

Guide to the Regional Foods of Italy



Guide to the Regional Foods of Italy

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by David Raezer and Jennifer Raezer

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Introduction

Previewing this book?

Please [check out our enhanced preview](#), which offers a deeper look at this guidebook.

Each region of Italy has its unique specialties and distinct culinary tradition. This Approach Guide provides a comprehensive review of the traditional “typical” foods (cucina tipica) that an adventurous traveler might encounter as they move throughout the country.

This recently updated and expanded guidebook begins by offering recommendations for navigating the Italian culinary scene (when to eat, how to tip, when not to order a cappuccino, etc.) and then goes on to provide a region-by-region culinary review. In reviewing the food for each region, the typical antipasti, primi, secondi, and dolci are profiled.

To make things easier for you to navigate each new region’s cuisine, this guidebook also provides detailed profiles of Italian salumi and pasta types, as well as a comprehensive, searchable, Italian-to-English glossary of culinary terms.

Contact us anytime

Our readers are our greatest inspiration. Email us at founders@approachguides.com to let us know about your experience with Approach Guides — many of our recent updates have been inspired by customers like you. We personally respond to every email.

We hope you enjoy what we believe is a totally unique cultural guide to some of the best in Italian cuisine. *Buon appetito!*

Have a great trip!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David and Jennifer Raezer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "David" being the most prominent.

David and Jennifer Raezer
Founders, Approach Guides

P.S. We highly recommend that this food guide be used in conjunction with our Approach Guide entitled “Italian Wine Guide” (www.approachguides.com) or Approach Guides Wine, our wine app for the iPhone or iPad (www.agwine.com).

Coffee Etiquette

Like so many things food- and drink-related in Italy, Italians have a set protocol for coffee drinking. Although some have been known to consume double-digit numbers of espressi per day, it is not inconceivable that the average Italian drinks 4-6 espressi each day (pre-work, mid-morning, post-lunch, mid-afternoon, post-dinner). Don't try to keep up...

What is a Caffé?

A caffè is an espresso, nothing else. That said, here are some of the more common coffee options (these largely correspond to the basic Starbucks classifications):

- If you order a **caffé**, you get an espresso.
- A **caffé ristretto** is a very “short” espresso, meaning that there is less water than in a typical espresso, making the flavor even more concentrated. While a ristretto has a richer flavor than a regular espresso, it also is more of an “essence” of coffee and in many respects offers a sweeter, rounder flavor only amounting to 1 or 2 small sips.
- A **caffé macchiato** is an espresso with very small amount of whole milk, served in the same sized demitasse cup as an espresso.
- A **cappuccino** (also “**cappuccio**”) is an espresso with a larger amount of whole milk, served in a larger, nearly mug-sized cup.
- A **caffé latte** is an espresso with an even larger amount of whole milk.
- A **caffé lungo** is an espresso with more water added, served in a larger, nearly mug-sized cup.
- There is **decaffeinated coffee**; it is called **caffé haag** and it is basically served as an espresso size.

Less “Options”

There is no option for the type of milk; it is always whole milk.

There are no flavors.

As for sugar in your coffee, add it yourself.

At a coffee bar, breakfast consists of coffee and a croissant known as a brioche (Milan and parts of the north) or a cornetto (Rome and parts of the south). That's it. Nothing else.

Timing is Critical

Never drink milk in your coffee after noon (especially not as a finish to your dinner). This includes both a cappuccino and a caffè macchiato.

At a restaurant, coffee is not served at the same time as dessert. Coffee is served dessert has been finished. If you order your coffee with dessert, get ready for some confused looks from your server.

Ordering and Paying

You don't get a coffee to go and, more often than not, you stand at the bar and drink it. If you want to sit down, be prepared to pay at least double.

Unless there is only one person running the place, you **don't pay at the coffee bar**, but at the cash register (cassa); typically you pay in advance.

All of the **coffee bars in Italy select a certain brand of coffee that they will use**; the name of this brand will be very visible and certainly written on the ceramic cups in which the coffee is served.

If you are given **water with your coffee**, it is meant to be drunk to clear your palate **BEFORE** drinking the coffee. A post-coffee chug of the water is a huge error, in the Italian rulebook, signaling a dislike for the taste of the coffee just consumed.

For further information on coffee culture, see our discussion on coffee in Naples in the "Campania" section.

Salumi Primer

Boudin

Boudin is a dark-hued blood sausage that contains pork and pig blood.

Bresaola

Bresaola is a notable exception to the pork-dominated world of salumi, as it is air-dried and salt-cured beef. Made in the Valtellina area north of Milan, a whole cut from the hind leg (top round) is first mixed with salt, pepper, garlic, cinnamon, laurel, and cloves. The meat is then encased in a membrane and allowed to air dry for one to three months. Bresaola is best served thinly sliced (though thicker than prosciutto) with a light drizzle of extra virgin olive oil, fresh black pepper, and hint of lemon. It has a rich, buttery, and musty quality.

Cacciatore

A small-sized pork salami (air-dried and salt-cured ground meat) that is seasoned with black pepper, spices, garlic, and dry white wine; it is aged for approximately one month. Cacciatore (literally “hunter”) is a bit spicier than your typical salami.

Ciauscolo

Ciauscolo is a lightly smoked, air-dried, and salt-cured pork salami, often spiced with pepper and garlic; moist and finely ground, it is designed to be spread on bread and eaten. It is a specialty of the Marche region.

Coppa

Also known as capocollo, this is air-dried and salt-cured whole pork shoulder and/or neck; this compares to prosciutto (from the hind leg) and lonza (from the loin). It is flavored with various spices (pepper, cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg) and aged for three to six months. Capocollo is traditionally found in the regions of Basilicata, Campania, Emilia-Romagna, Puglia, and Umbria.

Culatello

Produced in the area around Parma and similar in many respects to Prosciutto di Parma, culatello is made from the leanest part of the hind leg of the pig (whereas Prosciutto di Parma is made from

Pasta Primer

Types of Pasta

There are two basic types of pasta:

- **Dry pasta (pasta secca)**, made from flour (the specific type varies) and water. Pasta secca is factory-made, packaged pasta.
- **Fresh pasta (pasta fresca)**, made from flour and eggs. Pasta fresca is hand-made for immediate consumption. While pasta across the board is excellent in Italy, pasta fresca is the way to go if available; the homemade quality of these pastas affords them a profound texture, making what is already an incredible experience even better. These pastas also might be identified on menu as “fatta a casa” (made in house) or “paste fresche” (plural for fresh pasta). *It is important to point out that while fresh pasta is traditionally made with eggs, pasta is often made fresh in some locations (most in South Italy) from flour and water only.*

Shape Matters

The shape of pasta does matter. The various pasta shapes were designed to work optimally with the type of local sauce: tomato-based sauces work best with flat and smooth pastas; however, chunky meat pastas require tube- or twisting-shaped pastas that better capture their bulkier elements.

Pasta Lunga (Long Pasta)

Long pastas are best suited to olive oil and tomato sauces, rather than chunky meat sauces.

- **Bucatini**. A long, hollow, cylinder-shaped pasta. Think of it as hollow spaghetti.
- **Linguine**. Most prevalent in South Italy, linguine actually has an ever-so-slight curvature (the source of its name, “little tongues”), despite its flat appearance.
- **Spaghetti**. This long, thin, cylinder-shaped pasta is probably the most famous of all.
- **Spaghetti alla chitarra**. A square-shaped, rather than cylindrical, spaghetti.

Fettucce (Ribbon Pasta)

These are typically fresh pastas, however, all can be produced commercially as dry pastas.

- **Bavette**. A long, flat, narrow ribbon pasta that is similar to fettuccine in width.
- **Fettuccine**. Slight wider than the thinnest ribbon pasta, tagliolini, fettuccine is also known as **trenette** in Liguria.
- **Tagliatelle**. This flat ribbon pasta is slightly wider than fettuccine. This is the classic pasta

THE REGIONS OF ITALY



Lazio



Antipasti

- **Bruschetta.** Toasted bread topped with myriad items, usually including olive oil, garlic, and tomatoes. Pronounced: “bru-SKET-ah”.
- **Carciofi alla giudia.** Artichokes (a local variety, cimaroli) are a local specialty. These are deep fried and crispy.
- **Carciofi alla romana.** Artichokes (again the cimaroli variety) simmered in a boiling water-based mixture that includes olive oil, mint, lemon, and garlic.
- **Suppli.** Small balls of mozzarella wrapped in rice (sometimes with tomato sauce), breaded, and deep-fried.

Primi

- **Friarelli (a.k.a. brocoletti).** Tender, bitter greens similar to broccoli rabe; they grow in the province of Salerno and are cooked with oil, garlic, and peperoncino.
- **Puntarelle.** A slightly bitter, crispy green served in a dressing of olive oil, garlic, vinegar, and anchovy paste. Very tasty.
- **Stracciatella.** A chick broth and egg-drop soup.

Typical pastas

- **Bucatini.** A long, hollow, cylinder-shaped pasta. Think of it as hollow spaghetti.
- **Fettuccine.** Slight wider than the thinnest ribbon pasta, tagliolini.
- **Gnocchi or gnochetti.** Lazio’s gnocchi are traditionally made with semolina (flour from durum wheat), rather than riced potatoes and flour.
- **Penne.** This famous tubular pasta comes with (rigate) and without (lisce) ridges on the exterior.
- **Pincinelli.** Also known as bigoli in the Veneto, pincinelli is a large diameter spaghetti that is slightly doughier in composition; it is made from whole wheat flour and water that is extruded (rather than rolled) into a cylindrical shape.
- **Spaghetti.** The quintessential long pasta, it is thin and cylinder-shaped.
- **Tonnarelli.** About the width of tagliatelle, this ribbon pasta is square-shaped rather than flat.

Typical sauces

- **Amatriciana.** Sauce of salt-cured pork jowl (guanciale), tomatoes, onions, garlic, peperoncino, and pecorino cheese.
- **Arrabbiata.** Similar to amatriciana, with more tomatoes and peperoncino (making it significantly more spicy), less onions, and often no guanciale.
- **Cacio e pepe.** Sauce of grated pecorino and fresh ground pepper.
- **Carbonara.** Sauce of sautéed guanciale (pancetta is sometimes a substitute), egg, grated pecorino, and pepper.
- **Gricia.** Sauce of pecorino cheese, guanciale, onion, olive oil, and black pepper.

- **Puttanesca.** Sauce of garlic, black olives, capers, anchovies, and tiny tomatoes.

Secondi

- **Abbacchio a scottadito.** Thin strips of milk-fed baby lamb, sautéed.
- **Agnello a scottaditto.** Sautéed lamb strips.
- **Anguille.** Eels.
- **Coda alla vaccinara.** Oxtail and wine stew.
- **Coratella.** Lamb entrails (heart, liver, lungs, and windpipe), minced and sautéed.
- **Maialino al forno.** Roasted pork.
- **Pajata.** Lamb intestine, typically sautéed and served with pasta.
- **Porchetta.** Suckling pig typically roasted with rosemary, fennel, garlic, and pepper.
- **Saltimbocca.** Veal cutlets, topped with sage and prosciutto and sautéed.
- **Trippa alla romana.** Tripe is stomach lining, usually of a cow. It is typically cut into large pieces, boiled, and served in a tomato sauce. In Rome, it typically has mint and pecorino cheese added in for good measure.

Formaggi e Dolci

Cheeses

- **Pecorino Romano.** The quintessential cheese of Lazio, this is a sheep's milk cheese that has been aged in local tufa (limestone) caves. For the most part, pecorino cheeses are hard in texture and oily in character (due to their higher percentage butterfat); they have a rich flavor profile exhibiting rustic notes of sheep, with touches of sweet, salt, and peppery spice. They are best served sliced, as an accompaniment for food. For the highest quality, look for those made from 100% sheep's milk (marked as "pura pecorino").

Desserts

- **Frutta fresca.** Fresh fruits typically comprise the primary desserts for most diners in Lazio.
- **Panna cotta.** "Cooked cream", a no-egg "custard" made by simmering together cream, milk, and sugar; this combination is mixed with gelatin.
- **Semifreddo.** A semi-frozen mousse, consisting of equal parts ice cream and whipped cream.
- **Tiramisu.** Spongy ladyfingers dipped in coffee and layered in sweet mascarpone cheese.

Glossary of Common Foods and Terminology

- Acciughe - anchovies.
- Aceto - vinegar.
- Acqua - water.
- Acqua mineral - mineral water; served with (gassata) or without (naturale) bubbles.
- Acquapazza, all' - a lightly herbed broth (garlic, olive oil, and tomato) used for poaching.
- Affettato - sliced. Affettato misto is a mixed platter of cold cuts.
- Affumicato - smoked.
- Aglio - garlic.
- Agnello - lamb.
- Agrodolce - sweet and sour.
- Agrumi - citrus fruit.
- Albicocca (pl. albicocche) - apricot.
- Alici - anchovies.
- Amaro - bitter.
- Ammollicata (m ammollicato pl. ammollicati/e) - covered in breadcrumbs
- Ananas - pineapple.
- Anatra - duck.
- Animelle - sweetbreads.
- Anguilla - freshwater eel.
- Animelle - sweetbreads (thymus and pancreas).
- Arancio (pl. arance) - orange.
- Arista - a roasted loin of meat.
- Arogosta - spiny lobster (no claws).
- Arrosto - roasted.
- Asino - donkey.
- Assaggio - a taste.
- Astice - clawed lobster.
- Bacala - dried salt cod.
- Barbietola - beet.
- Basilico - basil.
- Ben cotto - well done.
- Besciamella - Béchamel sauce.
- Bianchetti - tiny, newborn anchovies or sardines, typically served flash fried.
- Bicchiere - A drinking glass.
- Bietola - chard.
- Birra - beer.
- Bistecca - steak.
- Bocconcini - little balls.
- Bollito - boiled.

Where It's From

Location, location, location...it is fundamentally important in Italy where food products are produced. When buying Italian food products at a store in Italy (and at home), the **packaging will always provide you with location-based information**. However, this information can be a bit hard to translate, as often the name of the region in which it was produced is not given; instead, what is given is the **two-letter abbreviation for the regional province**. To make things easier, we have provided an alphabetical listing of all of these two-letter province abbreviations below, the complete names of the provinces, and the associated regions, so you too can know where your Italian food goods are coming from.

Province Codes

AG: Agrigento (Sicilia)

AL: Alessandria (Piemonte)

AN: Ancona (Marche)

AO: Aosta (Valle d'Aosta)

AP: Ascoli Piceno (Marche)

AQ: L'Aquila (Abruzzo)

AR: Arezzo (Toscana)

AT: Asti (Piemonte)

AV: Avellino (Campania)

BA: Bari (Puglia)

BG: Bergamo (Lombardia)

BI: Biella (Piemonte)

BL: Belluno (Veneto)

BN: Benevento (Campania)

BO: Bologna (Emilia-Romagna)

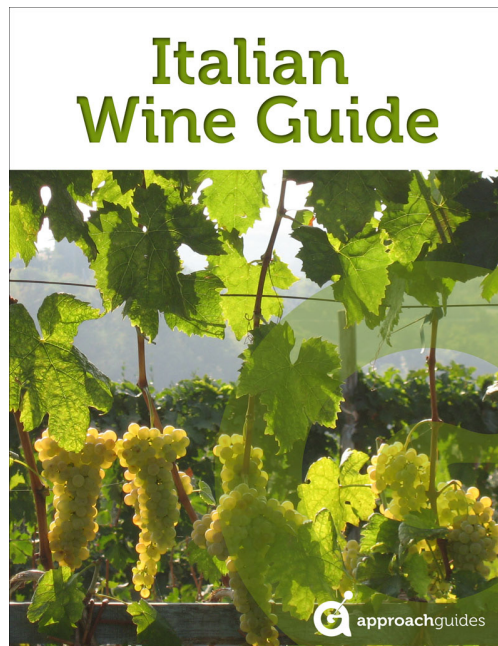
BR: Brindisi (Puglia)

BS: Brescia (Lombardia)

BZ: Bolzano (Trentino-Alto Adige)

CA: Cagliari (Sardegna)

The Wines of Italy



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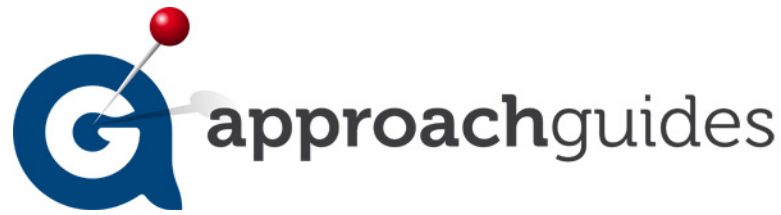
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Compulsive (and compulsively informed) travelers, the Raezers are the masterminds behind the downloadable Approach Guides, which are filled with a university course-worth of history and insights for 62 destinations worldwide. Why we love it. The Raezers share our desire for deep, well-researched information on the wonders of the world.

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What started as one couple's travel notes aimed at filling in the gaps in guidebooks has become ApproachGuides.com — a menu of downloadable travel guides that cover cultural and historical topics of interest to thoughtful travelers. What's hot: Bite-sized travel guides that specialize in topics ranging from ... the foods of Italy to one that helps you explore the historical and architectural significance of Angkor's famous temple structures in Cambodia.

Los Angeles Times