



Vini San Valentino

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The Wines of Emilia-Romagna

Most Americans think of *Emilia-Romagna* as a single region, while it is actually an uneasy union of two provinces joined together in 1945. The areas could not be more different.

Emilia is sometimes referred to as the bread basket of Italy, the home of *Parmigiano-Reggiano*, *Prosciutto di Parma* and the balsamic vinegar of *Modena*; it is conservative and traditional in politics.

Romagna is known for game and seafood, and leans toward intense regional feeling and socialism. Simply put, Romagna is the coffee and Emilia is the cream.

The contrast extends to wine as well. Emilia is the birthplace of *Lambrusco*, and has never really been taken seriously in the U.S. Romagna is the home of *Albana di Romagna*, one of the

great white wines of Italy, and is known for its *Sangiovese* — full-bodied, spicy and distinctive.

Trying Them at Home



Lambrusco

Lambrusco doesn't get much respect from Americans, largely because they fail to put the wine in context. Refreshing, effervescent and off-dry, it is perfect on a hot day or as an

accompaniment to a salami sandwich. It is not a "great" wine in the way that most people would define the term, but not every occasion in life calls for one.

We constantly hear that Lambrusco is improving, and that better examples are available for purchase. Strictly speaking, there's no need to splurge —

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Loreto

Meandering Through A Corner of Le Marche: Pesaro e Urbino

From coastal *Pesaro* — *Rossini's* birthplace — to hilltop *Urbino* — the "ideal Renaissance city" — the *Pesaro e Urbino* province in *Le Marche* is verdant with nature, music, history, faith, food, and wine.

The province of *Pesaro e Urbino* encompasses the northern third of *Le Marche*. It's bordered on the north by *Emilia-Romagna* and the independent republic of *San Marino*, on the west by *Toscana* and *Umbria*, and on the east by the *Adriatic*.

If you love Italy, this morsel of *Le Marche* definitely has something to capture your affection. Consider my discoveries as an *a la carte* menu from which to choose rather than a fixed itinerary.

Pesaro's Favorite Son

My travels to this area were based in the pleasant family seaside resort of *Pesaro* which flies the coveted *bandiera blu* (blue flag) for the quality of its coastal waters. The late *Luciano Pavarotti* owned a beach villa here which is now available for rental.

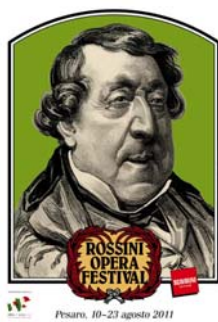
Because it's the provincial capital, a modern city grew up around the *centro storico*. *Piazza del Popolo* sits atop what once was the Roman

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Half of *Emilia-Romagna* is covered by plains.

forum. Sadly, most of the old town walls were torn down in a misguided modernizing effort in the early 20th century.

Through the ages, the wealthy and powerful called Pesaro home because of its strategic location and the sustenance provided by the outlying rich agricultural land. The *Malatesti*, *Sforza* and *Della Rovere* clans took turns dominating civic affairs. So it's ironic that the Pesaro native to have the greatest international impact was born in obscurity in a cramped two-room apartment.



Pesaro, 10-23 agosto 2011

It seems the father was a fan of Napoleon's invasion, which didn't sit well with the Papal States clergy when they were restored to power. Although Rossini lived in other Italian cities and eventually in Paris, he remained loyal to his birthplace. He willed his considerable fortune to Pesaro to



Performance of *Matilde di Shabran*

establish the Conservatory of Music and the Rossini Foundation.

crown jewel of these efforts. The score that disappeared after its first performances in 1825 enjoyed a triumphant Festival revival in 1984 under *Claudio Abbado*.

Come for the Renaissance, Stay for Today

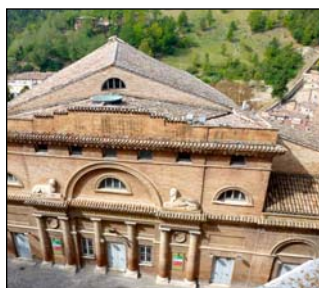
The twin turrets of the Renaissance jewel of *Urbino*, perched atop two hills, appeared in the distance long before we pulled up below the massive walls

surrounding it. While some critics whine that the large parking lot sullies the visual integrity, my eyes could only gaze above it to the *Palazzo Ducale*. "The most beautiful in all Italy," proclaimed one writer.



Palazzo Ducale, Urbino

The Palazzo, and many of the intellectual achievements within it, were the product of *Federico da Montefeltro*, Duke of Urbino (1422-1482). If you have even a cursory knowledge of Italian art, you'll recognize his profile. The *Piero della Francesca* diptych portraits of *da Montefeltro* (with his red hat and crooked nose) and his wife *Batista Sforza* hang in the *Uffizi Gallery* in Florence.



Teatro, Urbino

Da Montefeltro has been called "the light of Italy." Humanism ruled his court and he attracted the finest talents: writers, artists, scientists, and scholars. He recruited architect *Luciano Laurana* in 1465 to expand and refine a structure begun 20 years earlier. *Francesco di Giorgio Martini* took the reins in 1472. To stand in the center of the Courtyard of Honor is to know the rational, harmonious beauty that is the Renaissance.

"It seemed more like a city than a mere palace," wrote *Baldassarre Castiglione*, author of *Book of the Courtier*, the *Gossip*

I was curious to visit composer *Gioachino Rossini's* birthplace on the street that now bears his name. Although I'm a fan, I knew little about the composer's life. We saw the kitchen and the small room where he and his parents lived. The father was a horn player and slaughterhouse inspector. The mother was a *soprano*, but not of first rank, according to our guide *Silvia Orlandi*.



Il Barbiere di Siviglia in Pesaro's Piazza del Popolo

In conjunction with these organizations, the city has hosted the annual *Rossini Opera Festival* for the past 30 years. Every August, the city comes alive for two weeks with the strains of his genius. The Fest attracts world-class talent—*Cecilia Bartoli* and Renée Fleming enjoyed early successes here—to perform not only his greatest hits *Guillaume Tell*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *L'Italiana in Algeri* and *Tancredi* but also lesser known operas, sacred music, and songs.

Festival organizers avidly pursue revivals of Rossini's "buried" works. The recovery of *Il Viaggio a Reims* is the

We saw Rossini's spinet as well as libretti, paintings, and illustrations of his life and work. We learned that late in life the balding composer donned wigs of blue, brown, and other colors. I liked that quirkiness. There were even somewhat grisly black-and-white photographs of his dis-internment from *Perè Lachaise* cemetery in Paris in 1887 before his remains were entombed in *Basilica di Santa Croce* in Florence.

In 1797, the Rossini family fled Pesaro.

Urbino is a major producer of

Girl of its day. Art historian *Giorgio Vasari* proclaimed it “wondrous” and French essayist Montaigne commented that the palazzo “contained as many rooms as there are days in the year.” Da Montefeltro acquired a library of manuscripts second only to the Vatican. But, the Vatican has the last laugh; it now owns the collection.

All of these magnificent rooms are open: the immense throne hall, the private *studiolo* with exquisite wood marquetry and trompe l’oeil, the intimate marble Chapel of the Muses and companion Chapel of Absolution. Within the chambers are displayed the priceless works of the *Galleria Nazionale delle Marche*. Among many, we viewed paintings of the iconic *Città Ideale*, the Flagellation by Piero della Francesca, and the portrait *La Donna Muta* by *Raffaello*, who was born in Urbino.

Devoting a mere two hours to this experience could be considered criminal neglect. I comforted myself with the thought that never seeing this marvel would have been more reprehensible.

Before moving on, I had just a few minutes to spend in *Piazza della Repubblica*, which was bustling on a sunny September afternoon. Locals were going about their errands. Several *polizie* were chatting with their buddies instead of guiding traffic. Clusters of college students were unconsciously exhaling their energy into the air. *Urbino* has had a university since 1506 and the student body now numbers almost 20,000.

I did catch a glimpse of *Raffaello’s* birthplace (sigh!). Next time I’ll tour the interior, which is said to be a fine example of a middle-class Renaissance home. I’m confident Urbino will wait for me.

O, Come All Ye Faithful

The *Santuario di Loreto* (the shrine of the Virgin Mary’s house) is housed in the spectacular hilltop *basilica* in the walled town of *Loreto*. Technically, it sits in *Ancona* Province, a bit more than an hour’s drive south of Pesaro, but is worth the trip.

We entered the *basilica* from the vast *Piazza Madonna*. Even on a weekday in September, hundreds of visitors animated the space. One of the Capuchin monks shushed our guide *Andrea Giordani* but that was a losing battle. It’s estimated that four million pilgrims come each year.

The Holy House consists of three reconstructed partial stone walls that are encased in a formidable marble enclosure carved with scenes from the Virgin’s life.

Bramante originally conceived the marble surround but it took many artists and a span of 70 years to complete. Visitors are able to walk into the enclosure to be within the walls of the Holy House.



A chapel inside the basilica



Santuario di Loreto

Many approach on their knees as the deep furrows carved into the marble kneeler outside the shrine attest.

The interior of the basilica is divided into three naves with 12 side chapels. Many are illustrated with frescoes of the angels

whom the faithful believe carried the Virgin’s house to *Loreto*. An alternative legend professes that Crusaders rescued the sacred stones.

Arguably the finest

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Raffaello's portrait of La Muta

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the tin-glazed pottery *maiolica*.

art is ensconced in the Sacristy of St. John where *Luca Signorelli* painted exquisite gold-tinged frescoes of musician angels followed by the figures of the Evangelist and church scholars.

Out in the dazzling sunlight of the piazza once again, we marveled at the octagonal dome that *Giuliano da Sangallo* completed in May of 1500. It's the third largest in Italy after St. Peter's in Rome and *Santa Maria del Fiore* in Florence.

Through the centuries, Columbus, Galileo, Descartes and other celebrities have journeyed to Loreto. When Mozart visited, he bought his mother "some bells, candles, bonnets and patches." Today's sacred souvenir shoppers still have plenty to choose from in the kiosks and storefronts.

In 1962, Pope John XXIII paid homage to Loreto as the destination for the first Papal visit outside of Rome since Italy's reunification. A bronze statue of the rotund pontiff stands just outside the main piazza overlooking the valley.

On the Truffle Trail

Two dozen miles southwest of Pesaro, the placid coastal plain morphs into picturesque hills near *Acqualagna* with 5,000-foot-high *Monte Nerone* and other peaks in the distance. The terrain gets rugged quickly.

Our bus struggled up a winding dirt road to deliver us to truffle hunter *Giorgio Remedias azienda*. Although we'd been advised to have proper

footwear, the sight of *Remedia's* knee-high rubber waders gave some of us pause. He had a no-nonsense demeanor that could perhaps be attributed to his other job as chief-of-police in *Acqualagna*.

Remedia explained that this area is rich in truffles. He said that they're a symbiotic fungi that grow on the roots of oak and poplar trees. The



Le Marche wine grapes



Truffle crostini



Giorgio Remedias and his dog Chicca



Tartufi neri

Acqualagna area yields different varieties of *tartufo bianco* (white truffle) and *tartufo nero* (black truffle) almost year round.

This community is seriously all about truffles. It's said that one-fourth of the residents are qualified truffle hunters and 70 percent of Italy's truffle dogs are trained here. The white truffle is celebrated each autumn with the *Fiera Nazionale del Tartufo Bianco*.

To find the elusive *funghi*, Remedias trains dogs from the time they're puppies. He told us that no particular breed is optimal. He looks for animals that display a good sense of smell and

a talent for scanning an area with a swiping motion. To train a puppy, he places bits of truffle in a perforated plastic film canister. He lets the puppy mouth the canister to familiarize it to the aroma. Next step is to spade some holes in the woods in which to bury truffles for the dog to find. Soon, the dog learns to want the truffle enough to hunt for them. Dogs may be active for as long as 15 years and prized

animals can be worth as much as 5,000€.

Remedias brought out five-year-old *Chicca* and it was time to hit the woods. We slogged through some fresh mud (it hadn't rained for weeks until the day we arrived) trying to keep pace with the wiry gray hound. In no time, she dug up a black truffle, which Remedias snatched with one hand as he fed Chicca a different reward with the other hand. Otherwise, she would have gulped the fungus (world's priciest doggie treat!). And so they

continued for about half an hour, finding some white truffles as well as black.

Afterward, with the sun setting over the peaks, we returned to town and descended upon the *Acqualagna Tartufi* store with a shopping fervor that matched Chicca's hunting. I purchased a jar of *salsa tartufata* that I plan to toss with some pasta one of these days. I expect the powerful, earthy aroma will evoke memories of meandering through Le Marche.

—Sharon Sanders

Sharon Sanders wrote *One Woman's Truly Dolce Vita* in the September issue of *Dream of Italy*. She blogs at www.simpleitaly.com

Le Marche was occupied by

What to See

Casa Rossini

Via G. Rossini, 34
Pesaro
(39) 0721 387357
www.provincia.pu.it/cultura/musei/casa-di-rossini-pesaro/
Admission is 4€

Rossini Opera Festival

Held each August in various locales in Pesaro
(39) 0721 38001
www.rossinioperafestival.it

Palazzo Ducale and Galleria

Nazionale delle Marche
Piazza Duca Federico
Urbino
(39) 0722 322625
www.urbinoculturaturismo.it
Admission 5€

Santuario di Loreto

Piazza della Madonna 1
Loreto
(39) 071 9747155

Truffle Hunting Excursion

Azienda Agricola Remedia
Giorgio Remedia
Strada Frontino, 25
Acqualagna
(39) 0721 708214 or
(39) 0721 708165
m.remedia@libero.it
Conducts excursions with small groups of up to five people, the cost is 100€

Private Guides

Silvia Orlandi

Available for any destination in Pesaro e Urbino province.
(39) 335 6144241
orlandi.silvia@live.it

Andrea Giordani

Loreto
(39) 071 2905303
agiordan1@alice.it
www.guideturistichemarche.it

Where to Stay

Villa Catani Stuart

Trebbianico (Pesaro)
(39) 0721 55782
www.villacattani.it
Rates: A double room starts at 115€ per night. A junior suite ranges from 165 to 225€. Breakfast included. A charming 17th-century villa and 35-room hotel built in period style set amidst gardens on the sea just south of Pesaro. Modern amenities and an outdoor pool.



Villa Cattani Stuart

Hotel Vittoria

Piazzale Libertà, 2
Pesaro
(39) 072134343
www.viphotels.it/ita/hotel-pesaro_vittoria.asp
Rates: Start at 178€ per night, with breakfast. This recently renovated late 19th-century villa on the coast boasts 18 rooms, nine suites, and restaurant *Agorà Rossini*.

Villa Giulia

Pesaro
www.villeinitalia.com/houses/VillaGiulia.jsp
The late Luciano Pavarotti's spirit and many of his artifacts fill this spacious two-building beach compound, which is owned by his daughters. The main house accommodates 23 at a cost of \$16,395 to 26,235 a week depending upon season. The 11-person smaller house goes for \$10,930 to 19,675.

La Tavola Marche

Agriturismo Ca'Camone
Via Candigliano
Piobbico
(39) 331 5252753
www.latavolamarche.com
Farm stay and cooking school southwest of Urbino and west of Acqualagna. Check out the article in the June 2011 issue of *Dream of Italy*.

Where to Eat

Ristorante Andreina

Via Beffolareccia, 14
Loreto
(39) 071 970124
www.ristoranteandreina.it
Closed Tuesday
Thirty-something chef *Enrico Recanati* learned to cook from his *nonna Andreina* and has also completed

stages with some of Italy's finest chefs. He cooks with respect for tradition while bringing it to a new level of sophistication. Our group sampled white corn *polenta* with tomato puree and crispy fried basil leaves, a gossamer *lasagna* and whimsical vanilla *semifreddo* lollipops with a strawberry puree bulls-eye. Average cost for a three course meal without wine is 44€. Also offered are a five-course meal for 40€ and a seven course for 55€.

Ristorante Alceo

Strada Panoramica Ardizio, 119/121
Pesaro
(39) 0721 51360
www.ristorantealceo.it
For 37 years, owner chef *Rapa Alceo* has offered *alici scottaditto* (grilled anchovies) baked *spigola* (sea bass) and other local fare. Order a bottle of the local *Bianchetto del Metauro*. In good weather, clients can dine on a spacious terrace with a sweeping coastal vista. Average cost for a meal without wine is 50€.

Osteria del Parco

Via Mochi, 11/13
Acqualagna
(39) 0721 797448
www.osteriadelparco.net
Closed Tuesday
Dinner here was a trufflepalooza as we sampled 10 truffle-laden dishes from *crostini* to *risotto*. Average cost for a meal without wine is 25€.

Tourism Help

Le Marche Tourism

(39) 071 8061
www.turismo.marche.it

Pesaro e Urbino Province Tourism

(39) 0721 69341
www.turismo.pesarourbino.it

1 € = \$1.38 at press time

a bottle of *Ca' de Medici Lambrusco* (\$8) is plump, rich and refreshing, just what you would want as an aperitivo or as an accompaniment to a platter of prosciutto. If you're curious about how elevated the wine can become in the right hands, try the *Vecchia Modena Lambrusco di Sorbara* from *Cleto Chiarli*, or their *Vigneto Enrico Cialdini* (both around \$18); alternately, sample the fine Lambruscos of Cantine Ceci, which retail in the \$20 range.

The Emilia winery with the largest distribution in the U.S. is probably *Umberto Cesari*, founded in 1967. Cesari makes a wide range of wines, some of which are local and seldom exported (such as their *Malise*, made from the *Pignoletto* grape variety native to the Bologna hills). They are known for their *Moma* wines, which are a bargain at \$14. The *Bianco* (40% Trebbiano, 30% Sauvignon and 30% Chardonnay) is well balanced and fruit-forward, a nice accompaniment to fish courses; the *Rosso* is primarily Sangiovese, with 10% each of Cabernet and Merlot blended in, and pairs well with pasta and meat dishes. On the upper end of the scale, they've gained a reputation for blends such as *Liano* (\$25), a 70/30 mix of *Sangiovese Grosso* and *Cabernet* and *Tauleto* (\$40), a combination of Sangiovese and 10% *Bursona Longanesi*.

The signature white wine on the other side of the province is *Albana di Romagna*, which gained DOCG status in 1987. It is available in a variety of styles, from *secco* and *amabile* (off-dry) to *passito* and *dolce*. The dry version displays a gold color, floral aromas, crisp acidity and pleasant nutty taste, and pairs well with *piadina*, the thin flatbread native to the Romagna cities of *Forlì*, *Ravenna* and *Rimini*.



Umberto Cesari



Chiarli

The Albana grape reaches its greatest glory in the *passito* style, with the grapes dried in the traditional wooden boxes, or on grates in barns. Delicately sweet, with good balancing acidity and overtones of almond and quince, it shines after dinner with cheeses and roasted chestnuts. Excellent versions are available from *Campodelsole* (\$25) and *Tre Monti* (\$30) in half-liter bottles.

Tasting in The Region

The wine trail in Romagna is filled with pleasant detours and delightful surprises. If time and transportation permit, make sure to pay a visit to *Castelluccio*, located on a hilltop in *Modigliana*. Run by the talented winemaker *Claudio Fiore*, this estate gained fame in the 1970s when the owner hired Claudio's father *Vittorio*, a noted enologist, to oversee and improve production. Vittorio Fiore began aging the single vineyard wines of Castelluccio in French *barriques*, a technique previously unheard of in the region. Up to that point *Sangiovese di Romagna* had been a poor relation to its Tuscan cousin, but under Fiore's leadership the wines soon gained international acclaim.

Claudio began our tasting by inquiring, in an offhand manner, if we were interested in sampling a local expression of Sauvignon Blanc. The wine — *Ronco del Re* (\$35), an IGT Forlì — turned out to be absolutely riveting. It had intense, focused citrus flavors underlined by layers of minerals, and was complex and singular. The reds

were distinctive as well, particularly the single vineyard *Sangiovese Ronco delle Genestre* (\$45) and the *Massicone* (a 50/50 blend of Sangiovese and Cabernet). The Fiore family also makes another label from a nearby estate called *Balia di Zola*.

Old World meets New World at the small estate of *San Valentino*, a few miles from *Rimini*. Here the situation is much the same as at Castelluccio: *Roberto Mascarin* took over from his father *Giovanni* in 1997 and brought the winery to a new level of innovation. The core of his production is Sangiovese, including the entry-level *Scabi* (\$15) and the *Terra di Covignano* (\$20), a *Riserva*. Mascarin is making his international reputation on a series of elegant and concentrated blends including *Eclissi di Sole* (\$25, half Sangiovese with 20% each of Merlot and Cabernet Franc, along with 10% Syrah), the spectacular *Luna Nuova* (\$35, an 80/20 mix of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot) and a hefty single-varietal Syrah (\$95). These wines have become cult favorites in some of the top restaurants in California and New York, and it's easy to see why.

No visit to the region would be complete without a stop at the *Enoteca Regionale Emilia-Romagna*, dedicated since 1970 to promoting local wine culture. Located in the restored *Castello Sforza* in the village of *Dozza*, right on the border between Emilia and Romagna, the Enoteca represents 243 local wine estates. Over 1,000 wines are on display on a rotating basis, and the building features a wine bar where visitors may sample wines by the glass under the direction of trained sommeliers. Balsamic vinegars and spirits are also available.

The ancient *Via Emilia* co

Wineries

Contact these vineyards in advance to reserve a time to attend a tasting. Most don't list tasting prices on their websites, but expect to pay a small fee.

Umberto Cesari

Via Stanzano, 1120
Castel San Pietro Terme
(39) 051 941896
www.umbertocesari.it

Open Tuesday through Friday with options for tours, tasting and lunch at the vineyard.

Ronchi di Castelluccio

Via Tramonto, 15
Modigliana (Forlì-Cesena)
(39) 0546 942486
www.ronchidicastelluccio.it

Vini San Valentino

Via Tomasetta, 13
Frazione di San Martino in Venti (Rimini)
(39) 0541 752231
www.vinisanvalentino.com
Also offers accommodations at its agriturismo.

Campodelsole

Via Cellaimo, 850
Bertinoro
(39) 0543 444562
www.campodelsole.it

Tre Monti

Via Lola 3, Loc. Bergullo
Imola
(39) 0542 657116
www.tremonti.it

Chiarli 1860

Via Manin, 15
41122 Modena
(39) 059 3163311
www.chiarli.com

Cantine Ceci

Via Provinciale, 99
Torrile (Parma)
(39) 0521 810252
www.lambrusco.it

Monte delle Vigne

Via Monticello, 13
Ozzano Tarò
(39) 0521 309704
www.montedellevigne.it
Open Monday through Saturday; must book tasting at least a week in advance.

Tenuta La Viola

Via Colombarone, 888
Bertinoro
(39) 0543 445496
www.tenutalaviola.it
Open Monday through Friday.

More Noteworthy Places

Enoteca Regionale Emilia-Romagna

Piazza Rocca Sforzesca
Dozza
(39) 0542 678089
www.enotecaemiliaromagna.it

Romagna Terra del Sangiovese

Via A. Coast, 21/25
Forlìpopoli
(39) 0543 742059
www.romagnaterradelsangiovese.it
The wine store is open several hours per day; consult the website for the most current opening times.

Wines of the Imola Hills

Via Boccaccio, 27
Imola
(39) 0542 25413
www.stradaviniesapori.it

Casa Artusi

Via A. Costa, 27/31
Forlìpopoli
www.casartusi.it
(39) 0543 743138
See the December 2010/
January 2011 issue of *Dream of Italy*
for more details.

Emilia-Romagna Tourism Board

www.emiliaromagnaturismo.it

When exploring wineries in Emilia-Romagna, it's essential to plan your trip in advance. Large-scaled, commercial wine tourism of the type that you might find in the Napa Valley simply doesn't exist. Many estates are small, family-owned operations that only accept visitors by appointment; rather than tasting rooms, gift shops and group tours, you're likely to find yourself sitting around a table with the winemaker as you taste and discuss his products.

The food and wine are never far apart in Italy, and this is particularly true in Emilia-Romagna. Both art forms come together at *Casa Artusi*, the gastronomic center in Forlìpopoli. This special place was covered more in-depth in the December 2010/January 2011 issue of *Dream of Italy* but is worth mentioning again. Named for *Pellegrino Artusi*, the famed 19th-century author of *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well*, the facility combines many different functions under one roof.

There is a library and small museum devoted to Artusi's life; a test kitchen where visitors can take cooking classes and learn to make specialties of the province; a full-service restaurant and *osteria*; and a wine cellar run by the *Enoteca Regionale*, offering a wine bar with tastings by the glass. Casa Artusi makes an excellent starting point for the exploration of cuisine and winemaking in a region where they are virtually inseparable.

—Mark Spivak

Mark Spivak is an authority on wine, food, spirits and culinary travel. His book, *Iconic Spirits: A Dozen Beverages That Changed the World and Forged the Cocktail Culture*, will be published in the fall of 2012 by Globe Pequot Press.

Parma's Prosciutto Museum

No visit to the foodie town of *Parma* in *Emilia-Romagna* would be complete without a visit to at least one of the *Musei del Cibo* (food museums): *Pomodoro* (tomato), *Salame del Felino* (salami), *Parmigiano-Reggiano* (cheese) and *Prosciutto de Parma* (ham).

I'm a firm believer in learning about food, and I love knowing how things are made, so it was fascinating watching the process unfold at the Prosciutto Museum in *Langhirano*, near *Parma*. Visiting the nearby prosciutto factory is not part of the regular tour, but has a close relationship with the museum and welcomes visitors.

When the hams first come into the mostly chilly factory, they are tagged with the date of arrival, and thoroughly inspected. After salting, the haunches of meat rest for about a month in a refrigerated environment. In phase two, the salt is rinsed off the ham and then they are allowed to dry for several months in a warmer drying room. In the next phase, a paste of pork fat, salt and pepper is rubbed onto the exposed part of the ham, to ensure that both the inside and outside continue to cure evenly and to protect the ham from contaminants.

The nearly year-long maturing process then begins, in the cooler cellar rooms. Interestingly, these rooms have ventilation (vents that can be opened or closed, depending on the temperature and humidity) which our guide told us was one of the secrets of the Parma ham flavor. The factories of the prosciutto makers are all built so that they can take advantage of the cool crosswinds that come off the nearby river.

When the ham is close to the time it can go to market, inspectors perform the "*puntatura*" test, which is done the way it has been done for centuries: a bone from a horse that has been fashioned into a needle is inserted into the meat in five different places just under the rind of the ham to ensure the



proper aroma and consistent maturity. If the ham passes the test, it is branded with the Parma crown and can be sold.

After the factory tour, our guide Sara took us through the museum (and we appreciated her English translation) so that we could learn more about the region, the history, and the tools of the trade. As time passed, we were good and hungry.

While it is possible to just do a small taste of local prosciutto, our tour guide had arranged a full lunch for us. It being Italy, what we thought would be a little taste turned into a three-hour feast, hosted quickly by *Luigi Piovani*, the owner of *La Degustazione* restaurant attached to the museum.

We started out with one of the best plates of lasagna I've ever eaten (sorry Mom!). Then we tried several cuts of prosciutto from different makers, two kinds of *Zibello*

Culatello, which is a more expensive cut of pork and is cured differently than prosciutto, slices of *Felino Salami*, *San Secondo* cooked shoulder and *lardo* (which is just basically pork fat, and so delicious). Our lunch continued with tastings of two kinds of *Parmigiano-Reggiano* cheese that were aged for a full two years, two younger versions, and some locally produced honey, apple jelly and sweet desserts made from local fruits. All were paired with local wines.

While that might not sound like a lot of food, you have to realize that it took us twice as long to sit and eat and drink as we spent on the tour. But isn't that what trips in Italy are all about?

—Gregory Butera

The Details

Museum of Prosciutto

(Museo del Prosciutto)
Via Bocchialini, 7
Langhirano (Parma)
(39) 0521 821139
www.museidelicibo.it
Admission is 4€ per person.

La Degustazione Prosciutteria

same address as above
(39) 335 6664220
www.ladegustazione.it
Contact Luigi at info@ladegustazione.it to arrange factory tours, tastings and lunches.
Tour of prosciutto factory and museum is 115€ per group, with 6€ fee per person for protective outerwear for factory tour. Lunch at La Degustazione is 30€ per person.

1 € = \$1.38 at press time

"*Prosciutto*" derives from the Latin *perexsiccatus*.