

Emilia-Romagna's Food Crowned Italy's Best

Natasha Lardera (March 07, 2015)



“Italy’s Greatest Gastronomic Treasure, Emilia Romagna.” This is the title’s of David Rosengarten’s latest article published on Forbes, an extensive piece that goes beyond Parmigiano-Reggiano, Prosciutto di Parma, Mortadella, tortellini and balsamic vinegar.

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The long reportage starts with a cute cliché, that “If you ask an Italian where the best food is in Italy, you almost always get the same answer. “Eh,” they like to say. “At my mother’s house!”... looking like “how could you be so stupid to not know that?” Yet, apparently if you ask around and push for a regional answer everybody agrees on Emilia-Romagna, “the wondrous north-central region that lies in the fertile Po River Valley.”

What Rosengarten proceeds to explain is that for Italians this is not an uncommon answer, Emilia-Romagna is known to be a major player for its rich and savory cuisine but in the US its cuisine is not that popular. Americans, for example, tend to be big aficionados of Tuscan cuisine and the reported even gives a funny example: “Once, in New York, a great restaurateur opened a place called

Amarcord, a reference to Fellini, who was one of Emilia-Romagna's greatest sons. No one came. Finally, the restaurateur closed the place for a week, re-tooled, and re-opened as Il Toscanaccio. The joint was jammed from Night One."

According to Accademia Barilla, the first international center dedicated to the development and promotion of Italian Gastronomic Culture, the cuisine of Emilia-Romagna is the result of the coming together of Byzantine traditions and Lombard customs. "The local diet relies heavily on salumi and cheeses. These long-lasting products originally come from the nomadic populations in the area that sustained themselves with animals and few wild fruits and vegetables." Most of Italy's favorite cold cuts are indeed from this region: Prosciutto di Parma DOP, Mortadella di Bologna IGP, Cotechino di Modena, Cultatello di Zibello DOP, Salame di Felino, Salama da Sugo from Ferrara IGP and Spalla Cotta from San Secondo... and as far as cheeses are concerned, the king of all cheeses, Parmigiano Reggiano DOP is produced here.

"Pasta is king in Emilia Romagna," Accademia Barilla continues to explain, "thanks to the local cultivation of wheat. Fresh egg pasta is rolled and cut into lasagna, tagliatelle, tortellini, cappelletti and tortelli stuffed with various ingredients like beef, poultry, ricotta and swiss chard, cheese, eggs and herbs." Then these pastas are served with delicious, rich sauces such as Classic Bolognese Ragu, Prosciutto di Parma and Parmigiano Sauce and Sausage ragu. Sweet pastas may be served as a dessert as well.

Bread is also a key ingredient, often served with cold cuts. Piadina is a soft, flat bread that is typical of this region, and so are gnocco fritto (fried dough), tigelle (flat bread from the mountains) and Coppia Ferrarese DOP (sourdough bread in a twisted shape).

Seafood, poultry and meats are eaten for the second course. Throughout the region people eat rabbit, and serve more pork than beef - from porcini veal chops, to pork chops, or pork tenderloin with marsala sauce.

Most of the food served in the region follows traditional recipes but as Rosengarten explains there is also room for creativity. "They have a top-ten-list molecular palace for chrissake, Osteria Francescana, three Michelin stars and all. But even there there's tagliatelle Bolognese on the menu."

Throughout the article the author has included a few restaurants that should not be missed when traveling to Emilia-Romagna: Europa 92 in Modena, as well as "Il Cappero alle Mura" and "Zoello Ristorante" in Castelvetro di Modena, ending up with "Trattoria dai Mugnai" and "Ponterosso", both in **Monteveglia**, Bologna.

But, for those who want to have food from Emilia Romagna in New York City, one of the favorite is Via Emilia (47 E 21st Street) known for its soulful tortellini in brodo (pork, Prosciutto di Parma and Parmigiano Reggiano dumplings in hen broth) gnocco fritto (warm puffy fritters served with Prosciutto di Parma, sopressata dolce, mortadella and coppa) and Tigelle (Modena's mountain bread served with soft cheeses, cold cuts and pancetta spread.

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