

## NOTABLE EDIBLES

# ITALY'S CUTLERY CAPITAL

Jet-lagged, sleep deprived and waiting for a 7:00 a.m. pickup, I gazed into one of the two cutlery stores facing the piazza. LEDs spotlighted mint-condition pocketknives, dining utensils and corkscrews, while further inside I could see Bowie knives, shaving kits and a notably wide selection of sommelier sabers. Although I might have been surprised to find myself doing some early morning window shopping for machetes under any other circumstance, I had just arrived for a foodcentric tour around Maniago, Italy's cutlery capital.

Carla Gaspardo, sales manager at her family's local cutlery manufacturing company STA-FOR, had greeted me the day before at the train station that's about a two-hour ride northeast of Venice in the alpine region of Friuli. STA-FOR is one of the handful of modern cutlery manufacturers in and around Maniago that descend from a long line of metalworkers. Historically, the trade largely took root here thanks to the strong waters, aka hydropower, flowing out of the surrounding Dolomite mountain range as well as Venice's nearby commercial prowess. Today, the 40-plus-year-old company specializes in gardening scissors and shears, manufacturing and distributing top-of-the-line tools like their loppers and pruning saws internationally through suppliers, including DUMBO-headquartered Garrett Wade.

Having toured STA-FOR's sophisticated family-run operation, I mean it when I say that I would have happily geeked out on cutlery for a couple more days, but I had also been invited to Italy to eat.

Born, bred and gourmand Friulians, the Gaspardos were my

in. Since my visit was short, they honed in on the region's standards: There was never a shortage of prosciutto di San Daniele (similar in presentation to prosciutto di Parma but made via a distinctly different process), *frico* two ways (one a malleable, crisp wafer made from shredded cheese, and the other a sort of tender potato and cheese pancake) and prosecco (I have the best job).

We went deeper, too, and I wish I could abolish print space limits to tell you about every destination (see the link at the end for a full online list of recs), but one in particular was a singularly local experience.

After Carla picked me up from the piazza that morning, she, her brother Mauro, technical chief and production manager at STA-FOR, and I headed into the steep and craggy Val Tramontina area of the Dolomite hills to the breathtaking Borgo Tivol: a remote mountainside farmhouse with a B&B, easy access to the area's well-known and truly emerald pools and masterly family restaurant that makes almost everything, including cured meats and cheeses, in-house with ingredients from their farm.

There we had a four-course lunch paired with prosecco that also included Borgo Tivol's own fresh and aged cheeses, *agnolotti* filled with *formai dal cit* (a spreadable cow's milk cheese from the Val Tramontina), homemade bread and a rich dark-chocolate mousse. The reverence owners Xiaolei and Roberto Ferraro have for tradition, as well as their meticulous attention to detail for every dish, was clearest in how they prepared our distinctly Friulian *pitina* course.

**High on the hog.** A jaunt through the mountainous region of Friuli spotlighted regional specialties like prosciutto di San Daniele (*right*). Maniago (*below*) is the country's cutlery capital.

A cured, polenta-crust and juniper-smoked meat, legend has it that residents of the local mountain towns developed pitina hundreds of years ago as a means to preserve prized wild goat. Today pitina's usually made with a combo of either game, mutton, goat and pork and from September to June at Borgo Titol, they riff off a historic recipe with finely minced mutton and pork flank from their farm or a neighbor's. They dry this combination with salt, ground black pepper, garlic and cabernet wine before forming small loaf shapes that they cover with dry polenta. The farm then smokes the meat over beech, hornbeam, apple, cherry and hazel wood for one to two days at a temperature that doesn't exceed around 78 degrees Fahrenheit, creating a final product that can be eaten many ways including freshly sliced.

That day we had fried pitina with a simple olive oil and zucchini salad. Between silent bites, Carla mentioned that the meat is so particular to the Val Tramontina that most Venetians haven't even heard of it. Turns out, too, that there are fewer and fewer pitina makers, even prompting Slow Food to add it to a list of traditional foods that are "at risk of extinction."

I paced the pitina as best I could, feeling equally grateful and, since I don't check bags, miffed for not being able to get a supply past customs (lord only knows the gut punch I'd have watching a security guard chuck it in a trash can). The feeling persisted as we rolled ourselves back down the mountain to Maniago. It didn't take much for me to ultimately accept that I'd just have to come back if I wanted to try pitina again.

My beat changed, though, when I walked into one of Carla's favorite cutlery stores and spotted an impeccably designed set of olive wood cheese knives. My visit here had been just as much about metalworking as food, and since I had passed on the latter, I decided to buy the knives and check my bag—they're built to last, after all.

—Ariel Lauren Wilson

*Go to [ediblebrooklyn.com/friuli](http://ediblebrooklyn.com/friuli) for a full list of recommendations from our trip.*



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