

A bootful of delicacies

Eating and drinking around the world: Italy



Caesar once sent soldiers out to conquer the world. Italian chefs and mamas know better: They cook.

Their weapons are called bistecca alla fiorentina or tiramisù. Their strategy: To captivate through delicious taste. If you've ever eaten well under the Italian sky, you know that resistance is futile if cucina italiana is in play.

And if you're able to read between the lines on the menu, you'll know even more: For example, that there is no one Italian cuisine – even though cookbooks and travel guides persistently claim the opposite. Because in Italy cuisine is regional: Tuscan, Roman or Sicilian.

When it comes to eating, in fact, there's only one opinion that unites everyone in Italy: Eating isn't just a way of ingesting nutrition, it's a pure delight, an event that should never be hurried. An Italian lunch or dinner can last for several hours –

especially if the weather is mild and everyone's in a good mood. Both happen often in Italy.

A four-act opera

Things go faster in the morning: An espresso on the fly, accompanied by a tramezzino – a triangular piece of



toast smothered in tuna, cheese, vegetables or ham – that's enough. The situation is totally different when it comes to a sit-down meal, which can best be termed a four-act opera. It begins proudly with the antipasti (starters), dazzles with the primo piatto (the first course), becomes rich and bountiful with the secondo piatto (the main course)



and ends on a mild and cheerful note with the dolci (sweets). Each individual course reflects the season – as well as what's available at the regional farmers' market. And the meal is crowned with a strong espresso or grappa.

Mama's minestrone

Around the family table, all it takes are a few slices of prosciutto (ham) with a piece of cheese, or even pickled olives and bread, to conjure up a delicious starter. That comes as no surprise – in a country in which there are said to be more hams than valleys! Restaurants offer greater variety – with lemon-spiced seafood, hearty Parmesan, pickled mush-



rooms or vegetables baked in olive oil, depending upon the region. In fact, pizza is even sometimes served as an antipasto.

Pasta, risotto and polenta – the famous classics in cucina italiana – are the stars of the first course. And, of course, minestrone – a soup made from vegetables and leftovers that Italian mamas compose with such intuition and feeling.

No fear of innards

Fish and meat are reserved for the main course – although in Italy "meat" can also include such less noble cuts as innards or hocks. Here, too, regional variety dominates: Meat is a favorite in Florence, while Genoa prefers fish – and it's lamb, first and foremost, that's popular in Rome. However one dish has managed to gain unanimous national popularity: Grilled capon (castrated cock), which is a holiday favorite in Italy – regardless of whether the celebration is taking place in Rome or Rimini.



One classical dessert is fruit, which is washed at the table and eaten with a knife and fork. Yet cakes with fruit, as well as chocolate, cheese, ice cream and bakery, are also popular. Plus, of course, those desserts that have gone on to achieve international fame: Tiramisu. Or zabaglione, that mouth-watering warm dessert made from beaten eggs and Marsala wine.

The land of wine

With nearly one million hectares of grapes under cultivation, Italy in fact is considered to be the world's largest wine-producing country. White wines like Pinot Grigio, Frascati (from the city of the same name in Latium) or Orvieto (from Orvieto in Umbria) are known and loved far beyond the country's borders. Red wines like Chianti

classico (from the area between Florence and Sienna) or the famous Barolo, named after a small town in Piemonte, set gourmets and connoisseurs around the globe to raving.



Raving – it's a typical reaction when it comes to Italian cuisine. Because one thing is certain – and even the typical chaos on Italy's streets and the smog above Rome, Florence and Milan can't change that: This boot is full of delicacies: Anyone who's ever tasted Italy is sure to return!