



Giovanni serves dinner

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Home Food: Dinner with the Locals

I had been trying to attend a *Home Food* meal at a private home in Italy since I first learned of the organization in the winter of 2005. Somehow the stars never aligned until this past fall when a dinner in *Florence* fit perfectly in my schedule. And may I say, it was worth the wait...

Preserving a Food Culture

Home Food is non-profit cultural association that seeks to protect and promote Italy's gastronomic heritage. It was founded by *Egeria Di Nallo*, a sociologist at the University of Bologna, and is supported in part by the Italian Ministry of Agriculture. A network of guest cooks (*cesarini* — meaning "little Caesars") welcome Italians and foreigners alike into their



Linda Park Lyons

homes for lovingly prepared meals featuring traditional regional recipes (usually passed down through the families of the cesarini) and local ingredients. "Home Food's mission is based on the idea that good traditional food can be a tool to build up and preserve a culture," says director *Cristina Fortini*. It is a unique opportunity to connect with local Italians (most speak fluent English) and enjoy an incredible meal.

I had been receiving the Home Food emails with their schedule of meals (mostly dinners but sometimes lunches) for the coming months. Home Food has 20 to 25 meals planned each month during the summer, fewer at other times of the year. Though there

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Malatestiana Library

Visit Europe's First Public Library in Cesena

If you're a lover of books and libraries like I am, you'll get a rush stepping inside what is said to be the first public and monastic library in Europe, *Istituzione Biblioteca Malatestiana* or the Malatestiana Library. The experience is made even more remarkable when you learn that despite wars and natural disasters, the building, furnishings and manuscripts have all remained virtually untouched since the structure was built in the middle of the 15th century.

On a recent road trip along the *Via Emilia* (the ancient Roman road that runs from *Rimini* to *Piacenza*), my husband and I had the opportunity to visit an abundance of impressive fortresses, castles and churches in a land that is rich with layers of history. But when we stopped to tour the small town of *Cesena*, near the center of the province of *Emilia-Romagna*, we chanced upon the Malatestiana Library, an unexpected gem at the foot of the verdant Apennine Mountains.

The local tourist office provided the assistance of a delightful English interpreter, *Nicoletta Spinolo*, who accompanied us on the short walk along cobbled streets to the *Basilica Domenico Malatesta Novella*, which

continued on page 4

Home Food has 10,000 members.



Giovanni's ITALIAN PEAR CAKE



Ingredients

2.2 lbs pears
3 eggs
7 tbsp butter
1 cup flour
½ cup sugar
vanilla-flavored sugar
1 dose yeast
1 glass milk

Directions

Mix and whisk all the ingredients together in a bowl.

Pour the mixture into a baking pan previously greased and sprinkled with flour.

Top with the peeled pears cut into quarters.

Put pan into oven and bake at 340 degrees Fahrenheit for 40 minutes.

Once the cake is baked and taken out of the oven, sprinkle the vanilla-flavored sugar over it in as a garnish.

“Therefore, to the question that asks him from where his passion for cooking was born, he answers: ‘Like everything in life, it originates from love.’”

are now cesarini in many parts of Italy, the most popular offerings are in *Bologna, Rome* and *Tuscany*.

I chose a dinner called “The cooking: a passion born from love, like anything else in life...with Giovanni in Florence” and paid online for both a required membership in Home Food and the dinner. Fortini contacted me to find out if my mother (who would be joining me) and I had any food allergies, as she could make sure Giovanni accommodated us. A few weeks ahead, she sent me Giovanni’s full name, address and phone numbers.

Dinner in Florence

When the night of the dinner arrives, I admit that I’m a bit nervous. I’ve traveled to Italy dozens of times and been to many Italian homes, so I am surprised by this feeling and should encourage others not to miss a Home Food dinner just because it might be a little out of your comfort zone. As we walk through the door of Giovanni’s apartment into his book-lined entrance hall, all nerves fade with a warm welcome by Giovanni, a tall, older, bearded gentleman, and his friend, Jacques, both of whom speak impeccable English.

They escort us into the colorful, antiques-and painting-filled living/dining room where a fire is blazing in the fireplace, and two other Home Food guests, newlyweds Linda and Richard Parks from Dallas, are waiting. As we gather around Giovanni’s table topped with Asian-

inspired, antique plates and stemware, I pick up the evening’s program and menu sitting next to my plate and read a bit why Giovanni is our host tonight:

“Everything started many years ago when, almost aged thirty, he decided to leave his home in the province, in his native city of *Carrara*, that had become too much narrow to end there his exploration of life, and to arrive in

Firenze, a city of wide breath. Here, firstly he became a student of a small private school of restoration, supporting himself in a rented flat by doing his previous job, and then he also met people who changed and enriched his new life. In fact, an artisan friend of his preciously taught him and the figure of a French woman initiated him into the cooking. Therefore, to the question that asks him from where his passion for cooking was born, he answers: ‘Like everything in life, it originates from love.’”



Linda Park Lyons



The selection process for a *cesarina* (female) or *cesarino* (male) is rigorous and administered by the director and an admission committee. At the suggestion of a friend, Giovanni contacted Home Food. Fortini interviewed him on the phone about his love of food and then came to Florence for an in-person meeting. Along with other members of the admission committee, Fortini visited Giovanni's home for a meal, evaluating the setting, the menu, how he cooked and interacted with the guests. He passed a most difficult test.

Tuscan Culinary Treasures

Our traditional Tuscan dinner begins with *crostini di fegatini* (chicken liver on bread) which Giovanni prepares in his unique way, as more of a pate with capers, garlic and some *Pecorino* cheese. As we sip a local red, Giovanni retreats to the kitchen and returns with a piping hot platter of *testaroli* topped with *pesto*. Testaroli is a simple, ancient pasta made with flour, water and salt (no eggs) that is popular in Giovanni's hometown of *Carrara*, but hard to find here in Florence.

Our conversation is just as appetizing as the food. We learn more about Giovanni's friend, Jacques, who is a librarian at *Palazzo Strozzi* and also teaches Italian film classes to American students at Middlebury College's study abroad program in Florence. Linda and Richard share tales from their honeymoon so far in Italy and Richard explains he studied Italian in college and that's why he wanted to come back to Italy. As Italian President *Silvio Berlusconi* is about to resign from office, Giovanni and I discuss just how bad the Italian economy is. We all share favorite books (including Mary Taylor Simonetti's books on Sicily), movies (the Italian film *Pranzo di*

Ferragosto which was recently released with subtitles in the U.S.) and places to visit in Italy.

Our main course is *scamerita*, a cut of pork between the neck and shoulder. He tells us how he has baked the scamerita for two hours in white wine, olive oil, whole garlic and rosemary. The sides are spinach as well as wine-soaked pears. The pear theme continues with homemade pear sorbet and a pear tart. Giovanni serves sweet



The Details

Home Food

Via Broccaindossa, 41
Bologna
(39) 051 220727
www.homefood.it

Register on the website to receive a monthly email of the next month's scheduled meals around Italy. Since the schedule is only released a month ahead of time, if you are planning further in advance, you might want to e-mail Home Food at info@homefood.it to request a particular city and date. Membership (3.50€ per person) is required to attend an event. Home Food meals generally cost about 39€ and can be paid for in advance via PayPal.

Marsala wine and also brings out *Pernigotti* chocolates. *Mama mia!*

But Giovanni has saved the best surprise for last. He walks into another part of his apartment and returns with a framed work of art as a present for newlyweds Richard and Linda. It is an image painted on glass, a copy of a mosaic found in *Pompeii* showing Ulysses and Penelope in "conjugal affection." Not wanting to leave me out, he goes inside and returns with a similar but smaller piece of a gold bird painted on glass. All of us are touched and thrilled to have something lasting with which to remember this convivial night.

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oking classes for all levels.

houses the library in a wing of the monastery between its two cloisters.

Once there, a custodian warmly welcomed us in Italian and then took two large keys out of his pocket to unlock the imposing dark wooden doors.

Carved in an ornate Gothic style, the doors have repeated rows of rosettes and helixes in a checkered design, celebrating the library's

Jerome Levine



benefactor, *Malatesta Novella*, a wealthy Cesena nobleman. At the top of the

doors is the familiar elephant emblem of the Malatesta family that we had also seen in the *Duomo* in Rimini.

Entering the long, rectangular hall with *terra cotta* floors, you feel like you have stepped back in time. Some have called the library a

“church in miniature.” Divided into three naves, the wide center aisle is flanked by 20 impressive white, floor-to-ceiling columns, each one bearing the Malatesta coat of arms at its top.

On each side of the center nave are 29 rows of dark wooden “pluteuses” that look like pews but multitask as seats with inclined lecterns and bookshelves beneath. They, too, are embellished with Malatesta heraldry, painted in red, white and green colors, in case someone might forget the name of the angel philanthropist.

Metal braces, placed there by ingenious engineers centuries ago, support the beautiful vaulted ceiling that has survived a series of earthquakes in the area. Used only during daylight hours, the light-filled hall is illuminated by arched windows on both sides and a circular window at the front. Chained to each of the desks are the large leather-bound books, the size of unabridged dictionaries, which were all astonishingly handwritten prior to the invention of the printing press.

The idea for the humanist library, which was built between 1447 and 1452, is attributed to Friars of St. Francis, who wanted a study area annexed to their monastery. In what has been called the golden age of this city, Malatesta Novello agreed to fund the project. This entailed both building the structure, and acquiring and commissioning the books. His team of “librarians” organized a two-decade long effort to transcribe books they found elsewhere in Europe and return to Cesena with their contents. Six or seven Nordic writers were charged with copying the books into Gothic or semi-Gothic script; others were tasked to illustrate and bind them.

Planning a Visit

As soon as you arrive, stop at the *Cesena* tourist office. The tourist office provides excellent maps and helpful guides to the town's sights that are available in different languages. They may also be able to provide you with an interpreter.

Before you head off to the library, linger and look around the *Piazza del Popolo* to see the recently renovated Masini Fountain as well as the town hall, the Venetian Lodge and the Nuti Tower.

While at the Malatestiana Library, stop inside the room just across the way. There, the Piana Library contains over 5,000 precious volumes from the 15th to 19th century as well as the personal library of *Pope Pius VII* (one of three popes born in Cesena), choral books, the smallest book in the world, and a Gospel book dated 1104.

Also visit *La Rocca*, the impressive, pentagonal walled Malatestian Fortress in Cesena, which has two towers: one used as a museum of agricultural history (depicting rural life in the area), and the other a museum housing a collection of Malatestian ceramics.

A wonderful place to take a break for lunch is the *Osteria Michiletta* on Via Strinati, 41. It is conve-

niently located in the town center on the site of a former inn built in 1854, one of Cesena's oldest. *Rocco Angarola*, the good-humored chef/owner who resembles a hefty *Roberto Benigni*, worked in Minneapolis for many years before returning home to continue the cooking traditions of his

heritage. The homemade pasta, traditional piadina bread and local Sangiovese wine are wonderful.

Then find your way to visit the picturesque *Abbey of St. Maria del Monte*, perched on the top of a hill that can be seen from most streets in the historic center. The abbey is more than 1,000 years old and has a priceless collection of small painted votive tablets (called *ex-votos*).



Malatestiana Library

Piazza Bufalini, 1
(39) 0547 610892
www.malatestiana.it

Hours vary; check website before going.

Cesena Tourist Office

Piazza del Popolo, 15
(39)0547 356327
www.turismo.comune.cesena.fc.it

The library holdings, totaling 343 manuscripts, include legal, medical and scientific, literary, theological and philosophical works, as well as 14 Greek codices and seven Hebrew ones. While this library is open to the public, it wasn't a lending library; in fact, the books remain attached to the wooden desks by heavy wrought iron chains as they were then, subdivided by subject and kept in precise order.

The people of Cesena always took great pride in their library as they still do today, which is probably why it is so well preserved. In 1461, Malatesta, who turned out to be the last of the town's noblemen, entrusted the Cesena community to maintain strict controls over the library jointly with the friars

who were responsible for overseeing its use. This explains the dual

key security system that was in place for so many years: one key was for the town officials and one for the monks.

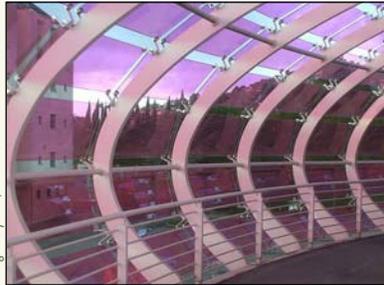
After Malatesta Novello's death, the town council obtained permission to excommunicate anyone who attempted to remove one of the volumes. Today, the library's holdings represent a treasure trove for scholars. Because of its unique place in history, in 2005, the Malatestiana Library was recognized as the first UNESCO Memory of the World site in Italy.

— Irene S. Levine, PhD

Irene Levine wrote about the cooking school and museum Casa Artusi in the December 2010/January 2011 issue of Dream of Italy. Visit her website at www.irenelevine.com

Other Noteworthy Italian Libraries

Italy is home to a number of impressive historic libraries including the following:



Perugia-City.com, flickr.com

Biblioteca Sandro Penna (Perugia)

www.comune.perugia.it/canale.asp?id=3730
(39) 075 5772500

This public library, located in the *San Sisto* district of *Perugia*, was named for 20th-century Perugian-born poet *Sandro Penna*. Its modern design and open floor plan make it an anomaly among Italy's traditional and historic buildings – it was built in 2004 and designed to look like a flying saucer. The library's transparent magenta walls and disc shape allow plenty of light to flow in, creating a homey and relaxing feel. The airy, informal space is equipped with multimedia stations on all three floors, as well as a colorful area catering to children. At night, the illuminated building casts an ethereal glow.

Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (Florence)

www.bncf.firenze.sbn.it
(39) 055 249191

The *National Central Library of Florence* is the largest library in Italy, holding a collection of more than 5,600,000 books, 29,000 16th-century volumes and nearly



littlereisendling, flickr.com

25,000 manuscripts. The public library was established in 1714 from the collection of Italian scholar *Antonio Magliabechi*, who amassed 30,000 volumes. The library originally housed its books in a building adjacent to the Uffizi Gallery, but moved into its current building on the Arno River in 1935. Notable items include a collection of 347 manuscripts belonging and relating to *Galileo*, and two globes produced by Italian cosmographer *Vincenzo Coronelli* in 1696.

Vatican Library (Rome)

www.vaticanlibrary.va
(39) 06698 79411

The Vatican Library is among the oldest libraries in the world – though it was established at the Vatican complex in 1448, its collection of volumes dates back to before the 13th century. The library currently holds 1.1 million books and 75,000 manuscripts, including illuminated manuscripts. The *Codex Vaticanus Graecus* 1209, the oldest known manuscript of the Bible, was written on 759 pages of vellum paper in 350 AD and has been at the Vatican Library since the 15th century. The library is only open to teachers, researchers and scholars who have a relevant need to access its collection.

—Elaine Murphy



Jokim Miller, flickr.com

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ned in the 4th century B.C.

News, Tips, Deals

Sala Blu Offers Assistance in Italy's Train Stations

My sister recently had a knee operation, still uses a cane from time to time and while we were traveling by train from Florence to Rome, we needed help. I contacted *Sala Blu*, a service offered by *TrenItalia*, which runs Italy's rail network, to help passengers with mobility problems. In Florence, the Sala Blu representative wheeled her to the particular train car and put the luggage on and then forwarded the information to our destination, in this case, Rome. We were met by people from Sala Blu when our train arrived in Rome and they took our luggage off the train and helped us to a taxi. There is no charge for the service but we tipped all who helped us.

The Sala Blu service is available to the disabled, elderly or pregnant, and offers assistance with luggage and wheelchair transfers as well as informa-

tion and seat booking requests. There are Sala Blu service centers in 14 major Italian rail stations but the service can also be arranged from 252 sta-



sammydavisdog, flickr.com



Shaun Merritt, flickr.com

tions across Italy (a complete list can be found at www.bit.ly/salablustations). Passengers should report to the assistance point in the station 30 minutes before departure.

E-mail Sala Blu in advance at assistenzaclientidisabili.fi@trenitalia.it In your e-mail, state the station of arrival, departure and connection; your date and

time of travel; the type of service you will need; and a phone number where you can be reached. You can also e-mail your request to one of the major

rail stations (you can find their individual e-mail addresses at the link above).

If your plans are more last minute, you can call (39) 199 303060 or (39) 199 892021 and select option "7" one hour before your departure (if

calling between the hours of 8 a.m. and 10 p.m.) or 10 hours prior to departure (if calling between 10 p.m. and 8 a.m.). If you are arriving or departing on an international train, you can call (39) 06 4881726 at least 24 hours before your departure.

—Cynthia Luzon

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Italy Foodie Happenings in 2012

A New Eataly Opens

Where: Rome at the former *Air Terminal Ostiense*

When: April 21, 2012

Why: Explore 12,000 square feet of Italy's best culinary products and dine at any of 11 restaurants. You've never seen a "supermarket" like this before.

Details at: www.roma.eataly.it

Slow Food Salone del Gusto/ Terra Madre

Where: Turin

When: October 25 to 29, 2012

Why: Every other year, Slow Food lovers from 150 countries convene on Turin to hold the world's largest artisanal food marketplace. Taste delicacies from throughout Italy and around the world.

Details at: www.salonedelgusto.com

Italy's new high-speed rail



A Rare Visit to the Swiss Guards Armory at the Vatican

Created under *Pope Julius II* in 1506, the Swiss Guards make up the oldest standing army in the world. They must swear to protect the Pope and his staff, even if that means giving their lives. They may look odd, in their colorful striped uniforms and feathered helmets, standing at the entrances to Vatican City, but don't be fooled, they perform an around-the-clock job that requires diverse skills—everything from proficiency in martial arts to fluency in multiple languages.



All photos by Michelle Monteciano

Few visitors to Vatican City realize that with a little planning, they can get a rare glimpse of the history of the Pope's soldiers with a visit to the *Swiss Guards Armory*, located



in the basement of their barracks.

The Swiss Guards fought few times throughout history, the most famous being during the Sack of Rome in 1527. Despite being a pacific army, they boast an extensive and historically fascinating collection of weapons. The armory offers a glimpse of the history and evolution of the arms used by the elite forces. It holds almost every original weapon the guard has ever possessed since the creation of the corps in the 1500s.

Inspect the flame-bladed swords and halberds—a combination of sword and battle ax that is considered the most emblematic weapon of the corps—that were a particular favorite of Swiss mercenaries in the 16th century. Their armory's modern weapons include muskets, rifles and most recently Swiss assault rifles.

See how the colorful uniform of the Swiss Guards that we know today—white gloves, feathered helmets and blue, yellow and red tunics and pantaloons—developed over the years. It is a myth that the present uniform was designed by *Michelangelo*, but it was actually designed by *Colonel Repond* in 1917, who wanted to create a modern uniform while still resembling the centuries old original as closely as possible. You can also take a look at the steel chest plate, and iron helmets with red feathers, which are traditional armor of the guards, still worn on ceremonial occasions such as the swearing in of the new guards and the major events of the Catholic calendar.

The armory is generally closed to the public, but visitors can sneak a rare opportunity to tour it by sending a request by fax or e-mail to the Colonel of the Corps a few weeks in advance. Receiving a response may take a bit of persistence, and if you are one of the lucky ones, visits are free of charge. Fax (39) 06 69885122 and/or e-mail gsp@swissgrd.va

—D.R.

Take a Mosaics Class in Rome

If you've already done the usual sights in Rome or are looking for a unique and authentic experience in the Eternal City, why not try something a bit more hands on? At *Aegea Mosaici*, a quaint art studio tucked away on a small street just off *Via della Lungara* in *Trastevere*, visitors have the chance to really delve into the ancient Roman craft of mosaics. Upon entering, you will be welcomed by the studio's manager, *Nadia*. An accomplished artist, she has been piecing together traditional and modern mosaics for more than two decades, and she swears by the therapeutic qualities of this art form.

Here at the studio, you can craft your very own mosaic or take longer courses in glass fusion or even making filati, micro tiles made with smalti glass. The technique was said to have been born in the Vatican's mosaic studio in the 17th century.

Agaea Mosaici began as a laboratory for creating and installing mosaics for flooring, walls and decorations. Now, its aim is to spread inspiration among people of all ages and backgrounds, with or without previous artistic experience. Works are realized in both classic and modern styles and the studio specializes in the reproduction and depiction of classic Roman mosaics. The intimate atmosphere offers the perfect occasion for striking up conversations with the locals.

Agaea Mosaici, at *Via Corsini*, 8, is open Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. A two-hour class costs 25€ and a seven-hour workshop is 85€. If you're staying long-term in Rome, the studio also offers longer term courses that meet weekly. For more information, call (39) 06 6872610 or visit www.aegeamosaici.com.

—Danielle Rovet

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il line starts up this spring.

Puglia's Borgo Egnazia

Puglia, Italy's southeastern region at the "heel" of the boot, is bordered by both the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, giving it one of the longest coastlines of any region in Italy — almost 500 miles. Most of Puglia is flat and agricultural, growing fruit, vegetables and grain in its mild Mediterranean climate. Almond trees and olive groves flourish; there are more than 50 million olive trees (strictly protected) in this region alone!

It's in this lovely setting that you will find the *Borgo Egnazia*, a stunning resort built in creamy white stone and stucco with Renaissance, Moorish and Norman influences. San Domenico Hotels (owners of the famous nearby *Masseria San Domenico*) created the property from the ground up in the town of *Savelletri di Fasano*, about 45 minutes from *Bari*. It opened in April 2011.

Only a golf course, owned by San Domenico Hotels, separates the *borgo* (meaning hamlet in Italian) from the Adriatic Sea. There are 63 rooms and suites in *La Corte*, the resort's central building. The *borgo*, set up as a small village with charming lanes, pink and purple bougainvillea and characteristic Puglian white and cream walls, contains another 92 units, ranging from 485-square-foot rooms to two-bedroom townhouses with fully equipped kitchenettes, two bathrooms a large sitting area, and a furnished patio. There are an additional 28 three-bedroom villas of almost 2700 square feet, accommodating six guests. These luxury villas have fireplaces, full kitchens including dishwashers, dining rooms and pools.

The tasteful accommodations are united in styling — eclectic, and modern

yet warm and friendly — rustic chic. The feelings conveyed are comfort, warmth and relaxation. Elements of nature, reflective of Puglia's close connection to the land are apparent throughout with stone floors, cotton window treatments, and ample displays of dried wood. But the rooms have all the modern conveniences, such as tilting mirrors and excellent toiletries in the bathroom, iPod docks, flat-screen TVs and complimentary wireless Internet access.



There are several ways to keep oneself occupied here, including the 18-hole championship golf course along the Adriatic (shared with two other properties in the San Domenico collection — guests of the *Borgo* have first dibs on tee times). Three outdoor pools, and an indoor pool, allow for a change of scenery near the water. The tennis academy offers lessons with professionals on three courts, one of which is grass.

The resort's talented chef offers cooking classes focusing on fresh local ingredients. The two private beach clubs cater to both families and those traveling without children; both offer dining options. One can participate in



water sports such as sailing and wind surfing or just loll in the comfortable chaises. A cigar lounge, game room, reading room, and boutique are other places to while away the hours here. The Trullalleri Kids Club handles children from ages eight to thirteen and the Fichi d'India Teen Club

provides all kinds of activities for the older set, including golf and tennis clinics and a multimedia area.

And let's not forget the 20,000 square foot spa/wellness center, called *Vair*. The variety of treatments here range from natural facial treatments to flotation sessions to the use of the tepidarium, calidarium, frigidarium, salt sauna, whirlpool, cleansing and purification rituals to manicures and pedicures.

The *borgo*'s location makes a great base for seeing some of Puglia's many highlights: the *trulli*

(conical stone houses) of *Alberobello*, the white-washed town of *Ostuni*, the vineyards of *Locorotondo* and the Baroque city of *Lecce* are all within an hour's drive. Not that you'll ever want to leave.



The Details

Borgo Egnazia

Savelletri di Fasano

(39) 080 2255000

www.borgoegnazia.com

Rates: Superior doubles start at 176 to 312€ per night, depending on the season.

Villas start at 855€ per night during the high season.

— Rosanne Cofoid

Rosanne Cofoid, president of *La Dolce Via Travel* (www.ladolceviatravel.com), creates custom Italy itineraries.

The largest aqueduct in Europe is in *Bari*.