

# Super savour

Don't just squeeze in bites between the sights – Italy has delicacies worth taking your time over. **Laura Goodman** knows where to make a meal of it all



## PROSECCO

**Where?** Treviso, Veneto.

Prosecco is the party-goer's choice: light, fruity and youthful. And in the similarly cheerful Treviso hills, you're never far from a bottle – particularly if you stick to one important road.

Less than half an hour's drive from the airport, the main Prosecco-producing region rolls between the towns of Conegliano and Valdobbiadene, and the road that links them is known as the Strada del Prosecco. It weaves neatly through the vineyards, past solitary churches, *castello*-topped communes and farming towns. More importantly, it's laden with opportunity for tasting and feasting.

Download a map and a list of hotspots from [www.coneglianovaldobbiadene.it](http://www.coneglianovaldobbiadene.it).

High on the hill of Cartizze, where the best grapes grow, is Col Vettoraz ([colvetoraz.it](http://colvetoraz.it)); pop in to see the Miotti family, taste their spoils and admire the sparkling view. Elsewhere, the Gregolettos ([gregoletto.it](http://gregoletto.it)) have been making Prosecco since 1600. At their cantina near the little commune of Follina, you can buy a bottle for £5, then head into the village for some of chef Vito's local flavour at Osteria dai Mazzeri (00 39 0438 971255, [osteriadaimazzeri.com](http://osteriadaimazzeri.com)).

Pushed for time? You can reach the Treviso hills on a day trip from Venice: Veneto Tours ([theothersideofvenice.com](http://theothersideofvenice.com)) has

a nine-hour trip taking in wineries and cellars from £95pp, including tastings.

**Just drink it:** It's a dream scenario when you can sip Prosecco for pennies whenever you please. Right on the Strada, at cosy, wood-panelled Trattoria Ristoro Fos de Marai (00 39 0423 900292; mains around £13), a bottle goes for £5, alongside a lavish lunch of garlicky snails, creamy tortellini and grilled lamb chops.

**Stay:** Due Carpini (00 39 0423 900655, [duecarpini.it](http://duecarpini.it); doubles from £72, B&B) is an old farmhouse and barn. All nine of its rooms have delectable vineyard views, while breakfast is a feast of sunrise-yellow scrambled eggs, and freshly baked breads and jams.

## GELATO

**Where?** Rome, Lazio.

Quality gelato has been in decline across Italy for the last few years thanks to copycat creams that look suspiciously like the real deal. It's only natural to drool over cabinets of technicolour tubs, but spotting the artisanal, authentic makers brings delicious rewards. Beware very bright colours, and whipped, lustrous heaps – it just means it's got lots of air in it. And, lastly, if you can't easily locate a list of ingredients, move along.

A good gelato slides down better if there's lots to look at. If you're sightseeing, head for the arches and neon sign of Giolitti (40 Via Uffici del Vicario), a central classic – it's been in the same spot close to the Pantheon for more than 100 years. Also, seek out seasonal fruit flavours: fancy-free Gelateria dei Gracchi (272 Via dei Gracchi) has wild strawberry and white peach, while Gelateria del Teatro (70 Via di San Simone) works wonders with Italian delicacies such as Sorrento walnuts and Sicilian oranges.

For a full gelato tour, contact Gina at GT Food & Travel ([gtfoodandtravel.com](http://gtfoodandtravel.com); £214 for a group of up to six); her three-hour walk includes a demonstration and visits to her favourite gelato-makers. She can answer your questions about the history of gelato, ice-cream trends in Rome, and how gelato, sorbet and granita are made.

**Just eat it:** The owner of Il Gelato (Piazza Monte d'Oro; [ilgelatocentrostorico.com](http://ilgelatocentrostorico.com); £1.70 for two scoops), Claudio Torcè, is widely believed to be the modern boss of ice cream.

Under the bare-brick domes of his shop are more than 100 flavours, from *zabaione* to savouries such as Gorgonzola. Claudio runs masterclasses in his precious laboratory – send an email via the website to arrange.

**Stay:** Casa Montani (00 39 06 3260 0421, [casamontani.com](http://casamontani.com); doubles from £135, B&B) is a discreet five-room guesthouse in a superb location – it's five minutes from the Spanish Steps, 10 from the Pantheon. Coffee and pastries are served in your room. >



HOW TO CHOOSE A RESTAURANT IN ROME: The best pizzerias in town are open for dinner only, so avoid any open at lunchtime. And if a place serves artichokes in

summer, when Rome's famous thistle is out of season, it's likely to be a tourist trap. Don't go there. You have been warned...

## WHITE TRUFFLES

**Where?** Alba, Piedmont.

In an oft-overlooked pocket of Piedmont, the Langhe is a collection of dreamy villages on hills, all crowned with castles. In the lush land between them, grapes, apricots, hazelnuts and mushrooms prosper. Most important, though, the Langhe is truffle territory. All types flourish, but as autumn descends the Alba white truffle creates a special sort of mania.

The *tartufo di bianco* is the most esteemed (and expensive) variety in the world, known as the 'Gold of the Langhe'. Every October since 1929, the region's capital, Alba, has held its White Truffle Fair, where the nuggety morsels go for thousands of euros. On weekends, they're displayed like jewels on checked tablecloths throughout the city, beside local cheeses, bottles of Barolo wine, almond biscuits, apricot cake and *gianduja* chocolates.

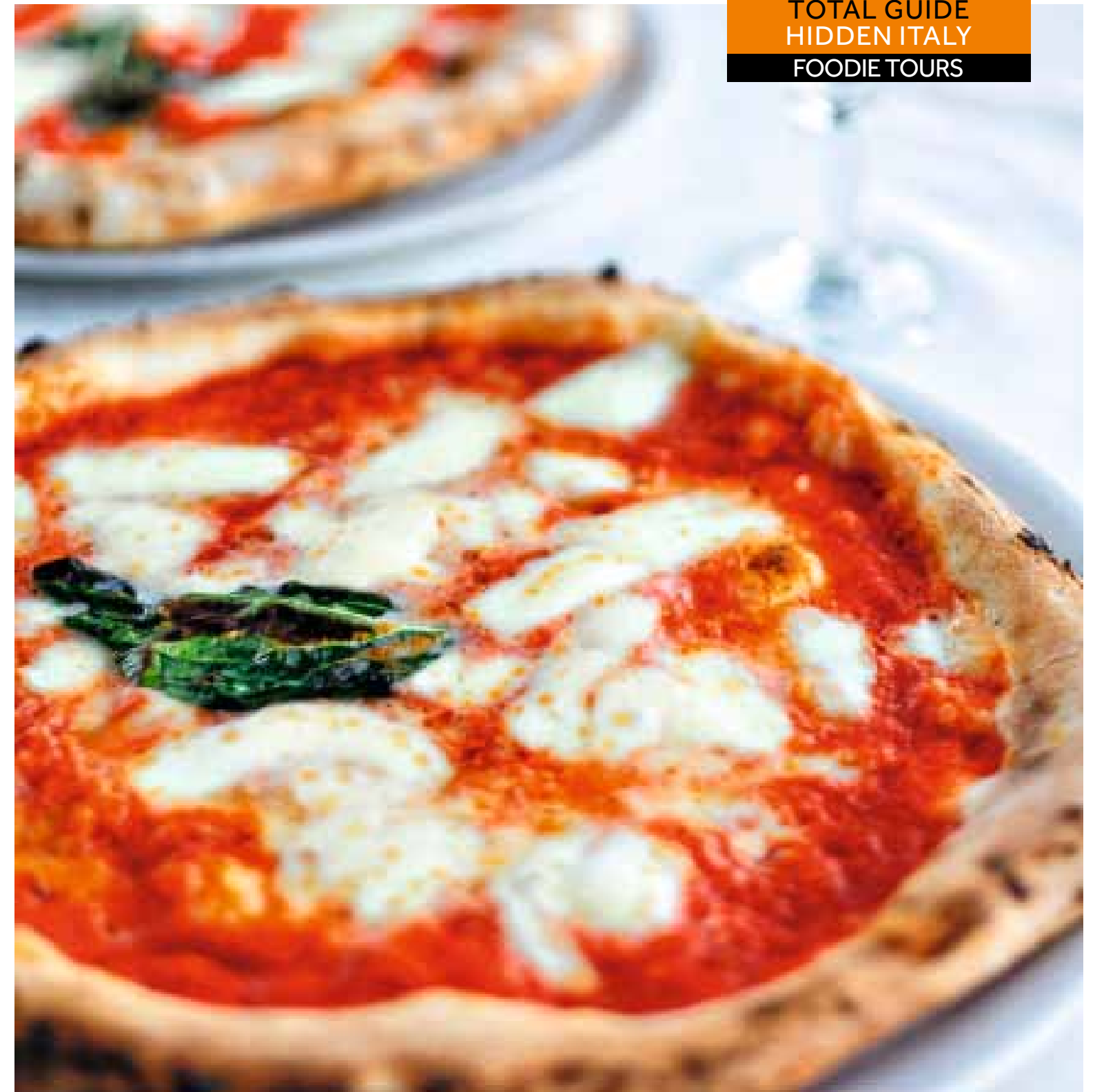
You can join a hunt, too (from October until it gets frosty). There are no pigs involved any more, just very clever dogs. Fourth-generation

truffle ace Giovanni Monchiero runs hunts, as well as a 'truffle-dog university', museum and produce shop at his mama's house (00 39 0173 615156, [universitadeicanidartufo.it](http://universitadeicanidartufo.it)).

BK Wine Tours (00 33 680 453570, [bkwine.com](http://bkwine.com)) runs gourmet tours of the region; a five-day trip including winery visits, tastings, a truffle hunt, lots of truffles and most meals costs from £1,020pp, excluding flights.

**Just eat it:** Each year, for as long as the truffles last, Ristorante Bovio (00 39 0173 590303, [ristorantebovio.it](http://ristorantebovio.it); mains around £12) goes to town with a six-course *tartufo bianco* menu (£150) – the golden specimens are shaved generously at the table over plates of porcini mushrooms, buttery pasta, sliced veal and soft cheese.

**Stay:** Just above Alba, beside a stretch of truffle-rich woodland, Cascina Reinè (00 39 0173 440112, [villalameridianaalba.it](http://villalameridianaalba.it); doubles from £83, B&B) is a dreamy *agriturismo* with pool, petite vineyard, chickens and homely rooms with terraces and balconies.



## PIZZA

**Where?** Naples, Campania.

Food historians and dough devotees make pizza pilgrimages to Naples, where inhabitants have been eating pizza for 300 years. The local style has a bubbly, lightly charred crust and is loaded with sauce – there are just two official flavours: marinara (tomato, oregano, olive oil, garlic) and margherita (tomato, buffalo mozzarella, olive oil, basil). And while you might find the odd olive-loaded 'ultra-pizza', Naples' pizza-makers keep it real, with rules (from the Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana) that aren't confined to ingredients: they specify the type of yeast, pH levels, variations of fresh

tomato and the temperatures of the (properly proportioned) wood-fuelled oven, too.

Naples itself is more laid-back, offering a pleasant mix of seaside strolls (views stretch to Mount Vesuvius and Capri) and cultural treats, such as the archaeology museum, with its Roman finds from Pompeii. In the historical centre, street pizza-vendors make swift, filling lunches for £3. Locals eat them folded in half twice, straight from the napkin. Pick a packed pizzeria, take a ticket and wait your turn. Di Matteo (95 Via dei Tribunali; 00 39 081 455262; £5) also does a good deep-fried *calzone*.

Get to grips with the Neapolitan specifics on a four-hour pizza-making workshop and

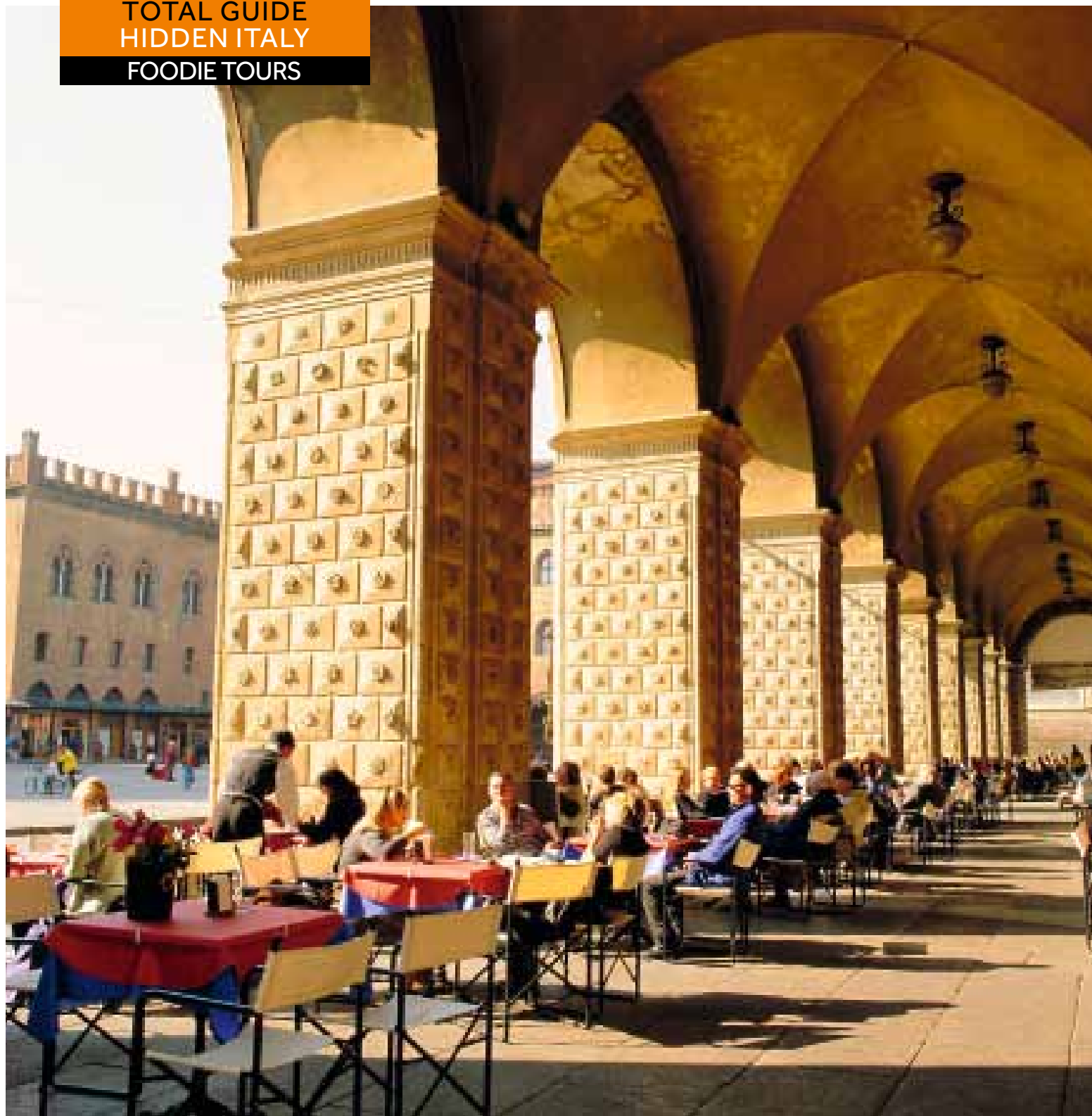
walking seminar with Context Travel (00 39 06 9672 7371, [contexttravel.com](http://contexttravel.com); €68pp).

**Just eat it:** Da Michele (1-3 Via Cesare Sersale; 00 39 081 553 9204, [damichele.net](http://damichele.net); €6) has been doing its thing since 1870, so its pizza chefs are proper pros. The sit-down restaurant is unfussy, with a generic red 'pizzeria' sign and a few copper pans dangling from the walls. The pizza is authentic to its saucy core.

**Stay:** On the fourth floor of a little palazzo in Naples' Chiaia district, Luna Caprese (00 39 081 764 6383, [lunacaprese.net](http://lunacaprese.net); doubles from €68, B&B) has stunning bay views. Rooms with balconies have been filled with flowers, lavish linens, paintings and sculptures by host Arnaldo. >

HOW TO CHOOSE A RESTAURANT ANYWHERE: Stick to places that follow traditional service hours (12.30-14.30 and 19.30-23.00). No place that serves dinner at

18.00 is ever good. And avoid restaurants on main squares; they are almost universally awful (unless you're there just for the people-watching).



## RAGU

**Where?** Bologna, Emilia-Romagna.

We call it bolognese, but the Bolognese call it *ragù*, and it's basically their lifeblood, so they should know. Every cook in Bologna has their own nuanced recipe, but simplicity is key: the Accademia Italiana della Cucina limits an official *ragù*'s ingredients to meat, onions, carrot, celery, a touch of tomato paste, wine and milk. No garlic, no herbs, no messing about. It should be slow-simmered and served with tagliatelle – optimum width is 8mm.

By day, Bolognese bustle takes place in the Medieval alleyways that criss-cross behind the grand, *palazzo*-bordered Piazza Maggiore.

Beneath high white canopies, there's a daily display of asparagus, artichokes, bus-red tomatoes and courgette flowers, alongside trays of delicate tortellini and snack-sized *pizzette*. Behind the veg, *salumerie* windows brim with mortadella and rosy pink salami.

You can arm yourself with an authentic *ragù* recipe at La Vecchia Scuola Bolognese (11 Via Galliera 11; 00 39 051 649 1576, [lavecchiascuola.com](http://lavecchiascuola.com); £80pp), a cookery school where a three-hour traditional class gets straight down to it.

If you have a day to spare, contact Alessandro at Italian Days (00 39 338 421 6659, [italiandays.it](http://italiandays.it); from £97pp for a day tour with lunch). He's a pro when it comes to the region's produce, and

he organises lovely trips to the nearby homelands of Parmesan and balsamic vinegar.

**Just eat it:** The menu at Trattoria Serghei (12 Via Piella; 00 39 051 233533; mains around £8) is a roll call of classics (as is the decor). The beefy *tagliatelle al ragù* is as authentic as they come, as is the tortellini (stuffed with mortadella and swimming in broth).

**Stay:** A short stroll from Piazza Maggiore, Hotel Metropolitan (00 39 051 229393, [hotelmetropolitan.com](http://hotelmetropolitan.com); doubles from £115, B&B) is a swish designer number, with sunny, all-white rooms. There are also apartments with kitchens, should you wish to cook up your goodies or refine your *ragù*. ■

PHOTOGRAPHS: ACONINIS, GETTY, ROBERT HARDING

WHICH WINE WITH WHICH FOOD: If it grows together, it goes together – choose wines from the region from which your food hails.