

Patrick O'Halloran – Lombardino's chef and owner, 2007 Italy restaurant picks

Where to eat in Rome

Gusto – A modern restaurant, pizzeria and wine bar that sprawls the entire length of a city block. Perfect execution of classic Roman cuisine with an emphasis on the freshest ingredients, great cheeses and excellent salumi, an attached shop sells cookbooks and kitchen gadgets.

Tazza D' Oro – The cities favorite coffee bar near the Pantheon, remember to pay the cashier first then present the barista with your receipt. Cappuccino is only a morning drink in Italy, after 11:00am you need to order “un café” which will get you a strong shot of espresso. Drink your café standing at the bar with the locals and you will pay half as much as if you sit at a table with the tourists.

Obika – This unique restaurant near the Pantheon is a shrine to artisan produced mozzarella. Billed as a mozzarella bar, the menu features several varieties of fresh buffalo milk mozzarella, wonderful salads and a great wine list. Watch the mozzarella Chef work in his open kitchen just as Sushi Chefs do.

Forno Campo De' Fiori – Stroll through the Campo's morning farmers market and then hustle over to the Forno for a giant slice of fresh hot Pizza Bianca. You will need to order by the centimeter as they cut chunks of hot, olive oil, rosemary and sea salt topped pizza from the 10 foot long slab. Hot, crisp and dripping with olive oil this is quite possibly the best street food in the world.

Maccheroni – This comfortable Roman restaurant presents all of the classics from, mozzarella and prosciutto and spaghetti carbonara to lamb chops “scottadito” in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere that won't break the bank.

Panattoni – My favorite for Roman pizza, located in Trastevere the sign outside simply says Pizzeria but the locals call it “l obitorio” or the morgue due to its long marble tables. The thin crisp crust fresh from the wood burning oven is to die for, but an unexpected treat was the lightly battered and fried bacala (salt cod) that would make any Wisconsin fish fry chef weep in his beer.

Crudo – An artsy cocktail lounge and multi-level restaurant that brings a little New York to the eternal city. The menu is modern and sophisticated with a focus on raw fish and meats served with style. Try local varieties of fish crudo or carpaccio made from beef, lamb or veal.

Naples and points South

Da Michele – For more than 130 years this local favorite has offered a menu of Pizza Marinara, Pizza Margherita, water, coca-cola and beer. The locals love it and the pizza has no rival. You will have to wait in line which presents its own set of challenges (for a

country with over 3,000 years of continuous civilization they still don't know how to stand in an orderly line) or better yet try and wrangle a number from the guy at the door.

Radici – Taking a modern twist on fresh Neapolitan ingredients this contemporary restaurant would be right at home in Chicago, New York or San Francisco. I had five beautifully presented courses with local wines to match. The owner personally translated the menu from top to bottom and gave me his recommendations. Fresh pasta with “lupini” slang for the tiniest of tiny local clams, local sea bass fresh from the boat served both raw and grilled with elegant sauces to compliment. Sometimes it's best to let go and put yourself in the chefs hands.

Dora – A Neapolitan institution devoted to one thing and one thing only, fresh fish. Four courses of fish - from deep fried to raw, lobster with pasta and cherry tomatoes and brilliant local sea bass cooked over a live charcoal fire served simply with lemon and a splash of fruity local olive oil. Ask for the waiter who can name all fifty U.S. state capitals.

Pizzeria Mattozzi – My first meal in Napoli. A simple pizzeria with a dog chained to the side of the wood fired oven. The service is brisk and brash but always with a sly wink from the owner. Just as you find anywhere in the region the pizza is first rate, also try the mozzarella in carozza (in a carriage) fresh mozzarella di bufala sandwiched between two slices of bread, dipped in egg batter and fried until golden. Watch the 100 year old waiter shuffle by and lovingly toss customer leftovers to the yelping dog in the dining room.

Il Buco – The finest table in Sorrento. This Michelin starred restaurant offers seven course tasting menus with wines to match. Try sumptuous soups and dish after dish of the freshest seafood. As is the custom you will find an emphasis on locally produced ingredients mixed with the high art of fine cuisine, the service is gracious and this will simply be a night to remember.

Pizzeria AurorA – Right on the main square in Sorrento this brightly lit tourist spot where waiters stand on the corner and beckon was a great surprise. From the traditional antipasti of fresh mozzarella and prosciutto, and the best spaghetti and clams with tiny fresh tomatoes I have ever eaten to the wood fired pizza topped with olive oil, buffalo mozzarella and bitter radicchio. Inexpensive, lively and hearty this place hits the spot for the hungry tourist who needs a break.

Don Alfonso 1890 – located in the town of Santa Agata sui due Golfi this world renowned restaurant and inn sits in the city center that over looks both the Bay of Naples and the Bay of Salerno. Chef Alfonso Iaccarino and his wonderful wife Livia are your hosts. The food is a link between modern Mediterranean style and top quality ingredients. Chef Alfonso is hailed as the greatest cook in Campania and he has all of the accolades to prove it. (Not the least of which are his three Michelin stars) The quality of ingredients is so important here that the family purchased a farm overlooking the Isle of Capri and now produces all of it's own vegetables, herbs and olive oil. I of course opted for the full on nine courses with matching wines from the region and was not

disappointed. The smallest octopus in the world bathed in fragrant chick pea sauce, beautiful medium rare veal topped with a pate of black pork and artisan mozzarella, a Neapolitan espresso mousse and a dizzying array of petite sweets to finish. Livia makes a point of visiting every table and when she found out that I was a chef she whisked me into the kitchen and then to the ancient wine cellar (from the sixth century b.c.) followed by shots of house-made limoncello and autographed cookbooks. This was a truly magnificent experience and well worth the price tag, I can't wait to return and visit the family farm.