

MASTER PASTA & OTHER ITALIAN CLASSICS

Treat yourself or a friend to a fun day or even a long weekend learning new recipes and techniques



ITALIAN ESSENTIALS

Bridge 67 Cookery School, Binleys Bridge Farm, Debdale Lane, Smeeton Westerby, Leicestershire (0116 279 6155, bridge67cookeryschool.co.uk)

The school is set in rolling Leicestershire countryside. Classes, held in a big country kitchen, focus on creating delicious recipes with minimal effort. I attended the Italian Cookery Course, an intermediate one-day course that included making gnocchi and authentic pizzas, as well as baking.

How hands on? The day starts with coffee and an introduction to Italian cooking by the owner, Jill Vickers. She explained the regionality of the dishes we would be preparing, and the importance of using good-quality ingredients. We did a taste-test of olive oils before chef Roy started us off in the kitchen. Highlights include making our own ravioli, whizzing up pesto and a fantastic lemon polenta cake. Throughout the day Roy was on hand to give advice to each person, depending on their ability.

Cost £110 for a one-day course, including food, wine and a booklet containing all the recipes plus information on the cuisine and skills learned. Other courses include Thai cuisine and advanced dinner parties; each class teaches a maximum of eight.

Verdict Good for fans of Italian cookery who want to broaden their repertoire. *Sarah Cobbold*

IF YOU LOVE TO ENTERTAIN

Foodat52, 52 Great Percy Street, London WC1X 9QR (07814 027067, foodat52.co.uk)

I attended the Flavours of Italy evening course, at this small, homely school based in a smart Georgian house in the heart of Clerkenwell, London. Tutor John demonstrated how to create a fantastic three-course Italian meal, then all six of us got stuck in.

How hands on? Totally – after introducing ourselves over bread and wine, we set about cooking with gusto. We each created an intriguing butternut & biscotti ravioli (without using a pasta maker). Then we prepared and cooked pollo soffritto – chicken and vegetables in a delicious sauce – before collectively putting together the amaretti semifreddo. Everyone had a chance to try each technique and be involved with each process. Then, as the food was cooking, we were invited into the living area of the house for drinks – it felt like being at a friend's house for dinner.

Cost My course was £85; the school runs a range of day and evening cookery courses, such as authentic Moroccan and southern Indian cuisine.

Verdict An enjoyable and relaxed way to learn new recipes and skills. *Emma Bales*

TURIN AND TRUFFLES

This north-west Italian city is a fantastic food destination – the home of truffles, chocolates, grissini bread sticks, vermouth, Lavazza coffee and bagna cauda – the most wonderful warm anchovy and garlic dip. Nearby Alba is the world's white truffle capital.

Hunting truffles Tour in Piemonte (tourinpiemonte.it) organises day trips from Turin to the former royal estate Fontanafredda, near Alba, for a truffle-hunting demonstration. True truffle hunting mainly happens at night, so this is more of a demo – visitors follow the licensed hunter and his dog around the woods finding truffles below oak, willow and poplar trees. The day, which costs from £43, also includes a wine tasting and a trip to Alba.

Cookery classes Make pasta and sauces from scratch, including the local speciality Agnolotti with ricotta & spinach filling with sage butter, during a three-hour lesson, about £78. Book with Cook In Italy (+ 39 011 889 174, cookinitaly.org).

Flavour feasts Join the evening Aperitivo, when cafes include snacks or buffets in the drink price. Eataly (eataly.it), in an old vermouth factory, has nine informal food-themed eateries plus an October-December truffle restaurant where the fabulous fungi is grated over pasta, risotto, cheese and ham dishes. You can also buy a 10 choco-pass offering tastings at ten city chocolatiers in 24 hours.

Getting there British Airways (ba.com) and easyjet (easyjet.com) fly to Turin. Le Meridien hotel (lemeridien-lingotto.it) has a seasonal truffle menu and arranges truffle-hunting trips. *Carol Wright*

We also recommend...

La Cucina Caldesi 118 Marylebone Lane, London (020 7487 0750, caldesi.com) Run by Giancarlo and Katie Caldesi, the school focuses on regional Italian cookery with a wide range of classes and tasting evenings. Guest tutors include Valentina Harris and Ursula Ferrigno. From £75.