

5 BEST ITALIAN COOKERY COURSES

Let the experts teach you how to cook authentic dishes, says **Charlotte Martin**



Puglia

The Casino Pisanelli, a beautiful 17th-century country estate in the Salento region of Puglia, is the location for a series of week-long trips. The courses strike a balance between cooking and relaxation – all classes are held at 6pm in order to freshly prepare the evening meal, leaving the day free to explore the area. Classes highlight the regional cuisine and make the most of the delicious local produce, which includes fish, capers, ricotta and chickpeas. Days are spent visiting local towns like Gallipoli (renowned for its fantastic fish market), tasting wine at the nearby Castle di Salve and picnicking on the beach. Courses are available from 29 May until mid-June and for the first two weeks in October. These cost £1,399 per person and include accommodation, daily cookery classes, all meals, excursions and transfers from Brindisi airport.

Flavours: 01506 854621; www.flavoursholidays.com



Le Marche

At a medieval farmhouse near the town of Ascoli Piceno, with views out to the Gran Sasso Mountains, you can learn the basics of Italian cookery. Tasting Places offers one-week courses teaching students how to create a range of dishes, starting with the basics of homemade pasta and fresh sauces and then moving on to cook local specialities like *vincisgrassi*, a lasagne made with porcini, black truffles and Parma ham.

Daily classes are combined with private dinners in local palazzos and visits to surrounding towns. Two courses are available this year, from 1-8 May, and 30 October-6 November. Each place costs £1,775 per person (based on two sharing) and includes accommodation, tuition, food, wine, all excursions and airport transfers. The nearest airport is Ancona. Tasting Places: 0207-460 0077; www.tastingplaces.com

Sicily

Sicily has its own culinary identity based on an abundance of high-quality raw materials. Anna Venturi hosts week-long cookery courses from her spectacular villa in the village of Capo D'Orlando on the north of the island, which looks across the Med towards the Aeolian Islands. Time is divided between meals in local restaurants, cooking classes and excursions to places like Palermo and the island of Lipari. There are also visits to local vineyards, olive oil plants and citrus mills. Venturi's ethos is to teach students how to cook simple, authentic dishes that are easily re-created at home. These include Sicilian specialities such as Risotto Giallo (a saffron risotto), stuffed artichokes and a traditional Sicilian method of baking fish in a thick crust of sea salt. Seven day courses run on selected dates from 24 April until the end of September and cost around £1,280 per person, including accommodation, all meals, excursions and airport transfers. The nearest airport is Catania. Italian Secrets: 01494 676 136; www.italiansecrets.co.uk



Il Veneto

Giuliano Hazan is the son of one of Italy's most celebrated chefs, Marcella Hazan. Inspired by his mother's culinary genius, he enrolled at her cooking school when he was 17. He now runs his own with his wife in the restored Renaissance villa, the Villa Giona, outside Verona. The week-long course is a complete immersion in Italian gastronomy. It combines dinners in local restaurants, cookery classes, a visit to a parmesan cheese factory, and a tour of the historic Allegrini vineyard. A one-week course costs £2,034 per person, based on two sharing. The price includes accommodation, four classes, all meals and excursions. Spaces are available in the second half of May, then throughout September and October. The nearest airport is Verona, from where you take a taxi. Villa Giona: 00 39 045 685 50 11; www.giulianohazan.com



Tuscany

Learn the secrets of Tuscan cuisine amid the grand-surroundings of the Villa San Michele, in the hills of Fiesole overlooking Florence. This 16th-century monastery, whose façade is by Michelangelo, is part of the Orient Express chain of hotels, and culinary students are instructed by the hotel's executive chef, Attilio Di Fabrizio. Mornings consist of a four-hour lesson demonstrating and cooking classic Tuscan dishes that are eaten for lunch at the end

of class. Afternoons are left free – you can simply enjoy the surroundings or take a trip into Florence. Four- and six-day courses are available and begin on various dates from May to October. Prices start at £1,612 per person and include full-board accommodation, tuition and ingredients. The nearest airport is Florence, from where you'll need a taxi. Taste Italia: 01268 711445; www.taste-italia.com