

# When in Rome

**Italians take their food very seriously and nowhere more so than the Eternal City of Rome, says Rowena Carr-Allinson**

LAZIO, THE REGION of central Italy with the ancient city of Rome at its heart, has a distinguished past. Its hearty cuisine is based on dishes devised when people were unable to afford a meal made with good cuts of meat and used offal instead. Less prestigious maybe, but definitely more affordable.

Traditional dishes feature pasta, of course, but offal, known as *il quinto quarto* or 'the fifth quarter' also makes a regular appearance. Dishes such as *coda alla vaccinara* (it literally translates as 'oxtail the butcher's way') or tripe have become local delicacies. Not for the faint-hearted, Rome's traditional menus will feature graphic translations with everything from baby lamb's entrails there for the taking.

Eating out in Rome offers a vast choice, from high-end gastronomic restaurants to local trattorias. However, wherever you go you'll find the staple dishes Italians know and love.

Although some restaurants like the sophisticated Antica Pesa are going for

creative cuisine, the majority of places stick to the local classics like *amatriciana*, a simple pasta dish made with *pancetta* (Italian bacon) and fresh tomatoes.

The attitude is why fix something if it isn't broken? Each restaurant strives to perfect the simple recipe passed down from generation to generation to make the best for a public that will eat the same dish time and time again.

Ask any local and they will tell you eating out is all about the food. In fact, the concept of interior design is wasted on the Romans. "If the decor is good, people will assume the food is rubbish, so we have great food but usually in rather shabby surroundings," says Natasha Pascali, an inhabitant of the Testaccio neighbourhood of Rome.

Renowned for its offal specialities, Testaccio was once home to a large slaughterhouse, where employees would receive the less noble



parts of the animals as part of their salary.

Trastevere, across the River Tiber, is also a popular area for informal restaurants, especially pizzerias offering the Roman-style thin crust pizzas cooked in wood-fired ovens, while 'the Ghetto' is the

place for Roman-style Jewish cuisine. On the high end of the scale, La Pergola at the Hilton boasts three Michelin stars with a Mediterranean gastronomic menu, while the very stylish Vivendo at the St Regis has a wine cellar where you can sample local dishes and an amazing wine list.

After the traditional antipasti starters – such as sun-dried tomatoes, *frittata*, artichoke, *bruschetta*, or anchovies and shrimp – the first course, or *primi piatti*, is usually pasta, then it's on to the *secondi piatti* (main course). As for the *dolce*, or sweet, pastries are mostly eaten for breakfast so it's likely to be *tiramisù*, *pannacotta*, *torta della nonna* (grandmother's cake with ricotta cream on a biscuit base) or simply juicy pineapple.

And to do it like a local, stroll down to a nearby gelateria for an ice cream, or simply stop for a coffee and digestive liqueur. It may be simple, but this is *la dolce vita*. ▶

▶▶ **Cooking *al dente* literally translates as 'to the tooth', indicating the way it should be tried to see whether it is properly cooked: firm, offering a little resistance to the tooth, but tender**

## EATING OUT

▶ **LA PARMIGIANA:** Opened by the Giovanazzi family in 1978, it's a firm favourite among Glasgow's Italian community. The cosy restaurant was praised by *The Times* and is the proud owner of several awards. Try the *Bucatini all'amatriciana*, a Roman classic.

447 Great Western Road, Glasgow G12 8HH. T: 0141 334 0686. [www.laparmigiana.co.uk](http://www.laparmigiana.co.uk)

▶ **SALVO'S:** It first opened its doors in 1976 and has since featured in the *Good Food Guide*; it was voted one of the top Italian restaurants in the UK by the *Sunday Times*, *The Times*, *Olive Magazine* and *The Observer*. Try the *carciofi alla Romana*, artichokes in olive oil with mint and garlic for a genuine experience.

115 & 109 Otley Road, Leeds LS6 3PX. T: 0113 275 5017. [www.salvos.co.uk](http://www.salvos.co.uk)

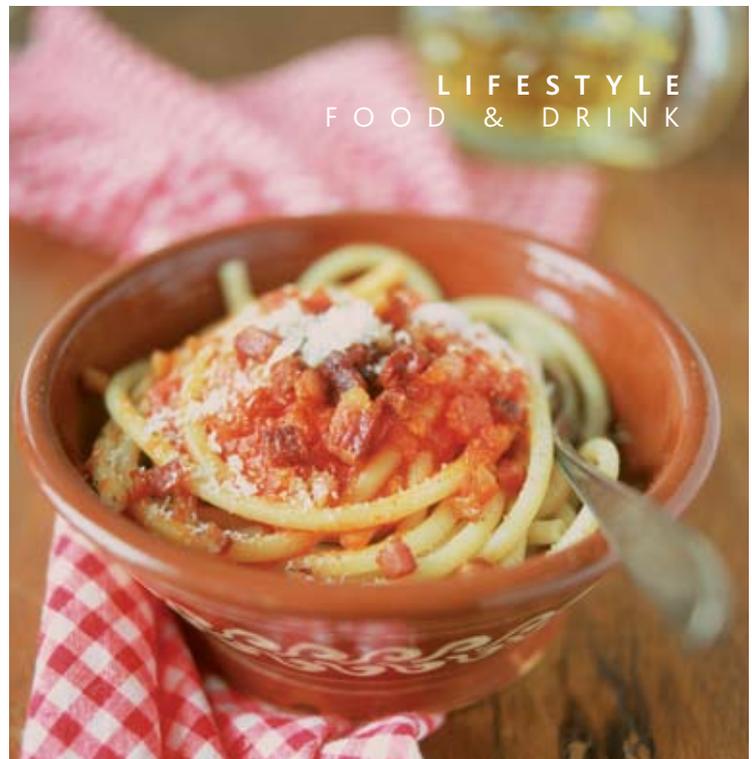
▶ **LAZIO RISTORANTE:** The family-run restaurant was opened in 1981 by two brothers, Antonio and Lorenzo Crolla. They emigrated from a tiny village in Lazio, Picinisco, and serve up local fare like Roman-style thin crust pizza and *Saltimbocca alla Romana*.

The front of the restaurant has cosy booths for two set opposite the chef's area. 95 Lothian Road, Edinburgh EH3 9AW. T: 0131 229 7788. [www.lazio-restaurant.co.uk](http://www.lazio-restaurant.co.uk)



IMAGES: ITALIAN STATE TOURIST BOARD; STOCKFOOD

Clockwise from left: Italian coffee; saltimbocca; bucatini all'Amatriciana; a selection of Italian cheeses; pasta carbonara



## POPULAR DISHES

- ▶ **SUPLÌ AL TELEFONO:** Fried rice balls stuffed with mozzarella.
- ▶ **FIORI FRITTO:** Deep-fried courgette flower with mozzarella and anchovy.
- ▶ **ABBACCHIO ARROSTO:** Sweet and tender month-old lamb roasted with sage and wine sauce.
- ▶ **SALTIMBOCCA ALLA ROMANA:** Roman veal with ham, sage and wine sauce.
- ▶ **STRACCETTI CON RUCHETTA:** Thinly ragged slices of beef in red wine sauce on a bed of rocket.
- ▶ **BUCATINI ALL'AMATRICIANA:** Long pasta with *guanciale* (cured pigs cheek or pancetta), chilli, tomato and *pecorino Romano*.
- ▶ **CODA ALLA VACCINARA:** Oxtail in a wine, tomatoes and pepper sauce.
- ▶ **LA PAJATA:** Veal offal cooked in a tomato sauce and usually served with Rigatoni pasta.
- ▶ **TRIPPA ALLA ROMANA:** Tripe or cow's stomach in tomato sauce.
- ▶ **PECORINO ROMANO:** Salty and piquant ewe's milk cheese, which is often served with pears.
- ▶ **PASTA CARBONARA:** The name derived from 'carbone', which translates as 'coal' and hints at the black, freshly ground pepper with which it should be covered. An original recipe based on eggs, pecorino, unsmoked pig cheeks and pepper, it should never contain cream.

## ROMAN BREAKS

- ▶ **CITALIA** has three nights at the five-star D'Inghilterra in a classic double room on B&B basis from £314 per person, based on two sharing. The price includes British Airways flights departing Gatwick and three nights for the price of two. T: 0871 664 0253. [www.citalia.com](http://www.citalia.com)
- ▶ **HOLIDAY ON THE MENU** offers a six-night stay in Toffia, a tiny medieval hilltop village 30 miles north of Rome, from £899 per person, including breakfast, four cooking sessions followed by lunch, dinner and wine tasting supper, and guided visit to Rome. Flights extra. T: 0870 899 8844. [www.holidayonthemenu.com](http://www.holidayonthemenu.com)
- ▶ **LETSGO2ROME** offers two-night city breaks in a three-star hotel on B&B basis from £155 per person, based on two sharing, including flights. T: 0871 208 3145. [www.rome.letsgo2.com](http://www.rome.letsgo2.com)
- ▶ **INGHAMS SHORT BREAKS** offers a three-night break on B&B at the three-star Senato, overlooking the Pantheon, from £356 per person, based on two sharing and including flights. T: 020 8780 7700. [www.inghams.co.uk](http://www.inghams.co.uk)





# Est! Est! Est!!!

**Throughout history Rome has been associated with wine, especially the famous Frascati and the bizarrely named Est! Est! Est!!!**

WINE IS AS much a part of a culture as the cuisine and, as with everything in Italy, there is a regional focus on local produce and products. White wines feature most prominently, particularly Frascati. Known all over the world, it is light and delicate, perfect for easy drinking with lunch or with appetisers on a balmy summer's evening al fresco.

The hill towns known as Castelli Romani just a few miles away from the Eternal City are home to Malvasia di candia, Trebbiano and Bellone vineyards. With a hot and dry climate along the Tyrrhenian Sea coast (pictured) and conditions cool and damp inland, Lazio's gentle slopes are perfect for planting vines.

Est! Est!! Est!!! originates from Montefiascone, north of Rome near Lake Bolsena, and is also based on Trebbiano and Malvasia grapes, giving a similar semi-sweet fruity fragrance with a slight fizz.

The story says the name came from the 12th century, when Johann Fugger, a German bishop, travelled to Rome for the coronation of Henry V. He sent a lackey ahead to chalk 'Est!' on the doors of the inns serving good wine, meaning *vinum est bonum* or 'the wine is good'. In Montefiascone, the lackey was

►► **Frascati is light and delicate, perfect for easy drinking with lunch or with appetisers al fresco**

bowled over by the local produce, marking 'Est! Est!! Est!!!' on the door.

The Cannellino dessert wine is also worth trying. Sweet and full-bodied, it is produced with the grapes from the sunny southern exposed slopes picked late in November.

Originally these whites were designed not to overwhelm food, as a light tipple, but today they are getting drier, more tangy and refreshing. However, the much overlooked Lazio reds, such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, are finally coming into their own and appearing as the new house wines.

But it's not just about the vino – the cafe culture in Rome is alive and well. Sit at one of the multitude of terraces and order a coffee with a grappa, sambuca or limoncello, which are popular digestive liqueurs, although not made locally. For an espresso try the Café St Eustacchio, a local favourite, or the renowned Antico Caffè Greco on via Condotti and order Palombini coffee, made in Rome. ■

## MIX & MATCH

► **QUENCHER:** Flat Roman thin crust pizza is traditionally eaten with the thirst quenching locally brewed beer, Peroni.

► **PERFECT:** *Rigatoni con pajata*, or pasta with milking lamb's entrails, is best eaten with a Lazio red Merlot, Montiano by Falesco. The winner of the Tre Bicchieri award is a perfect match, thanks to its full-bodied, round and elegant finish with a hint of vanilla, red fruit and spices.

► **RELIABLE:** *Pasta carbonara* is recommended with Dolce Piglio, a good down-to-earth table wine produced by the Cooperativa di Piglio with the Piglio grapes from the city of Piglio in Lazio.

► **CLASSIC:** *Insalata caprese*, the classic tomato and mozzarella di bufala (produced in south Lazio) starter is great with a fresh white Frascati like the Frascati Superiore del Poggio dei Gelsi, by Falesco.

## DID YOU KNOW?

► **WINE ACADEMY:** A stone's throw away from the Spanish Steps, the International Wine Academy occupies a 16th-century *palazzetto* in the very same spot where Lucullus held his fabled banquets in antiquity.

► **THE RUSSIANS LOVE IT:** Italian wine exports to Russia in the first two months of 2007 increased fivefold in volume.

► **FAMILY PERONI:** Peroni, the leader in the Italian beer market, was founded in 1846 by the Peroni family, who still oversee the company's four breweries and headquarters in Rome today.

► **PERONI BREWERY:** Peroni beer was originally made in Rome and today, the Antica Birreria Peroni – the old brewery – is a down to earth *osteria* popular with a local crowd.