

Handcrafted Food is a Key Part of the Italian Tradition

There are many cuisines around the world, but perhaps none of them focuses on the type of painstaking, all-day work and preparation that Italian cuisine does. That's because much of the food served throughout Italy simply requires a great deal of work to cook and prepare. Pasta is often made by hand using fresh ingredients while sauces take all day to cook and properly seasoned. Aged cheeses and fresh breads, essential to finishing off any truly authentic Italian meal, sometimes take multiple days or months to prepare. That's why the Italian tradition treats every meal as a celebration and as a reward: That meal, at least historically speaking, often took months of preparation so that each fresh ingredient could be properly aged and integrated into the dishes being served.

A Simple Way to Cook a Fulfilling Meal

Though Italian cuisine often involves a whole day of preparing, and some of its ingredients must age for months at a time, the actual preparation of an Italian meal is very straightforward. This is especially true when considering the advanced techniques and delicate ingredients used in French and German dishes, for instance, which often compete with Italian cuisine as a leading choice of diners around the world. The Italian philosophy of cooking makes it simple to prepare a beautiful, tasty dish for an entire family without having advanced culinary experience.

This aspect of cooking reflects Italian culture: In many regions of Italy, the central point of connection for large families is a meal freshly prepared at home. Home cooks, unlike restaurant chefs, rely on a series of basic culinary skills and processes. That carries through to today's Italian cuisine at the leading restaurants around the world. While the flavours are amazingly complex, the process of bringing those flavours to the table remains a relatively simple labour of love.

Italian Food Encourages Sharing and Conversation

A proper Italian meal goes well beyond the dishes being served for lunch or dinner. In fact, delicious Italian cuisine often serves not as the star of the show, but as the background to a long conversation that involves family, friends, and neighborhood acquaintances. Throughout Italian history, one thing has remained constant: A good meal was served only to form the basis of a good conversation. Italians are known for taking hours at a time to finish a meal, with ample sources of protein, pasta, and locally fermented wines.

Perhaps due to an Italian meal's social legacy, developed over many generations, the country has become known for its "endless" meals that involve many courses. Most traditional Italian meals start off with light meats, vegetables, or cheeses, and progress through at least four different courses that involve a heavier "entree" meal and light snacks. A dessert option is typically offered as well, once the conversation has begun to wind down and guests are beginning to transition to dessert wines or coffees. It is often said that the best way to judge the success of an Italian meal is by the level of conversation that it encourages, and it's easy to see why that legend has become the case not only in Italy, but in Italian restaurants around the world.

Italian Food is the Original "Melting Pot" Cuisine

Modern immigration patterns have allowed the world to shrink, in some sense, with the mingling of cultures and cuisines throughout all of the continents. Even so, this type of melting pot is not something that should be considered new or original. In fact, Italian cuisine has been melding flavours and regional identities for centuries. As mentioned earlier, modern Italian cuisine originates from 20 different regions now grouped together as a single country. Even before that formal union, however, Italians were borrowing each other's techniques and recipes. The type of cuisine that is most commonly "exported" internationally is one that has blended Roman, Greek, Sicilian, and Etruscan cooking styles and recipes.

By melding together, the best parts of Italian cuisine, culture, and conversation, Italian food has become a conversation piece all on its own. Today, it represents simple cooking, complex flavours, and comforting conversations among friends. No matter where someone is or where they're from, those elements of a meal can make any day, and any cuisine, very special indeed.

Few cuisines have managed to travel the world and become as popular as Italian cuisine, with restaurants that serve up authentic Italian dishes located in almost every major urban centre and country internationally. This is not something that happened by accident, however. Italian food has evolved over many generations, and the unique care and ingredients that go into every dish are designed to inspire an authentic connection to Italian history, culture, and, no matter where the dish is served. To understand what makes Italian food so unique, so special, and so globally popular, consider its origins and what goes into every item on a typical Italian menu.

Over 20 Different Regions of Unique Cuisine

The great thing about Italian cuisine is that it's an extremely diverse set of recipes, cooking techniques, and multi-generational traditions. Indeed, Italy as a country didn't come into existence until the middle of the 19th century. Until that point, modern Italy was made up of 20 different regions that developed independent cuisines based on local traditions, climates, and availability of diverse ingredients. To understand Italian cuisine is to understand the difference between Tuscan, Florentine, and Sicilian cooking styles, among many others. Each region took advantage of its location and traditions to shape modern Italian food. Steaks, pasta dishes, and seafood dishes, come from different regions and are often cooked with different spices based on their origin.