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WITH A DIFFERENCE

Whether you fancy spending a few days cooking in Italy, learning French in a château, or wine tasting in Hampshire, we've got some great ideas to fuel every passion – and to suit every budget!



FLAVOURS OF ITALY

Tested by Sian Lewis, 38, SHE's Associate Art Director.

"Given my love of Italian cooking and culture, the promise of a long weekend (four days) in an idyllic Italian palazzo, nestled in peaceful countryside, felt like a dream come true. And when I snatched my first glimpse of stunning Palazzo Minelli from a dusty track that snaked its way lazily through acres of orchards and fields, I almost had to pinch myself. But my fellow students and I had little time to stop and stare – we were immediately swept up by our delightful host Suzanne and guided into a converted stable block (where our simply furnished bedrooms were located) for a five-course lunch – what a great way to break the ice!

The cookery lessons take place in the old laundry. With 15 recipes to learn in just a few days, there was no time to lose and Suzanne soon got us to work. A passionate chef who developed her love of cooking from her grandmother, her recipes are mostly derived from the local region, Emilia-Romagna. We got to work on pancetta pastries, courgette soup, sausage macaroni and lemon and coconut cake. It was all delicious, but what made it special was that Suzanne had a tip for almost every ingredient

TO BOOK

Four-day cookery courses in Bologna with *Flavours Holidays* cost from £799, including return flights, full-board accommodation, transfers, cookery lessons and sightseeing (flavoursholidays.co.uk; 0131 625 7002).



Palazzo Minelli



Sian gets ready for rolling



The rustic dining area in the stable block



Suzanne demonstrates her cookery techniques



Becoming pasta experts

(for example, you should only put garlic in warm oil, never hot, as this makes it bitter). And we learned that spaghetti bolognese doesn't exist in Bologna – Bolognese is a meat sauce, local to the area, but is served with tagliatelle, never spaghetti!

Our class of six (five women and one intrepid man), ranging from a maths teacher to a food technologist, was an enthusiastic bunch with a love of food in common. The atmosphere was fun and relaxed and I found myself crying with laughter more than once. It didn't matter a bit that I was a beginner, as Suzanne made everything seem so easy.

Eating the fruits of our labours each night on the terrace and being taught how to make pasta by a local 'mama' were my personal highlights. Mixing the pasta dough was the easy part, but rolling it out and stretching it until it was wafer-thin was very difficult for us novices – mine looked more like a soggy hanky! But before long, we were experts at wrapping squares of meat-filled pasta around our fingers to make tortellini.

SCHOOL'S OUT

A trip to the foodie mecca of Bologna, 25 minutes away, took us to stalls laden with fabulous fruit and vegetables and super-fresh fish. Shop windows displayed pasta in the most exotic styles, colours and shapes and ceilings were densely hung with pancettas and hams. We also had a whistle-stop tour of a balsamic vinegar factory. Although the guide spoke little English, his delicious two-, 10-, 20- and 50-year old vinegars spoke volumes!

BEST FOR...

The course is great if you're going on holiday alone and it caters for both inexperienced cooks and serious foodies. Ages ranged from 25 to around 60 – so a varied mix!

THE VERDICT

It was everything I'd hoped from a cookery course. The teaching was intensive, the atmosphere relaxed – what's more, I really felt as though I'd learned something that I could take away with me."

• Courses run from May to October. The next ones are 19-22 Sept; 26-29 Sept ▷