



Gastronomic Veneto

From Verona to the Adriatic, the Po Valley to the Dolomites

5–12 June 2024 (MK 322)

8 days • £4,310

Lecturer: Cynthia Chaplin

One of Italy's most varied regions, both gastronomically and geographically.

Some of the greatest and best-known Italian wines including Amarone and Prosecco.

Michelin-starred restaurants.

Artistic riches in the dazzlingly picturesque Verona, architecturally spectacular Vicenza and smaller towns such as Asolo.

Led by wine expert Cynthia Chaplin.

While the opulence of the Doges and the abundant feasts depicted in the paintings of Veronese may be less evident today, Venice's influence still extends over a vast region. From Padua, Vicenza and Verona all the way to the banks of Lake Garda; and to the north, over vine-covered foothills leading up to the jagged peaks of the Dolomites. This region, known as the Veneto, later came under the influence of the Austro-Hungarians, who similarly left their mark on a *cucina* with middle-European accents and a coffee culture that rivals Vienna's.

La Serenissima's enduring influence is noticeable in a love of fish and shellfish from the lagoon and the Adriatic, while even though transport and refrigeration render the process unnecessary, *baccalà* – air-dried, not salted cod – remains a favourite. Mountain traditions, meanwhile, are steadfastly safeguarded through cheeses produced from fragrant alpine milk, smoked meats and the art of distillation.

Corn was first introduced into the Italian diet some 500 years ago and polenta remains the staple. *Vialone nano* rice, cultivated near Verona, is the favoured variety for making deliciously soupy *risotti*. Fruits and vegetables abound: asparagus from Bassano del Grappa, radicchio from Treviso and Castelfranco, cherries from Marostica and tiny violet artichokes from Sant'Erasmus. Grapes grow almost everywhere, producing some of the country's greatest wines, as well as more accessible if no less satisfying everyday ones.

Our tour begins in Verona, with visits to churches and Roman monuments, small producers and outstanding restaurants. We travel through the wine hills of Breganze to Asolo, striking out in search of outstanding mountain cheese, gorgeous sparkling wines, fiery grappa. And we end on the Venetian



Asolo, engraving from *The Magazine of Art*, 1887.

lagoon with lunch on a private island with its own vineyard.

Itinerary

Day 1: Verona. Fly at c. 8.30am (British Airways) from London Heathrow to Venice and drive to Verona. Dinner at a historic restaurant. First of three nights in Verona.

Day 2: Verona, Sant'Ambrogia di Valpolicella. A major Roman settlement, Verona also flourished in the Middle Ages under the tyrannical rule of the Scaligeri dynasty. A sequence of interconnecting squares lie at the heart of the city, lined with magnificent medieval *palazzi*. Outside Verona, visit the atmospheric Villa di Serego Alighieri, surrounded by Valpolicella vineyards, for a private wine tasting and lunch. 21 generations after Dante Alighieri's son bought the estate, the house and surrounding land still belong to his direct descendants, the Counts Serego Alighieri.

Day 3: Isola della Scala, Verona. Drive south to the rice fields near Isola della Scala to visit the historic rice mill at Riseria Ferron, which dates to 1650. There is a cooking demonstration here of typical rice dishes, and lunch. In the afternoon visit an olive oil producer near Verona, which uses artisanal harvesting methods to create only the highest-quality oils, tasted during the visit.

Day 4: Vicenza, Breganze. Leave Verona for the beautiful little city of Vicenza, architecturally the noblest and most homogenous in northern Italy, much of its fabric consisting of Renaissance palaces. Andrea Palladio spent most of his life here, and his buildings include the town hall (Basilica Palladiana) and an epoch-making theatre (Teatro Olimpico). Continue to the lovely hilltop town of Asolo where the next four nights are spent.

Day 5: Valdobbiadene. Spend the morning at a renowned winery in the Cartizze hills, family-run for over 500 years. Visit the cellars and have a Prosecco tasting here, before a rustic lunch nearby overlooking the vineyards, each hill's contours finely etched by parallel lines of vines. Some free time in Asolo before a wine tasting led by the lecturer.

Day 6: Canove di Roana, Bassano del Grappa. Drive into the mountains to a cheese-maker on the Altopiano, a high Alpine plain on the northern edge of the Veneto, past brightly coloured houses, pines and meadows. Taste Asiago cheese and see where it is produced. Return to the lower plain to visit the charming town of Bassano del Grappa for a lunch of the celebrated local asparagus. Grappa tasting in the most eminent distillery in town, overlooking the bridge designed by Palladio.

Day 7: Treviso, Castelfranco Veneto. Once an important fortress city, Treviso has a fine

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historic centre with imposing public buildings and many painted façades. The cathedral has a Titian *Annunciation*, but the hero of the day is the 14th-century painter Tommaso da Modena: his frescoes of learned monks in the chapter house of S. Nicolò are extraordinary. Return to Asolo. In the evening drive to Castelfranco Veneto for the final dinner of the tour (1-star Michelin).

Day 8: Mazzorbo. Drive to the coast and cross the lagoon by *motoscafo* (water-taxi) to the island of Mazzorbo, with wide vistas of breathtaking stillness. Visit the beautiful *orti* (kitchen gardens) of the acclaimed Venissa restaurant (1-star Michelin), taste wine produced from grapes grown here, and lunch. Fly from Venice, returning to London Heathrow at c. 7.30pm.

Lecturers

Cynthia Chaplin. A professional sommelier and Vinitaly International Academy certified Italian Wine Ambassador. Born in the USA, Cynthia moved to Europe in 1990 where she has lived in Spain, Belgium, England and Italy, where she settled, centring her career in the Italian food and wine sector. She is a member of *Le Donne del Vino* and a Professor of Italian wine and culture, a regular judge for wine and sake competitions, and consults with restaurants and wine shops developing comprehensive wine lists and excellent food pairings.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £4,310 or £4,100 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £4,970 or £4,760 without flights.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Airbus 320); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation; breakfasts, 6 lunches and 4 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer.

Accommodation. Hotel NH Collection Palazzo Verona, Verona (nh-hotels.com): luxurious 5-star, excellently located in the historic centre. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.* **Hotel Al Sole, Asolo** (albergoalsolasolo.com): small 5-star hotel, full of charm, with wonderful views from the terrace and a good restaurant. Rooms are a variety of sizes, and some are on the top floor with sloping ceilings. *Single rooms have French beds.*

How strenuous? The tour involves a lot of walking, sometimes uphill and over unevenly paved ground. The coach can rarely enter town centres. Fitness and sure-footedness are essential. Some days involve a lot of driving. Average distance by coach per day: 45 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.