



Gastronomic Emilia-Romagna

One of the world's most famous food-producing regions

14–20 September 2024 (MK 422)

7 days • £3,380

Lecturer: Marc Millon

A food-lover's paradise: the best cured meats, Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, traditional balsamic vinegar, handmade egg pasta.

Private visits to artisan producers, interspersed with artistic highlights such as Parma's exquisite Camera di San Paolo.

Multiple wine tastings, and a full range of eating experiences, from rustic farm lunches to 2* Michelin dining.

Led by Marc Millon, gastronomic specialist.

Emilia-Romagna, shaped like a wedge of its renowned Parmesan cheese, is rich in every way – artistically, culturally, economically and, by no means least, gastronomically. To journey along the Via Emilia, the long, straight Roman road from Milan to the Adriatic coast, is to immerse oneself in a gloriously hedonistic garden of Eden that is the source of some of the greatest foods in the world.

The lovely cities of Parma and Bologna are the ideal bases from which to explore some of the masterpieces of Italian gastronomy, including the two jewels in the region's crown; sweet prosciutto di Parma, air-cured by dry mountain winds that sweep down from the Apennines, and Parmigiano-Reggiano, the king of cheeses. Here, within their strictly defined areas of origin, there is a rare opportunity to see the production of these protected foods and to taste them in the company of the producers themselves.

We also visit a family-run *acetaia* to discover the mysterious art of producing traditional balsamic vinegar, the rich, complex condiment that must be aged for a minimum of 12 years. Vast oceans of inferior imitations may be found on tables all around the world, but the real thing, aged in batteries of wood, unctuous and thick, is known as 'black gold': an incredibly concentrated elixir that is part of the region's great gastronomic patrimony.

The trademark of Bologna is its hand-made egg pasta, which appears in many guises from filled tortellini to rich, luscious lasagne. A visit to Bologna's food market with its vast array of fresh pasta, mortadella and salami, breads, cakes and ice cream explains why this city is known as *la grassa* (the fat one).

Wine, too, is an important feature



Parma, steel engraving c. 1850.

throughout. We discover expressions of the grape that may not be as exalted as the region's foods but which are perfect accompaniments, made from ancient grapes such as Malvasia, Trebbiano and Sangiovese. We also discover the real Lambrusco, foaming wildly, raspingly dry and rich in acidity.

Although the main focus of this tour is gastronomy, both Parma and Bologna have a wealth of artistic treasures and time is allowed to explore these. Feeding the body, feeding the mind: this is the gastronomy of Emilia-Romagna.

Itinerary

Day 1: Parma. Fly at c. 10.15am (British Airways) from London Heathrow to Milan. Drive to Parma and in the late afternoon see astonishingly vital and illusionistic frescoes by Correggio, Parma's finest painter. The first four nights are spent in Parma.

Day 2: Parma, Polesine Parmense. Parma is of great importance in particular for its High Renaissance school of painting. See the art collection in the Palazzo della Pilotta, and also the exquisite Camera di S. Paolo. At the 13th-century Antica Corte Pallavicina in Polesine Parmense discover the rare and prestigious culatello di Zibello, made from the rump of a specially bred pig and cured for over a year in cellars to a near-unbelievable intensity of

flavour and sweetness.

Day 3: Parma and surroundings. Parmigiano-Reggiano has been made in the area around Parma using the same methods for over 700 years. Watch the process at a modern caseificio, with a tasting. Continue to a producer of prosciutto di Parma and see the age-old process of curing and drying, before tasting it later with lunch at a charming agriturismo. In the early evening the lecturer leads a wine tasting in the hotel.

Day 4: Torrechiara, Langhirano. In the morning visit the 15th-century castle in Torrechiara, then visit a nearby winery for a wine tasting and lunch overlooking the vines.

Day 5: from Parma to Bologna. Visit a family-run *acetaia* to see the hand production of traditional balsamic vinegar and have a rustic lunch. Continue to Bologna for a visit to the vast Gothic church of S. Petronio, with sculpture by Jacopo della Quercia. See also the enchanting early medieval church complex of S. Stefano. The last two nights of this tour are spent in Bologna.

Day 6: Bologna, Dozza, Imola. The famous food market in Bologna sprawls through a maze of streets where shops and stalls display an overwhelming array of fresh pasta, artisanal mortadella, hams and salamis, cheeses, fresh fruit and vegetables, and an irresistible variety

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continued

of bread and pastries. Taste these products in some of the city's historic food shops. In the evening drive to Dozza for a tasting of wines from Romagna, before continuing to Imola for dinner at one of the region's finest and most famous restaurants (two Michelin stars).

Day 7: Forlimpopoli. Forlimpopoli is the birthplace of Pellegrino Artusi, the author of the original Italian national cookbook. A demonstration of fresh pasta-making is followed by lunch. To see pasta being made by hand is to witness a near miraculous transformation of the simplest ingredients, flour and eggs, into the most ingenious collection of shapes and forms. Fly from Bologna, arriving Heathrow at c. 6.00pm.

Lecturers

Marc Millon. Wine, food and travel writer. Born in Mexico, he was raised in the USA before studying English Literature at the University of Exeter. Together with his wife, he has pioneered a series of illustrated wine-food-travel books including *The Wine and Food of Europe*, *The Wine Roads of Italy* and *The Food Lover's Companion to Italy*. He is also the author of *The Taste of Britain* and lives in Devon, where he is closely involved with the food scene of the West Country. Marc has a weekly show "Wine, food and travel with Marc Millon" on Italian Wine Podcast.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,380 or £3,210 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,730 or £3,560 without flights.

Suggested train itinerary: London – Paris – Turin – Milan – Parma: c. 12 hours. Contact us for advice.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Airbus 320); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts; 5 lunches, 5 dinners and 3 wine tastings with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Grand Hotel de la Ville, Parma (grandhoteldelaville.com): an elegant 5-star hotel within walking distance of the historic centre. Designed by Renzo Piano, the hotel is stylish yet functional. **Art Hotel Commercianti, Bologna** (en.art-hotel-commercianti.com): A traditional hotel housed within a medieval palazzo, located right next to Piazza Maggiore. Rooms vary in size and décor and all are classically furnished and comfortable. *Single rooms throughout are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? There is a lot of walking and standing on this tour, and it would not be suitable for anyone who has difficulties with everyday walking or stair-climbing. Coaches cannot enter some of the historical town centres. Some days involve a lot of driving. Average distance by coach per day: 65 miles.

Gastronomic tours. On a tour that focuses on food, wine and cooking traditions, we regret that participants with special diets may not have the same gastronomic experience as those with no restrictions. Please discuss your requirements with us before booking.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.