AN EXPERIENCE ABROAD
BY MAIA PLANTENI

A COMPILATION OF ALL THINGS ITALIAN
BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE TUFTS ITALIAN SOCIETY
Last year I spent my junior spring semester in the beautiful and largely unheard of city of Bologna in Italy with the Brown program. In anticipation of the 5 months I was going to spend in Italy, I think I spent the last 2 months, salivating over the culinary feast I was heading for. Anyone who studies Italian and plans a trip there is aware of the food delights that Italy promises. I was no different and I was willing to bankrupt myself if it meant satisfying my appetite and savoring all that Bologna and Italy had to offer.

I chose to study in Bologna because of the city’s size, proximity to other great destinations, its world famous university and most importantly the fact that it is not on the regular tourist map. I wanted to experience the real Italy away from the throngs of tourists and their blaring flash cameras. When I applied to the Brown in Bologna Program the prospect of immersing myself in the Italian language was my core reasoning. I didn’t realize that I was heading for the food capital if Italy! Indeed Bologna is known as "La grossa" which literally means “The Fat one”. Bologna as the capital of the Emilia Romagna province boasts some of the best food in all of Italy! You like Bolognese sauce, you owe it to Bologna and the ragù!

As I mentioned earlier I was the study abroad student prepared to live the full experience even at the expense of my own cash flow. I was rigorous about my other expenses, but when it came to food I was extremely generous with myself. However as prepared as I was to break open by piggy bank I was pleasantly surprised by the many amazing food opportunities in Bologna that were wallet friendly! Here at last I got to subject, "Laperitivo italiano". Laperitivo was traditionally the pre-dinner drinks that would ‘open one’s appetite’ for the full dinner. The notion was that one would order a drink with some basic snack foods before heading for the proper three-course meal. Aperitivo usually start at 6 in the evening and extend till 9/10pm just before Italians head to dinner. Now the term and concept of “aperitivo” has been re-appropriated by restaurants and no longer means pre-dinner snacks but actually implies an open buffet with drinks, and still at very interesting prices!

Where originally one might find nuts, crackers etc now one can regale in a full-blown pre-dinner buffet. In my experience at Bologna I was amazed by what was actually served at these pre-dinner drinks. Many restaurants offered a diversified selection of pastas, warm and in salads, with other salads/vegetable dishes, potatoes, meats and most importantly the massive wheel of Parmesan cheese and deserts. The “aperitivo” is a social event that opens the evening before the later scheduled dinner where friends and co-workers can wet their appetites over a light meal with drinks. However even though I said ‘light’ meal one could also make it the entire dinner by scavenging the entire buffet selection. Laperitivo was a great occasion to meet people and enjoy a cost-effective meal and drinks.

During my time in Bologna and my extensive search and experimenting of different aperitivi I found that the general cost was always between 7-10 € for one alcoholic drink with open buffet. Yes, open buffet! This is not a lie nor is it an exaggeration. Despite the small plates offered, one could just go back to reserve as many times as desired. I must clarify that for Italians, the open buffet is an available option, but most of them still take the term “aperitivo” in its real definition as only a pre-dinner event. However as a broke study abroad student still seeking to eat my way through Italy, I took the open buffet to heart. I stockpiled my plates with the amazing variety of foods to accompany my usual house red wine glass all for 9 €. I still cannot believe my luck at eating good food, drinking wine whilst also being frugal. I think the aperitivo tradition is something that needs to be exported to the United States. Who could resist a good meal and a glass of wine for 10?!

I am a firm believer in the therapy of food and wine. Italy only reinforced this conviction and I miss my time and food their on a daily basis. Wouldn’t the world be a better place if the tradition of food and drinks as an evening combination became worldwide, affordable and still as filling as ever?

Sassi di Matera

If you’re looking for a unique place to visit in Italy, check out the city of Matera. Matera is located in the Southern province of Basilicata (the “arch” of the boot). The historic center of the city is notable for its “Sassi”, cave dwellings in which people have called home for thousands of years. The Sassi are carved out of the stone that lines the sides of a steep ravine and are piled atop one another—they are thought to be some of the first human settlements in Italy. In fact, people lived in the Sassi until the 1950s, when the government forced residents out of the caves due to overcrowding and poverty.

Fun Facts about Matera and the “Sassi”

- The “Sassi di Matera” were named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1993.
- The Sassi were the set of many films, including Mel Gibson’s “The Passion of the Christ”.
- Over the past ten years, the Sassi and the city have undergone re-development and now approximately 50% of the cave dwellings are re-inhabited.
Where to Eat?!

In the United States, there are many options when it comes to dining out. We have sit-down restaurants, fast food restaurants, fast casual restaurants (like Chipotle or Panera), and diners. Just as distinctions between these types of establishments exist in America, differences in dining styles exist in Italy. It can be pretty confusing for a tourist, trying to decipher the difference between an osteria and a trattoria...because there are also ristoranti and pizzerie, among other types of eateries.

**Ristorante:** here is your classic sit-down restaurant. A ristorante in Italy is the fanciest and most expensive option. Printed menus will offer every course à la carte, with a fixed price and food will be prepared by a professional kitchen staff.

**Trattoria:** the trattoria is less formal than the ristorante. You can expect prices to be much more reasonable, but service much more casual. There may or may not be a hostess and there may or may not be a menu. Trattorie are generally family-owned and serve regional specialties family-style.

**Osteria:** this is basically Italy’s version of a tavern. Historically, an osteria was an inn providing both lodging and simple food and wine. Today, the osteria is seen more as a “rustic” wine bar serving simple, inexpensive local food.

**Pizzeria:** this is more obvious. Enter a pizzeria in Italy and you will find...surprise...pizza! Pizza is baked by a pizzaiolo in a wood-fired oven. Pizzerie are very casual establishments in Italy, and you can either eat pizza on location or take the pizza away. Until recently, pizzerie only offered, well, pizza but now many places provide other dishes.

**Bar:** you will not be judged by going to the bar in Italy during the daytime. That’s because a bar in Italy is really a place to go for espresso and a brioche in the mornings...sort of like the American café. You can either stand at the bar and drink coffee or sit down (in most bars, you will be charged extra for sitting down). Most bars tend to be frequented by locals in the morning but remain open throughout the day, offering panini at lunchtime and in some places, aperitivi.

**Paninoteca:** you will find a wide assortment of hot and cold sandwiches, or panini, at a paninoteca. Paninoteche are good places to find something cheap to eat for lunch.

**Tavola calda:** The tavola calda is essentially an informal eatery where you choose from a wide assortment of pre-prepared dishes, all at very reasonable prices. It is basically the Italian version of Dewick or Carm, except you pay a cashier at the end, after your food is on your tray.

**Gelateria:** this is incredibly obvious...a gelateria is an ice cream shop, only much, much, much better. Keep in mind, here you pay for your coppa or cono after you order and most gelatai get irked if you ask to taste-test flavors.

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**Mole Antonelliana**

If you’re ever in Torino, you should check out the Mole Antonelliana. The Mole is the major landmark of the city and is named for both its size—mole is the Italian word for “bulk” and “sheer size”—and for the architect who built it, Alessandro Antonelli. Construction on the Mole began in 1863 and lasted about three decades, until its completion in 1889. The Mole is over 525 feet high and is quite unusual in shape; its square base it surmounted by a square-shaped dome, topped off with a thin, elaborate spire. In its time, it was the tallest brick building in the world. Originally constructed to be a synagogue, the Mole now house the National Museum of Cinema. Visitors can also take an elevator to the terrace at the top of the dome for breathtaking views of the city and the surrounding Alps.
Wherever you travel to in Italy, you will find good food (maybe with the exception of tourist hubs in Rome, Florence, and Venice). If you’re a real "foodie", though, I suggest you make your way to Bologna.

**Bologna is known as La Grassa (the Fat One) for good reason.**

You’d be surprised to know that the following foods call Bologna their birthplace...

- **Tortellini**—*tortellini* are ring-shaped pasta, typically stuffed with meat. Legend has it that the first tortellino was inspired by "l’ombelico di Venere", or the bellybutton of Venus, the goddess of love. The proper way to serve *tortellini* is not with a cream sauce, rather to serve it in a meat broth (*tortellini in brodo*).
- **Tortelloni**—the *tortellono* is the *tortellino’s* older brother. *Tortelloni* are the same shape as *tortellini*, only larger. For the most part, they’re stuffed with ricotta cheese and a leafy vegetable; in some places, it is common to find *tortelloni* stuffed with pumpkin and cheese. *Tortelloni* are generally served in a butter and sage sauce or with a tomato sauce.
- **Ragù alla bolognese**—*ragù alla Bolognese* is the traditional red meat sauce, generally served with *tagliatelle*. True *ragù* is slowly cooked and uses ingredients such as onion, celery, carrot, different types of finely chopped meat, wine, and a small amount of tomato.
- **Mortadella**—*mortadella* is real, Italian bologna. It is made with finely ground pork, and mixed with salt, white pepper, peppercorns, coriander, anise, and pieces of pistachio. The mixture is then stuffed into a casing, cooked, and sliced. *Mortadella* is frequently served as an *antipasto* but can also be used to stuff *tortellini*. 
Dances of Italy

For the most part, when people think of Italy and Italian culture, they immediately think of food. Yes, it is true that food plays a tremendous role in Italian life. A lesser-known aspect of the Italian culture is the folk dance. Just as there are regional differences in food, there are regional differences in dances—a reflection of the influences of conquering or migrating peoples over the centuries. The tarantella is the most known folk dance, but there are handfuls of other dances, such as the pizzica and the galletta. Traditional folk songs that accompany the dances are still sung in the local dialects and most call for the fisarmonica, the organetto, and the tamburello. Be on the lookout for an Italian folk dance workshop at the end of this semester!

The Islands of the Lagoon

The Venetian Lagoon is an enclosed bay of the Adriatic Sea. More often than not, when you’re visiting the Lagoon, you’re there to see the splendid city of Venice. While Venice has a lot to offer, hopping on one of the vaporetti can take you to other majestic, picturesque, and sometimes overlooked islands of the Lagoon.

Murano: Murano is an island town located in the Venetian Lagoon, a little north of the city of Venice. Murano is known for its glassmaking, both in history and today. Murano became a hub for glassmaking in 1291, when the Venetian Republic ordered glassblowers to move their workshops to the isolated island, fearing fire and the destruction of Venice’s wooden buildings. Today, glassmakers of Murano continue to employ century-old techniques and the island is home to some of the most prominent glassmaking companies in the world. If you visit Murano, you can find out more about the history of glassmaking Murano Glass Museum; additionally, many glassmaking companies offer free glassblowing demonstrations.

Burano: Take another vaporetto and you could end up in Burano. Not only is Burano known for its lace-making, it is recognized as one of the most colorful places in the world, for each home is painted with a beautiful, vivid color. The reason? Years ago, fishermen painted their homes bright colors in order to differentiate dwellings in the fog; colors of houses have remained in families for years and a color change requires permission from the government.

Torcello: Torcello, also located north of the main city, was founded in the 5th century, making it even older than Venice. One of the most spectacular sights to see in Torcello are the Byzantine mosaics inside the Cathedral of Santa Maria Dell’Assunta. The mosaics date back to the 11th century, and one of the most impressive mosaics of the Last Judgement.
Harry Potter e la Pietra Filosofale

AN EXCERPT By J.K. ROWLING, TRANSLATION BY MARINA ASTROLOGO

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Dudley rimase con il naso spiaciuto contro il vetro, a contemparare le spire brune e lucenti.

‘Fallo muovere’ chiese piagnucolando al padre. Zio Vernon picchiò sul vetro, ma il serpente non si mosse.

‘Ancora!’ ordinò Dudley. Zio Vernon tornò a bussare forte con le nocche sul vetro, ma il serpente continuò a non fare.

‘Che noia!’ disse Dudley con voce lagnosa. E corse via.

Harry si spostò davanti alla vetrina del pitone e guardò intensamente il serpente. Non si sarebbe stupito se anche lui fosse morto di noia, senza altra compagnia che quelli stupidi che tamburellavano tutto il giorno con le dita contro il vetro cercando di disturbarlo. Era peggio che avere per camera da letto un ripostiglio, dove l’unico visitatore era zia Petunia che pestava sulla porta per svegliarli; lui, almeno, poteva girare per tutta casa.

D’un tratto il serpente aprì gli occhi piccoli e luccicanti. Lentamente, molto lentamente, sollevò la testa finché si trovarono all’altezza di quelli di Harry.

Gli feci l’occhiolino.

Harry lo fissò stupito. Poi diede una rapida occhiata in giro per vedere se qualcuno li osservava. Nessuno. Tornò a fissare il serpente e ricambiò la strizzatina d’occhi.

Il serpente girò la testa di scatto verso zio Vernon e Dudley, poi alzò gli occhi al cielo. Dette a Harry un’occhiata che equivaleva a dire:

‘Questo è quel che mi tocca sempre’.

‘Lo so’ momorò Harry di qua dal vetro, anche se non era sicuro che il serpente potesse udirlo. ‘Deve essere veramente fastidioso’.

Il serpente annui energicamente.

‘Ma tu da dove vieni?’ gli chiese Harry.

Il serpente colpi con la coda un cartellino accanto al vetro. Harry lo guardò attentamente.

Boa constrictor, Brasile.

‘Èra un bel posto?’

Il boa colpi di nuovo con la coda il cartellino e Harry lesse ancora: Questo esemplare è nato e cresciuto in cattività.

‘Ah, capisco, non sei mai stato in Brasile, tu?’

Il serpente scosse la testa e in quello stesso momento un grido assordante alle spalle di Harry li fece trasalire entrambi: ‘DUDLEY! MR DURSLEY! VENITE A VEDERE QUESTO SERPENTE! INCREDIBILE QUEL CHE STA FACENDO!’

Dudley caracollò verso di loro più in fretta che poté.

‘Fuori dai piedi, tu!’ intimò mollando un pugno nelle costole a Harry, il quale, colto alla sprovvista, cadde a terra come un sacco.

Quel che seguì avvenne così in fretta che nessuno si rese conto del come: un attimo prima Piers e Dudley erano chini vicinissimo al vetro, e un attimo dopo erano saltati all’indietro tra gridi di orrore.

Harry si tirò su a sedere boccheggiando; il vetro anteriore della teca del boa constrictor era scomparso. Il grosso serpente stava svolgendo rapidamente le sue spire e scivolando sul pavimento, mentre in tutto il serpentario la gente si metteva a urlare e cominciava a correre verso le uscite.

Mentre gli scivolava accanto a tutta velocità, Harry avrebbe giurato di aver udito una voce bassa e sibilante dire:

‘Brasile, aspettami che arrivo... Grrrrrazie, amico’.

We hope you enjoyed the first edition of Italianità, a creation of the Tufts Italian Society to promote the Italian culture and lifestyle on campus. If you’d like to contribute a photo or article to upcoming issues, please contact us at: Tufts.italianclub@gmail.com

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