



# Roman

BY MEAGHAN

“Did you know,” my friend asks when I tell him that I am writing an article on traditional fare of Italy, “that Rome is the reason I don’t eat meat anymore?”

At first, I think he’s joking—but upon hearing his tale, I briefly consider going veggie myself. On his first visit to the Eternal City, he stopped at an off-the-beaten-path *trattoria* and innocently ordered something the menu translated as “mixed meat.” But the servers brought to his table an immense bowl of broth in which floated—he swears—a lamb’s head, a goat’s leg with the hoof still attached, and an *entire* frog, among other assorted animal parts. The elderly proprietor even came out from the kitchen to meet the brave tourist who wanted to sample what was obviously not the menu’s most popular item.

I share this story not to scare off would-be travelers (and food lovers) to Rome, but simply to illustrate the range of Italian cuisine that goes worlds beyond pizza and pasta. Thanks to a long, eventful history and the recent unification of its many disparate regions, Italy’s cuisine is in fact as varied and glorious as its landscape. Rome, a cosmopolitan capital that offers more varied and international dining options than perhaps any other Italian city, has managed to preserve a distinct culinary legacy all its own. Although some of the more hard-core, old-school Roman dishes might indeed seem geared more toward gladiator than gourmand, vegetarians, take note: The wide assortment of this city’s unique recipes guarantees appealing dishes for every palate.

# Holiday

Come take a taste of al

MULHOLLAND

Not long after moving to Italy, I found myself increasingly involved in discussions about food. Topics like where to find the most exquisite pastries, which fruits were currently in season, and whether oregano should *ever* be added to tomato sauce took



The Colosseum

on a whole new significance to my life. Never before had I witnessed a roomful of sophisticated dinner-party guests arguing about ice cream flavors, but such episodes soon became commonplace—and I grew accustomed to the typical Monday morning banter centering less around what one had done over the weekend than on what one had cooked and where one had dined. In this land of epicurean pleasures, one learns quickly that food isn’t just for *eating*—it’s for seeing, smelling, touching and talking about, as important a part of the history and culture as the boundless artifacts and archaeological treasures.

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**T**hough the city itself was influenced by a vast succession of rulers, traditional Roman cooking has its roots in the poorer neighborhoods, where little

## all the Eternal City has to offer.

changed over the centuries and people made do with what ingredients were available. These rustic and deceptively simple dishes, still available on most authentic restaurant menus, use local vegetables such as *cicoria* (chicory) and *agretti* (similar to spinach) and rely heavily on the *quinto quarto*, or "fifth quarter"—spare animal parts such as brains and innards, left over when the best cuts of meat had been sold.

Both modern hub and ancient relic, Rome displays a unique juxtaposition of past and present in everything from graffiti-splattered Egyptian obelisks rising in the midst of morning traffic to impeccably dressed urbanites smoking cigarettes in the shadow of the Colosseum. A sampling of the city's lesser-known culinary treasures, from delicious golden-fried zucchini flowers to the hearty *coda alla vaccinara* (oxtail stew), will give the visitor a taste of Rome that is worlds away from the pizza and pasta of typical tourist menus.

You don't have to endure an extreme culinary adventure like my friend did in order to experience bona fide *cucina romana*. The key to getting the

most from your Roman holiday is in knowing what to order, and where. Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

Anyone who has spent time in Italy knows that the most memorable meals are often to be had in unexpected places, like that tiny back-alley *osteria* with paper tablecloths and the menu comprising whatever the chef felt like making that night. You'd be wise to avoid overpriced eateries near popular landmarks and seek out tried-and-true (if perhaps less aesthetically pleasing) establishments in neighborhoods such as **Testaccio**. This traditionally working-class area is a bastion of alleged *romani di Roma* (families going back at least six generations) and also of old school Roman cooking.

**Da Felice** (29 Via Mastro Giorgio, 06/574-6800) is a favorite among the aforementioned Testaccio locals for classics such as *coda alla vaccinara*, thick and tender oxtail stewed with celery and tomatoes. Enjoy a bottle of wine from the *Castelli Romani* hill towns and then

head to nearby Monte Testaccio, the city's biggest area for clubs and nightlife.

**Augustarello** (98 Via Giovanni Branca, 06/574-6585), another Testaccio haunt with a reputation for authenticity, serves up *animelle* (grilled sweetbreads) and *pajata*, a signature delicacy of seasoned and lightly fried lamb's (or calf's) intestines with the mother's milk still congealed inside. If such a visceral dining experience seems a bit over the top for your tastes, you can always try one of the excellent pasta dishes, such as *carbonara*—rigatoni tossed with egg yolk, *pecorino* cheese, *pancetta* and freshly ground black pepper.

Across the Tiber from Testaccio is the hip **Trastevere** neighborhood, where you can wander the enchanting (if crowded) medieval streets and learn more about local traditions at the **Museo di Roma**

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