of pre-prepared fried rice balls left under heat lamps. The contrast between these and freshly fried ones is striking. Whether you opt for the Sicilian or Roman version, both are iconic foods to eat in Italy that you'll be talking about long after your trip.

Pizzoccheri

Pizzoccheri from Valtellina are pasta made from buckwheat flour. Their origins date back to 1750. Originally from Siberia, buckwheat has been grown in Valtellina since the seventeenth century. Served with cubes of potato, wilted cabbage and melted local cheese, it is a rustic dish traditionally served in the mountain villages of the region. Swap the Valtellina Casera and Parmesan cheeses for ones that are made using vegetable-based rennet if serving to vegans.



Cinta Senese

Cinta Senese DOP is another symbol and heritage of Tuscany. A breed of swine original from Siena hills, as its name may suggest. Known since the Middle Age, this Tuscan race is the only that survived through the centuries. Moreover, the name "cinta", which means "belt" in Italian, derives from the white pinky stripe the pig has on the chest and forelegs. A unique feature of this animal.

Ragu from Cinta Senese DOP is unique, dark, red colored, strong, but low in saturated fats thanks to the rearing. Pigs are rustic, completely free to graze inside farmers' properties, during summer they eat herbs and roots, while during winter they find chestnuts and acorns, and these give a sweeter taste to the meat.

Cacciucco

Cacciucco is an Italian fish stew native to the western coastal towns of Tuscany. It is especially associated with the Port of Livorno in Tuscany and the town of Viareggio north of it. Cacciucco is a hearty stew consisting of several different types of fish and shellfish.



Prosciutto

Italy is also famous of it's cured ham. Ham or Prosciutto is pork that has been preserved through salting, smoking, or wet curing. It was traditionally made only from the hind leg of swine, and referred to that specific cut of pork. The top prosciuttos that are recommended are, prosciutto di Parma, prosciutto di San Daniele, Culatello di Zibello, Prosciutto Toscano, Prosciutto di Modena, Vallée d'Aoste Jambon De Bosses, Prosciutto Veneto Berico Euganeo.



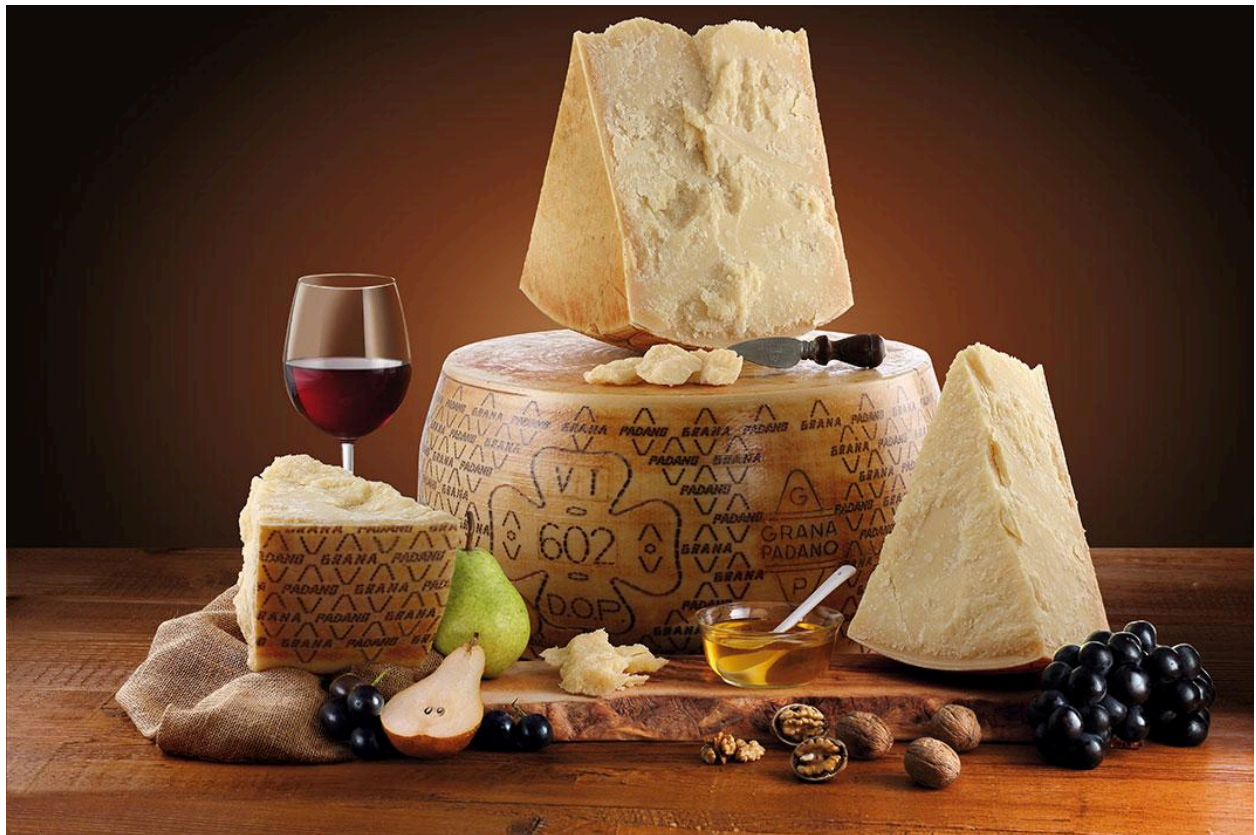
Mozzarella

Mozzarella is perhaps Italy's most famous cheese. But did you know that this formaggio fresco comes in many different shapes and forms?

A typical cheese of Campania in southern Italy, mozzarella is loved and enjoyed by many throughout the world for its soft and tangy flavours. While the classic fior di latte variety made with fresh, whole cow's milk is the most well-known, Italy celebrates many types of mozzarella varying in shape, sizes, texture, and even flavour.

Grana Padano

No other type of dairy product can use the term "grana", which is why the name of this Italian cheese should always be given in full: Grana Padano. This cheese has a delicate taste with a remarkably milky flavor. It is usually served over pasta, but can be eaten with honey, jam and fruits too.



Gelato

No trip to Italy is complete without gelato, and it's totally normal to eat gelato on a regular basis in Italy, especially in the summer (in southern Italy they even eat it for breakfast!). Without a doubt, it's one of the most iconic foods to eat in Italy.

Though gelato and ice cream are similar, they're not quite the same. To start, gelato has far less butterfat than ice cream: about 4 to 8% compared to 14% for ice cream in the United States. The low-fat content means that gelato is served a bit warmer and tends to melt in your mouth faster, and it also intensifies the flavor and gives it a more velvety texture.

Moreover, gelato has a much higher density. Regular ice cream has air and water added to increase volume and weight. These additions also make it less flavorful. On the other hand, traditional artisan gelato is super sweet and super flavorful. Another key difference is that good gelato isn't made for long-term storage.

Finding quality gelato in Italy

When seeking out the best gelato in Italy, there are a few things to look out for.

- Before purchasing, check out the color of certain flavors like pistachio (Does it look earthy colored, or artificial and bright?)
- Look for fruit flavors that are in season (they should be), and consult the ingredient list.

- *Pay attention to how the gelato is stored. Artisanal gelato is slow-churned and should lay flat in its container. Beware of giant mounds of gelato—they may look good, but they often indicate lower quality because they've been whipped to add more air to the product.*



Tiramisu

Tiramisu is probably the country's most beloved after-dinner dessert. This no-bake parfait features layers of soft, sweetened mascarpone cheese and coffee-soaked ladyfingers.

It may be simple to make but not all tiramisu is created equal. A good tiramisu features only the highest quality coffee and mascarpone. Cream and egg whites are sometimes added to the mascarpone to give it a lighter texture, and a variety of cookies and cakes can be substituted for the traditional lady fingers.

Did you know? While tiramisu is undoubtedly one of the most iconic foods to eat in Italy, it's surprisingly one of the more recent additions, with most accounts dating its creation to the 1960s.



Cannoli

One of Italy's best-known desserts, cannoli (the singular is cannolo) originated in Sicily, but can be found all over the country and beyond. The tube-shaped dessert is made of fried pastry dough filled with whipped ricotta sweetened with sugar and candied orange. You'll sometimes see versions featuring pistachios, chocolate chips, or candied cherries. The origin can be traced back to the 10th or 11th century, when Arabs ruled Sicily, with one legend saying that cannoli were invented in a Moorish harem as a vaguely phallic tribute to the sultan, while another legend attributes their invention to the nuns of a convent in Caltanissetta.

Maritozzo

A sweet that's found almost exclusively in Rome, the maritozzo is a soft bun split down the middle and filled with whipped cream. Its origins can be traced all the way back to ancient Rome, but it became popular during the Middle Ages, when the church allowed it to be eaten during the fasting days of Lent. Its name derives from the word marito, which means husband, and during the 19th century, men would propose by hiding a ring in a maritozzo.



Coffee

Italian coffee isn't like coffee in your local Starbucks. Though some of the dozens of choices might sound similar (latte, cappuccino, etc.) they're rarely what you have been led to believe they are. For instance, if you were to order a "latte," in Italy you would simply be served a glass of milk.

Among all the coffee-loving cities in Italy, Trieste has one of the best coffee and cafe culture. Its long history as a tax-free port brought some of the first coffee beans to the city during Europe's first coffee craze in the middle ages. Today Italian coffee king Illy has its headquarters there and the city still imports many other brands as well.



Digestivo

The term "digestivo" or "digestive" does not refer to one drink, but a class of drinks that are enjoyed after a big meal with the aim of settling the stomach and helping you feel not-quite-so-full. Drinking them dates back to the Middle Ages, when people all over Europe believed in the medicinal properties of alcohol mixed with sugar and herbs.

Although the doctors are still out on the medical benefits of drinking medium to strong liquors after a meal, the fact remains that you cannot say you have enjoyed a real Italian meal unless you top it off with a shot of the hard stuff.

Popular digestives include limoncello, grappa, amaro, cynar, amaretto, and if you're feeling brave, sambuca, which has enough alcohol to make a horse giddy. If you step off the beaten track in Italy you will also discover all types of nice post dinner tipplers made from local fruits and herbs. Don't be shy, they are always worth a sip.



Excerpts from

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