



*Borgo Santo Pietro cooking school*

# GOURMET ITALY

## A NEW BREED OF GASTRONOMY

*By Sharon Kilby*





on traditional home cooking such as pasta and pizza-making courses. These basic ‘foodie’ experiences were important however, and still provide the backbone to Italian cooking tours today.

With regions such as Tuscany, the Amalfi Coast, Piedmont, Liguria and Lake Como leading the way in terms of Gastronomy, many other less known Italian areas are also now making waves when it comes to luxury gourmet experiences. Liguria, Sicily, Le Marche and Capri all have their fair share of luxury hotels offering gastronomic activities.

Italian cooking became popular in the 1990’s in response to the global publicity associated to London’s famous River Cafe a trailblazer in the joys of Italian food. Furthermore, on the back of British Chef Jamie Oliver’s promotion of Italian recipes and the Italian lifestyle in general, the country has enjoyed a surge in discerning ‘foodie’ travellers looking to experience the essence of Italian gastronomy.

Since the 90’s however, gourmet travellers have divided into two very different camps, those guests who simply want to soak up the atmosphere and heart-warming culture of Italian ‘home-style’ cooking.

Then, there are the elite travellers who are looking to sample the very finest wines alongside masterfully created exquisite Italian dishes. It is these high-earning, extremely discerning guests that have inspired a new generation of luxury hoteliers across Italy to ‘up their game’ on the culinary front.

In the last 12 months several new Italian cooking schools and gourmet

tours have been launched all of which are masterminded by luxury Italian Hotels. Maximizing on ‘in-house’ experiences, 5 star hotels are now offering a variety of interesting gastronomic experiences that have a more contemporary flavor.

Hotels that have their own cooking school or host in-house cooking classes immediately catch the eye of potential guests and are also much preferred by agents. Those properties that offer a diverse range of experiences also increase income as guests often book two or three different culinary activities during their stay.

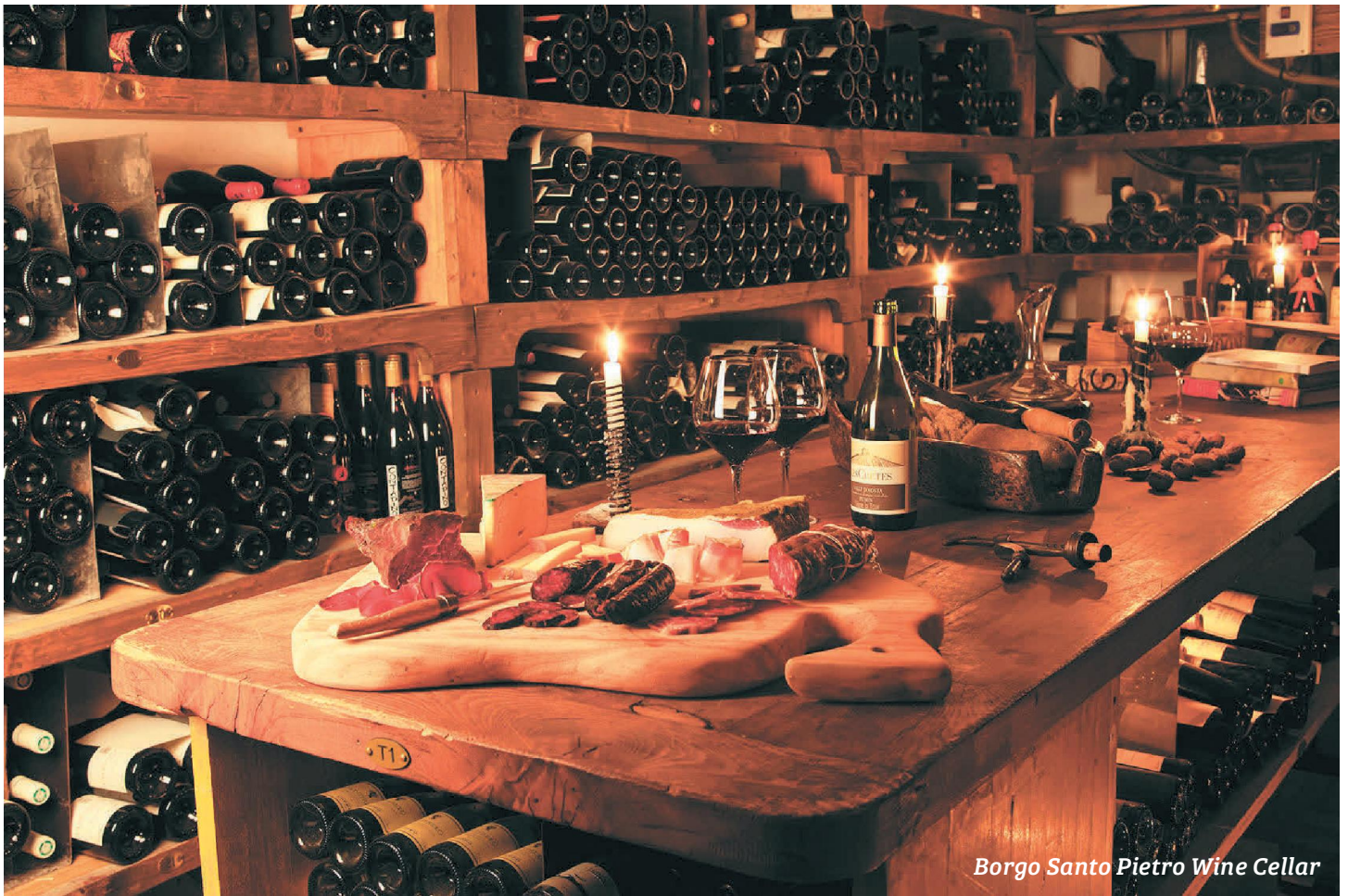
One outstanding hotel hitting the headlines in culinary circles is Borgo Santo Pietro in Tuscany. In June 2015 the hotel opened its state of the art cooking school located next to its impressive kitchen gardens. The school offers a variety of courses to both guests and also non-residents. Alongside traditional classes focusing on Tuscan favorites such as classic pastas and pizzas the school also offers gourmet classes and master classes for serious cooks and professional chefs. These innovative culinary experiences include: farm to plate cooking, country to coast seafood classes, chocolate making, cooking with truffles, bread-making, baking and gluten free classes to name but a few. Whilst traditional cooking styles are celebrated at the hotel, Michelin starred chef Andrea Mattei also teaches contemporary methods and modern cooking techniques. The hotel’s emphasis on gastronomy is carried throughout the country estate and activities also include olive oil tasting, truffle hunting, honey tasting and farm tours. The comprehensive collection of ‘foodie’ adventures

Experience Classic and Contemporary Cooking at some of Italy’s leading luxury hotels.

Italy is without a doubt one of the top destinations for travellers who are looking for an epicurean adventure and the choice of luxury hotels offering gourmet experiences is steadily on the rise.

Originally, culinary tours in Italy were simple affairs with an emphasis





*Borgo Santo Pietro Wine Cellar*

allows the hotel to add value to the guest experience and ‘capture’ their audience, thus further increasing revenue.

Luxury Hotels with cooking classes in Italy have to be proactive and think above and beyond the mainstream when it comes to introducing new gourmet experiences in the future. Several respected hotels are introducing culinary events, packages and offers that attract those interested in Italian cooking and also boost booking figures during quieter months such as truffle hunting in October and detox cooking in April.

Palazzo Seneca in Umbria hosts regular gourmet events such as the ‘Prosciutti dal Mondo’ a three day festival that celebrates the ‘Norciana’ or local ham. Guests can experience an Italian style ‘festa’



*Bellevue Hotel & Spa garden*

where the very best regional food and wine producers come together to offer an inspiring bounty of flavors. Guided tours of local farms and vineyard’s are combined with exclusive wine tastings and culinary tours. This kind of 5 star gourmet break attracts visitors from around

the world who wish to indulge in fine food. Palazzo Seneca also works closely with Relais and Chateaux and plays host to the gourmet festival of Italy. Guests can also partake in cookery classes in a grand 16th-century palace where specialties include cured meats,





truffles and lentils.

The interaction between the gourmet traveller and the concierge service are complex yet beneficial to all luxury hotels in terms of generating new revenue streams. For example, at Hotel Bellevue in

the Italian Alps guests can book a cheese-tasting session in the hotel's own 'cave'. Located in the heart of the mountains the hotel's cheese cellar boasts cheeses from across the region as well as national specialties from central and southern Italy. Guests can also

take a hike to La Maison à l'Alpage a country lodge in the National Park where once a week, Hotel Bellevue's chefs transfer their skills to higher ground where they work al-fresco at the foot of the Gran Paradiso peak preparing freshly grilled meat and cooked polenta in a traditional cast-iron cauldron.

Each region in Italy has its own rich and diverse culinary heritage and hotels are recognizing the intrinsic link between local culture and luxury hospitality. Taking the roots of the region and translating these into contemporary cuisine allows hotels to maximize on marketing and publicity opportunities. For example, having a Michelin Starred chef will immediately differentiate a hotel from its competitors. Having an award winning chef and a cooking school accompanied by gourmet events such as farmers markets, barbeques and luxury picnics all add new dimensions to a luxury hotel.

Italy's leading gourmet hotels share one common vision - to offer unique and memorable epicurean experiences to their guests.



**About the author**

Sharon Kilby is a director of Arthouse PR, a UK based public relations agency specializing in the travel and luxury lifestyle sectors. Arthouse PR represents several boutique hotels in Italy, Iceland and the UK. Sharon is also a freelance writer and has edited over 60 luxury lifestyle publications including numerous hotel magazines. [www.arthouse-pr.com](http://www.arthouse-pr.com)