

Ticino cuisine

nothing is more typical for live in Ticino than a grotto Ticinese



Hardship famously leads to creativity. That explains the richness of Ticino cuisine, dishes which are often based on the basic recipes of the cucina povera, the "peasant's cuisine". The traditional Ticino culinary culture is groundbreaking insofar as it is now where everyone wants to be: close to its roots.

Anyone travelling to Ticino, to wealthy Switzerland, can hardly imagine that for centuries the valleys on the south side of the Alps, which today appear so welcoming, were once the poorhouse of Europe. Until the establishment of the cantons in 1803, Ticino was a peasant region where along with the Swiss nobility, poverty and scarcity reigned supreme. For a long time, the peasants' meagre meals consisted of "polenta and milk, potatoes and cheese, focaccia [bread from chestnut flour], that was it", wrote the author Plinio Martini who died in 1979 in his autobiographically-inspired novel "Il fondo del sacco", which plays out in the Maggia Valley of the 1920s.

The earlier the sun disappeared behind the mountains in those days, the more monotonous the dishes became. "In autumn we had chestnuts, we ate them for three months for breakfast, lunch and dinner," Martini's narrator recalls. The fact that cooking was governed by making do can be seen in other parts of the canton as well, for example the famous Ticino minestrone, a soup that was originally nothing but a way of using up leftover vegetables.

But that was by no means the limit to their innovation. In order to keep sausages, wine and cheese fresh in the summer heat, the people of Ticino invented fridges that worked without electricity. In the "grotti", the cliff cellars, the temperature remains cool the whole year round. For example, they are still used in Mendrisio to age Zincarín cheese. Many 'grotti' are now also used as restaurants in nature, where local delicacies are served up outdoors on granite tables. The German food legend Wolfram Siebeck was so impressed that he came up with the on-the-spot term "Grottengut" or "grotto fare".

Culinary heritage is, however, not only upheld in the 'grotti'. Many starred chefs await with modern, creative interpretations of the cucina povera and combine it in a sophisticated way with Mediterranean Italian cuisine. However, it is no longer hardship that leads to creativity, but rather the desire to let one's imagination run free.

Grotto America – a ‘grotto’ makes history

The Grotto America in Ponte Brolla is a pretty little restaurant closely bound up with Ticino history. Situated on the River Maggia, it is surrounded by many old caves which once served for storing food. Its origins go back to the mid-nineteenth century, when it acted as one of the most important assembly points in the region where the emigrants came together before starting off on their journey to America. It has kept the same name up to the present, and keeps the original wall paintings by a Ticino emigrant family which was lucky enough to be successful abroad.



On their return, they bought the grotto and christened it “America” in memory of their journey. Today, the little treasure is run by former professional snowboarder Davide Buvoli together with his father Angelo. Meals based on traditional Ticino recipes and prepared with produce from small local farmers and manufacturers are served in the vaulted cellar and in the garden. Alongside these delights for the palate, there is also a cultural programme entitled “L’Angolo degli Artisti”, which offers a stage to Ticino, Swiss and even international artistes all throughout the summer. www.grottoamerica.ch

Unspoilt beauty: the Grotto Pozzasc in Peccia

The Grotto Pozzasc lies in an idyllic location beside a natural basin formed by the river in the Peccia Valley. Originally the restaurant was used as a mill, as proven by the evidence in the form of bits of stone and wooden construction materials. Every day, polenta is prepared at the stove and various types of cheese, Mortadella and Codegotto (a speciality sausage) are served. You can enjoy both the culinary delicacies and the magnificent view of the river sitting at the granite tables in the shade of the trees. Claudia and Christian spoil their guests



with other treats such as minestrone, braised tripe, sausages from their own butchers, local cheeses, home-made sweets and pastries. Seasonal dishes served include Capretto nostrano, trout in carpione and a selection of venison specialities. www.pozzasc.ch

Evening Grotti Lake Lugano tour

The mild summer nights in Ticino are really inviting for having an outdoor meal and simply relaxing and unwinding. The Lake Lugano shipping company offers its Grotti tour throughout the summer - there are several Grotti and restaurants directly on the lake’s jetties. A successful idea for connoisseurs, because when the lights shine on the lake in the evening, the atmosphere is simply enchanting. The first two stops are Grotto San Rocco and the Grotto dei Pescatori, at the base of Monte Caprino, located amidst nature and with a beautiful view to Lugano City and the sublime backdrop of the



maintains surrounding them. The next stop is Cantine di Gandria, where two further Grotti tempt you to taste typical Ticino products. You then return to the point of departure in Lugano via picturesque Gandria. The evening tour

costs 15 Swiss francs per person and takes place on Thursday, Fridays and Saturdays from 1st of June until August 25th 2018. www.lakelugano.ch

Guide Michelin Switzerland 2018

Two Michelin Stars

Ascona – **Ecco** (Hotel Giardino Ascona) – Rolf Fliegau

One Michelin Star

Ascona – **Locanda Barbarossa** (Castello del Sole) – Matthias Roock

Bellinzona – **Locanda Orico** – Lorenzo Albrici

Lugano – **Galleria Arté al Lago** (Grand Hotel Villa Castagnola) – Frank Oerthle

Rolf Fliegau – The Workshop of Haute Cuisine

For a long time, Rolf Fliegau was Europe's youngest two-star chef, and he continues to delight diners with his award-winning cuisine, combining high-quality craftsmanship with sophisticated individuality. Rolf Fliegau's future career became clear at an early age. As a child, he enjoyed nothing more than spending his time in the kitchen of his parents' restaurant. Today, he is one of Switzerland's most decorated chefs, having been awarded two stars by the Michelin Guide for both his Ecco Ascona and St. Moritz restaurants. With the opening



of Atlantis by Giardino, the Swabian chef's concept is now also represented at the Ecco Zürich restaurant, and his decision to place his long-term sous-chef Stefan Heilemann soon saw Ecco Zürich awarded two Michelin stars as well. What sets Rolf Fliegau's cuisine apart? The high-quality mix of craftsmanship and sophisticated individuality in each of his creations – together with the fact that, while his food embodies a regional down-to-earth attitude, this is combined with a certain style that appeals to a diverse international clientele. Rolf Fliegau resembles a musician at the piano in the way he plays with textures and temperatures. He loves to experiment. Yet despite being an exponent of haute cuisine, he always remains in touch with the principles of popular cuisine – an approach he describes as “purist aroma cuisine”. “Aroma cuisine means that every ingredient retains its original flavour,” he says. “By combining the different components, I am able to optimally accentuate all of the flavours.” His success continues apace, with one gourmet critic labelling him “one of the greatest chefs of his generation” in Germany's Welt am Sonntag newspaper. www.giardino.ch

Locanda Orico – the flagship of Bellinzona’s gastronomy

The Locanda Orico is a small restaurant with top cuisine, located in the middle of the old town beneath the Castelgrande. With one Michelin star and 16 Gault Millau points, it is deemed the culinary flagship of the city. Chef Lorenzo Albrici’s passion for cooking was awoken during his childhood when he scouted out his grandmother’s hotel during the holidays. The year 2017 has been already the 20th in which he manages his restaurant Locanda Orico successfully. An anniversary year, also concurrent with his 50th birthday. His recipe for success is the delicate connection of Italian influence and French ideas which he creates with surprising dishes which are artistically presented on the plates. The guests are seated in two small, elegant rooms where they can enjoy the culinary delicacies and competent service under subdued lighting and sober décor. If you wish to give the star cook carte blanche, we recommend the tasting menu, consisting of five or six courses, which costs 109 or 120 Swiss francs. At lunchtime, you can also enjoy Lorenzo Albrici’s cuisine with a business lunch for as little as 48 Swiss francs. www.locandaorico.ch



Mattias Rook – Culinary Excellence

Chef Mattias Rook joined five-star Castello del Sole Beach Resort & Spa in Ascona, Ticino, in spring 2017 and has been impressing not just the guests. Just six months into the job, the top chef—originally from northern Germany—was awarded a Michelin star and 17 Gault Millau points at the gourmet restaurant “Locanda Barbarossa”, where he caters to the culinary needs of guests together with Maitre d’ Sergio Bassi. Mattias explains his culinary philosophy as follows: “My cuisine is imbued with Mediterranean lightness and has classic French cuisine as its foundation. I also add a pinch of flavourful adventure inspired by my culinary travels. That lends my creations their own special note.” The Castello del Sole is surrounded by the 150-hectare Terreni alla Maggia farm, forming part of the same estate. As well as producing wine and cereals, the farm also grows rice. The variety grown here—on the most northerly rice farm in Europe and indeed in the world—is called “loto” and is a small-grain risotto rice—top quality products which Mattias Rook makes use of in his cuisine, bringing food directly from the field to the table: rice (loto), cereal for pasta, corn for polenta, vegetables, fruit and fresh herbs. His personal favourite on the menu of gourmet restaurant Locanda Barbarossa is the menu entitled “*Sapori del nostro orto*” (flavours from our garden), where every dish is prepared using several ingredients sourced from the estate’s own sustainable production. The Castello del Sole Beach Resort & Spa is open for the summer season from 23 March until 21 October 2018, during which time guests can look forward again to indulging in the culinary masterpieces of Mattias Rook. www.castellodelsole.com



Gault-Millau 2018

17 Points

- Ascona – Locanda Barbarossa (Hotel Castello del Sole) – Mattias Roock
- Ascona – La Brezza (Hotel Eden Roc) – Salvatore Frequente
- Ascona – Ecco Ascona (Hotel Giardino Ascona) – Rolf Fliegau
- Lugano – Principe Leopoldo (Hotel Villa Prinzipe Leopoldo) – Dario Ranza

16 Points

- Bellinzona – Locanda Orico – Lorenzo Albrici
- Lugano – Galleria Arté al Lago (Grand Hotel Villa Castagnola) – Frank Oerthle
- Ponte Brolla – Da Enzo – Andrea Cingari
- Taverne – Motto del Gallo – Matteo Cereghini

15 Points

- Ascona – Ristorante Eden Roc (Hotel Eden Roc) – Cyrille Kamerzin
- Bellinzona – Osteria Mistral – Luca Brughelli
- Chiasso-Seseglio – Vecchia Osteria Seseglio – Ambrogio Stefanetti
- Locarno-Muralto – Osteria del Centenario – Egon Bajardi
- Losone – Osteria dell’Enoteca – Tommaso Cacciapuoti
- Verdasio / Intragna – Al Pentolino – Daniele Blum
- Vico Morcote – La Sorgente – Giuseppe Lanzilotto

14 Points

- Airolo – Forni (Hotel Forni) – Simone Ciaranfi
- Ascona – Ristorante della Carrà – Luca Torricelli
- Ascona – Tre Stagioni (Castello del Sole) – Mattias Roock
- Ascona – Marina (Hotel Eden Roc) – Gero Porstein
- Ascona – La Casetta (Hotel Eden Roc) – Gero Porstein
- Cademario – La Cucina (Kurhaus Cademario) – Franco Passoni
- Intragna – Restaurant da Agnese & Adriana (Hotel Stazione) – Adriana Broggin

Locarno – Cittadella – Matteo Rossini

Locarno – Locanda Locarnese – Presyo Cadlolo

Locarno – La Rinascente – Mario Hüttenmoser

Locarno – Da Valentino – Valentino Roversi

Locarno-Monti – La Chiesa – Peter van Bosch

Lugano – Le Relais (Grand Hotel Villa Castagnola) – Christian Bertogna

Lugano – Orologio Da Savino – Marco Badalucci

Lugano – Restaurant I Due Sud (Hotel Splendide Royal) – Domenico Ruberto – Entdeckung des Jahres im Tessin

Lugano – Ai Giardini di Sassa (Villa Sassa Hotel) – Teo Chiaravallotti

Lugano-Massagno – Grotto della Salute – Giuseppe Pezzoli

Orselina – Al Gusto da Christen – Sascha Christen

Riva San Vitale – Porto Pojana Ristorante Terminus – Andrea Levratto

San Pietro di Stabio – Montalbano – Claudio Croci Torti

Ticino's delicacies

a culinary journey through Ticino's delicacies

The magic of the south awaits you in Ticino, the sunniest place in Switzerland. The sky is blue, life is sweet and gastronomy is linked to elegant restaurants and romantic 'grottos' – rustic little eateries serving the delicious local cuisine that is the gem in Ticino's crown. With unique flavours and a lot of emphasis on regional produce, anyone who has the pleasure of visiting Ticino will willingly give into temptation to sample the local specialities. Come with us on a culinary journey to visit the producers of these gourmet delights.

A taste of the south at the Bellinzona Saturday market

Every Saturday, the inner city of Bellinzona is transformed into colourful and joyful hustle and bustle when the market booths spread out their treasures beneath the blue and red striped rooves. The Bellinzona Saturday market, where some 120 local producers offer their goods from 8am to 1pm, has long since become the meeting place for the locals and tourists: Sun-ripened fruit and vegetables of the season from the Magadino plain, cheese specialities from Leventina and the Muggio valley, sausages manufactured using traditional recipes and crispy Ticino bread and



honey, but also flowers, arts and craft, antiques and clothing are offered. Following this, the restaurants in the old town offer market visitors to lunch at affordable prices with their "Piatto del mercato" [Market platter] offer. By the way, the Bellinzona market has its own bi-lingual cookery book "Le ricette del mercato di Bellinzona" (in German and English), which you can purchase in the bookshops in the city. It contains more than 60 recipes for the products available at the market. www.bellinzone-altoticino.ch

Airolo – Cheese ! Do it yourself

With the help of a professional cheese maker, visitors can make their own delicious cheese from fresh alpine milk from the St. Gotthard region. This is an unusual, entertaining and social opportunity to get to know an award-winning Ticino product and how it is made. The cheese you make is stored in the cellar of the dairy and sent home to you (if you live in Switzerland) once it has ripened so you can enjoy the wonderful flavour of alpine cheese even after your holiday is over. The show dairy, Caseificio del Gottardo, is located at the foot of the pass of the same name. The restaurant can seat up to 200 guests and serves fondue and raclette. www.cdga.ch



Discovering the Salame dei Castelli di Bellinzona

The delectable salami made at the Castelli di Bellinzona is ripened in the vaulted cellar at Montebello Castle, which provides the perfect environment for storing this famous Ticino speciality. You can find out all about it on a Salame dei Castelli di Bellinzona Discovery Tour where the charcutiers demonstrate the art of traditional salami tying – one of the oldest Ticino trades. A tour of the castle, which was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in the year 2000, includes information on its history as well as an aperitif of local wines, salami, bacon and ham to complete the culinary experience. Those who wish can also visit the two sister castles Sasso Corbaro and Castelgrande free of charge afterwards. www.ticinella.com



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A nature trail to the Prosciutto dell'Alpe Piora

Gain an insight into the production of the famous Piora ham on the Piora Alp. You can even visit the cellar where the pure mountain air refines the delicious flavour of this dry-cured ham every single day. Travel up the steep alp on the Ritom funicular railway to the beautiful nature reserve Parco Alpino Piora in northern Ticino and then follow the nature trail along



the enchanting Lake Ritom directly to the cellar where the people of Ticino ripen their dry-cured ham. After the tour you'll be invited to enjoy an aperitif consisting of prosciutto ham and corresponding Ticino wines. www.ticinella.com

Zincarlin, cheese from Valle di Muggio

Valle di Muggio is one of the most authentic and traditional regions of Ticino and was awarded the Landscape of the Year Award 2014 by the Stiftung Landschaftsschutz Schweiz (Swiss Foundation for Landscape Conservation). The valley is home to Zincarlin, a tangy, unpasteurised cheese that has been produced by families here since the 19th century. This culinary legacy of Ticino would have been lost forever if it hadn't be for locals boosting commercial production in 2005. Made from cows and goat's milk sourced from the alps of Monte Generoso, Zincarlin has established itself as a Slow Food award winner. A trip to Salorino is well worth it if you're interested in finding out how this traditional cheese is made, stored and ripened. The pyramid-shaped cheeses mature in natural rock cellars in the Mendrisiotto district that are hundreds of years old. Weekly visits are offered for groups of at least three people with a tasting session afterwards. www.mendrisiottoturismo.ch



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Pasta e Pesto fatto in casa – fresh homemade pasta

There are as many different types of pasta in Ticino cuisine as there are in Italy. From spaghetti and macaroni to fusilli and fresh gnocchi – once you've eaten fresh pasta, you'll really appreciate the flavour as fresh, homemade products simply taste different. And for a delicious pasta meal all you have to do is add the right pesto. The delicatessen, 'Pasta e Pesto' in Lugano offers cooking classes for anyone who wants to learn how to make their own pasta. And once the work is done, the delicious creations are, of course, eaten in the large tavolata with the corresponding wine. www.pastaepesto.com



A fine drop of Ticino wine

Das Ticino is the home of the world-famous Merlot. You can sample this sun-blessed wine in over 40 Ticino wine cellars. An expert will guide you through the secrets of viticulture and wine production and a tasting session of various types of Merlot in the wine cellar brings the visit to a perfect end. www.gastronomie.ticino.ch

Casa del vino – meeting point for those with good taste

Ticino is not just a region of sun and stunning views, it is also a place with a strong wine-making tradition. The mild Ticino climate helps exceptional wines flourish, particularly Merlot, which is the most widespread in the Italian-speaking area of Switzerland at around 80% of all vines. The Casa del vino in the old Mulino del Ghitello mill in Morbio at the entrance to the Breggia Gorge is a place for everyone that wants to find out more about the Ticino wine scene. The "Wine House", as the name translates, is open from Thursday to Sunday and has over 200 different wines from 40 producers from the region available for tasting. Young cook Remi Agustoni from Caneggio rounds off the local products with his cooking skills, offering tasty food which can be ordered alongside the wines to be tried. Maître Massimo Manelli is on hand to provide useful tips for anyone wanting to discover Ticino wines. The historic, fully-renovated building which dates from the 17th century also offers courses, advice and events on anything to do with wine and gastronomy in addition to the tastings on offer. www.casadelvinoticino.ch



Farina Bóna – the good flour

A tasty tradition is resurging in Vergeletto in the Onsernone Valley. The former teacher and musician Ilario Gabani has not only brought the old mills back up to speed, he is also responsible for the renaissance of Farina Bóna. The flour made from roasted corn grains is gluten-free, easily digestible, and gives the widest varieties of dishes a subtle popcorn note. Whilst the valley dwellers used to mix the flour with water, milk or wine to spice up their otherwise somewhat modest menu, today there are hardly any limits to the uses



of Farina Bóna. Cakes, biscuits, 'spätzle', bread, pasta as well as soups, ice cream, beer, liqueur and a delicious spread – Bonella – take on a special taste thanks to Farina Bóna. Top chefs discovered the "good flour", as it translates, for their creative cuisine a long time ago. Accompanied by a local guide, guests can find out more about the production of Farina Bóna at the mills in the village of Vergeletto from June to October. www.farinabona.ch

Rice, Polenta and Whisky

The Terreni alla Maggia farm produces polenta flour made from homegrown maize, pasta from durum wheat – and rice. The first attempts at growing rice at 198 metres above sea level on the sandy-clay alluvial land of Maggia in Ascona were undertaken in the 1990s. Since 1997, Loto rice, which is perfect for making risotto, has been growing on the world's northernmost rice fields. Around 400 tonnes of raw rice are harvested each year. Of that, around 60 percent goes on to be sold as white rice in 1 kg packs under the name Riso Nostrano



Ticinese. Haute cuisine chefs have long appreciated the Ascona rice. Those who are after something a little stronger after a delicious risotto need not look too far. Terreni alla Maggia has their very own answer: with its pleasant fruity aroma, amber colour and sophisticated sweetness, Ascona whisky guarantees an incomparably delightful sensation. www.terreniallamaggia.ch

Tea culture on the Monte Verità in Ascona

If you thought that tea only grew in far-off continents, well you'd be wrong. The Monte Verità above Ascona (the hill where once upon a time revolutionaries, artists and philosophers formed a community to test out new, alternative ways of living) is home to one of the few tea plantations in Europe. This botanical quirk is partly thanks to the unique microclimate on the hill, and also partly to the pioneering spirit of the "tea philosopher" Peter Oppliger, a pharmacist and specialist in natural and herbal medicine. He successfully grew *Camellia sinensis* for the first time on the Monte



Verità in 2006. The tea plantation now consists of some 1,400 plants and a Zen tea garden with a pavilion, and the Casa del Tè which hosts regular Japanese tea ceremonies. In 2017, Katrin Lange and her husband Gerhard took over the Casa del Tè. The couple bring their passion for the hot drink and their experience from the Länggass-Tee head

office in Bern into running the tea house on Monte Verità and are now looking to expand the products they offer. In addition to the classic tea ceremonies, they also now run so-called salone culturale which are cultural events involving tea and which have become a firm fixture on the calendar. In addition, they will also be launching a “tea school” which will give students an intensive course in the Japanese tea ceremony and they are also running tea evenings which give guests an introduction into different ways of preparing teas and country-specific introductions into enjoying the herbal drink. One high point of the year is the traditional tea harvest which takes place every May on the Monte Verità and offers a programme with all different activities to celebrate the harvest. www.casa-del-te.ch

Gazosa – sparkling mineral water with retro-appeal

Gazosa is Ticino’s answer to the heat of summer. For many generations, locals have been refreshing themselves with this sweet, sparkling mineral water. Unlike other carbonated drinks, it contains no fruit pulp, but is made with pure fruit distillate instead which means there are no need for any preservatives. Often the drink is mixed half and half with wine – for example Merlot. It is one of the delicacies produced by the firm Gazosa1883 in Mendrisio, and proudly bears the name of the first Gazosa factory in Mendrisio, which went into production in 1883. Other factories in the region in Mendrisio, Bellinzona, Biasca, Locarno, Lugano and Personico also enjoy long company histories. The drink, which is found in characteristic swing-top bottles, was known in the 18th century as “the poor man’s champagne”, now belongs to the culinary heritage of the canton. However, this Ticino lemonade speciality is not merely a cultural heritage but has become a great favourite in the bars north of the Gotthard and comes in a wide range of flavours. www.gazosa1883.ch



Bisbino, the first Ticino gin, comes from the Muggio valley

In addition to its superlative wines, Mendrisiotto is happy to offer a new product which has been available since September 2016: The first Ticino gin was born in Sagno in the Muggio valley. The initiators of the new spirit drink were the four Ticino natives Martino Mombelli, who conceived the recipe and is the founder of the Terra Matta brand as well as his friends Giona Meyer, Rupen Nacaroglu and Damiano Merzari. As a homage to their home, where they all have deep roots, the new creation was “baptised” as Bisbino, the name of the mountain above Sagno where some of the ingredients such as the juniper berries come from. It is produced by the renowned distillery in Mendrisio. The result is a 100% organic product, which has already been accepted by Ticino’s gastronomy with open arms. www.bisbino.ch



Food & Wine Tour – a Culinary Journey of Discovery Through Lugano

Exploring Lugano through a culinary lens is the motto of a new Food & Wine tour along the banks of Lake Lugano. On the three and a half-hour journey, a local guide takes visitors to destinations such as famous specialty shop Gabbani or the Grand Café Al Porto, where local luminaries have held court in Lugano since 1803, along with other restaurants and bars typical of the city. Some of the Ticino specialties to be sampled along the way include regional cheeses, aromatic salamis, risotto and polenta as well as delicacies from other parts of Switzerland. These local dishes are paired with regional wines such as



Ticino Merlot, as well as entertaining anecdotes about the city's various dining establishments. To end the tour on a sweet note, there is freshly baked torta di pane on offer, fragrant amaretti or gelato, refined with a few drops of local nocino. This tour is offered year-round and can be booked through the Lugano tourist office. www.luganoturismo.ch

Ticino Experience – a film you can eat

The gourmet chef Fidelio is the main character in a (silent) movie that is shown at Casa Rustica in the Albergo Losone in Losone near Locarno. As the manager of a three-star restaurant 'Estrellas' in Barcelona, Fidelio is beside himself as he's lost a star due to a grouchy restaurant critic. What now? Fidelio needs a new concept! Enter Carmen, a fortune teller. She sends Fidelio, a chef and a waiter out to discover culinary specialities from other countries to give their restaurant some new appeal. As they search for ideas, the trio



wander through the Ticino valleys and sample the typical regional products – Ratafia, alpine cheese, sausage and much more. The audience won't go hungry either. While the spectacular images flicker across the screen you'll enjoy a selection of delicacies yourself. Do you think the Fidelio will get his star back in the end?! The Ticino Experience is a charming event for companies or groups of friends. www.ticinoexperience.ch

SWISS TAVOLATA – be a farmer's wife's and countrywoman's guest in Ticino

Sampling classical Swiss cuisine in private homes - that is the SWISS TAVOLATA concept of the association with the same name which was founded in September 2014. The offer takes account of the ever-increasing demand for authentic experiences, regional cuisine and meeting the locals. Currently almost 40 farmers' wives and countrywomen throughout Switzerland cook for groups of national and international visitors consisting of two to twelve persons. Also five hostesses from Ticino offer this individual, typical menu at home. The sumptuous menu,



consisting of at least 75% local products, includes an aperitif at the farm, an appetiser, a main course, a dessert, water and coffee or tea, including biscuits/cakes, for CHF 76. Those wanting to taste (exclusively Swiss wine

naturally) are charged CHF 96. Children are also more than welcome at a fixed price of CHF 46. You can book on the website www.swisstavolata.ch.

Bissoli – chocolate Bellinzona city coins

If you enjoy something sweet, you should try Bellinzona's famous "Bissoli" - scrumptious chocolates made of chocolate cream with chestnut filling and shaped similarly to a 300-year-old coin. A picture of a snake (Italian biscia), the city's emblem, is placed on the coin in white chocolate as was already punched on the coins back in 1503. The sweet biscuits resulted from a competition "Un dolce per Bellinzona" ("Something sweet for Bellinzona") several years ago. Combined with a coffee or an espresso, the Bissoli nowadays offer the perfect sweet break in Bellinzona's old town, e.g. at the pastry shop Peverelli on Piazza Collegiata, which sells the chocolate coins. www.panetteriapeverelli.ch



Crèfli and spampezie – sweet traditions from the Leventina region

Spampezie from the Leventina valley are typical Christmas biscuits found in the region. It is believed that the name itself comes from the Italian word for gingerbread: pan di spezie, and the recipe consists of flour, butter, honey, chopped nuts and a delicious mix of spices. Carved walnut wood baking moulds are used to make the spampezie (which are also known as crèfli if the shape is a little different). The main designs include religious scenes such as the Three Kings or stars and fishes, but other ones such as family or regional coats of arms are also widespread. Every household in the valley has its own recipe for making the fortifying biscuit eaten during the cold months of the year so that every farmer, industry worker or railwayman in the Leventina region can mark the celebrations around Christmas, the New Year or other church festivals. Nowadays these sweet regional specialities from the Leventina valley can be found all year-round in bakeries such as Renato Schröder's panetteria in Chiggiogna which prepares spampezie in the good, old-fashioned way using lots of nuts and a good splash of grappa. www.spampezia-faido.chwww.spampezia-faido.ch



The secret of Panettone

Christmas without Panettone? Inconceivable in Ticino! This sweet cake is the crowning glory of a Christmas dinner. Nowadays, however, this traditional Christmas cake is eaten all year round. The Poncini bakery in Valle Maggia specialises in making Panettone and, without any false modesty, it really is one of the best in Ticino. If you're interested to see how this sweet Ticino delicacy is prepared, you can take part in a tour of the Poncini bakery. As well as seeing how the classic Panettone is made, you'll also gain insights into the production of various different Panettones such as Panettone Nostrano, Veneziane and Colomba. Of course there are also plenty of samples to taste along the way! www.panetteria-poncini.ch



Ravioli di carnevale – culinary renaissance

In some rural parts of Ticino, carnival has a special sweet aroma of baking. For example, ravioli di carnevale from the Muggio valley have undergone something of a culinary rebirth. Only some of the locals in the villages of Muggio, Bruzella, Cabbio and Scudellate used to know the centuries' old recipe for these sweet, fried, cheese-filled ravioli, before the slow food movement moved to preserve the tradition a few years ago. You will find another type of carnival ravioli in Tesserete, where the pasta squares are filled with dried plums or jam. They are only made during carnival, same as the Tortelli di carnevale (with grapes and grappa) in Pazzallo near Lugano.



Colomba ticinese - The sweet highlight of the feast day menu

In Ticino, the Easter dove is the crowning moment of the feast day menu. There are many legends regarding the origins of this traditional Easter cake, one of which dates back to the sixth century. It is about King Alboino's Easter invasion of Pavia. When the Lombardian king rode into the town by the Ticino river, his horse started to kick out like a wild thing and looked like he was going to eject the king into the river. After a while, a man emerged from the crowd and gave the horse some dove-shaped bread whereupon the animal immediately calmed down. The king was so moved by this that he released the girls he had earlier taken as part of the spoils of battle. According to another legend, Agilulfo, another Lombardian king, met with the Irish monk Columba before going to war. The king wanted to have some doves roasted, however as it was Good Friday when you aren't supposed to eat meat, the monk politely declined and set the doves free. When the king saw the birds flying up into the sky, he converted to Christianity and declared that, from then on, only dove-shaped bread could be served at Easter. No matter how the Easter dove may have come to be, the fact remains that it is made with glazed orange peel and covered with an icing of egg white, sugar and almonds. The most striking thing about the Easter dove or Colomba ticinese, a protected brand since 1999, is the contrast between the soft dough and crunchy icing.



Culinary events in Ticino

A Taste of the South

Those enjoying good food whilst travelling will always return to Ticino: the use of local products ensuring a particularly tasty experience is highly valued, irrespective of whether in a rustic grotto or in an elegant gourmet restaurant. The month of May in Ticino is highly recommended for gourmands, because the merry month is dedicated to culinary delights with a large number of sumptuous events focussing on local specialities. And to the autumn in Ticino belong wine festivals like porcini to a risotto.

San Pellegrino Saponi Ticino – culinary highlights

Viele Köche verderben den Brei? Nicht beim Gourmet-Festival San Pellegrino Saponi Ticino, das vom 29. April bis 17. Juni 2018 zum zwölften Mal stattfindet. Viele Köche sorgen hier für einen einmaligen Anlass. Do too many cooks spoil the broth? Not at the San Pellegrino Saponi Ticino gourmet festival, which will have its twelfth instalment from 29 April to 17 June 2018. The many cooks at San Pellegrino add a unique flavour to the event. „Flavour oft he world“: The 2018 edition of the gourmet festival is dedicated to the rendezvous between Ticino and various cuisines of the world. All



the Ticinese chefs will invite a global chef to join them in the kitchen and create a special festival menu. San Pellegrino is the brainchild of festival chef Dany Stauffacher, who wanted to raise the region's gastronomic profile: “Ticino has a special connection to gastronomy. For example, the famous Bibliothèque Internationale de Gastronomie is in Lugano. It's the biggest library of its kind in the world with about 4,000 texts and records, some of which date back to the 13th century and they are all about gourmets and gastronomy.” www.sanpellegrinosaporiticino.ch

Strawberry festival in Locarno – sweet temptation in Piazza Grande

On Ascension Day, the people of Locarno gather on the Piazza Grande (main square) for the strawberry festival. It starts at 1:00 pm and offers a varied and entertaining spectacle throughout the afternoon with music and dance performances by local groups. The keenly contested “Miss Fragola” (Miss Strawberry) competition is another highlight, when the young beauties vie for the title on the Piazza Grande catwalk. However, the afternoon's sweetest temptation has to be the strawberries, which you can enjoy in many different ways: with cream, sugar, aceto balsamico or as traditional strawberry cake. The summer treat of strawberries and cream is of course another option for your enjoyment on 10 May 2018. www.ticino.ch



Maggio Gastronomico Bellinzona e Tre Valli

From the 1st to the 31st of May 2018, Northern Ticino has issued invitations to dine for the 32nd time, an ideal event to familiarise yourself with the region's cuisine. For an entire month, the best restaurants in Bellinzona, Biasca, the Blenio Valley and Leventina will be featuring tasting menus and surprising culinary creations. The objective is to familiarise both the people of the Ticino and the tourists with Ticino's regional products. The complete list of participating restaurants can be viewed on the culinary festivals website "Maggio Gastronomico". www.maggiogastronomico.ch



Mangialonga - Gourmet stroll in the Mendrisiotto

On Labour Day (May 1., 2018), the Mendrisiotto turns into Ticino's culinary meeting place, when the Mangialonga once again beckons everyone to join in a gourmet stroll through Southern Ticino. The tour starts at the Mercato Coperto in Mendrisio and leads via the Castel San Pietro back to Mendrisiotto's capital along almost ten kilometres to eleven service/resting stations offering different local specialties for tasting. Apart from the breathtaking natural surroundings and local delicacies, there are also musical interludes along the way.



What starts at 8 a.m. with coffee and croissants ends at 10 p.m. with a glass of grappa. The time in between is filled with a world of ham, pasta, polenta and fish wanting to be discovered. www.mangialonga.ch

Caseifici Aperti – Insight into the art of Ticino cheese manufacture

Vom 5. bis 6. Mai 2018 kommen Käseliebhaber bei den Tagen der Cheese connoisseurs will be able to taste various Ticino cheese varieties and gain insight into the art of cheese manufacture on the days of the open cheese dairies (Caseifici aperti) from the 5th to the 6th of May, 2018. This year, 20 cheese dairies from all parts of the canton will be participating in the "Caseifici aperti" event. An ideal opportunity to familiarise yourself with the regional manufacturers and the associated, deeply rooted Ticino tradition. Apart from tasting various cheese varieties such as goat cheese products, cream cheese, Formaggella and alpine cheese, yoghurts, curd cheese and other locally manufactured dairy products, numerous dairies are also offering lunch based on the tasted cheeses, as well as regional specialties such as polenta or Ticino Luganighetta sausage, including musical entertainment. www.caseificiaperti.ch



Cantine Aperte - Day of the Open Wine Cellars in Ticino

The Merlot wines from Ticino have long ceased to be an insider secret. The southern Swiss climate is perfectly suitable for winegrowing. Passionate winemakers use this locality to create fine wines which need not fear international comparison. Furthermore, numerous wine cellars are also architectural gems located amidst idyllic vineyards. Some 50 Ticino vineyards are opening their doors from the 19th to the 20th of May 2018 for the Day of the Open Wine Cellars (Cantine Aperte). A great opportunity for wine lovers to view



the cellars and vineyards in Switzerland's sunny basin, to talk to the vintners themselves and to taste the wine directly on site. Apart from wine tasting, many vineyards also offer lunch and dinner with local products, entertainment, music, exhibitions and cultural events. www.ticinowine.ch / ticino.ch/cantineaperte

Autumn festival - Grottini, gnocchi and gourmet

A riot of tastes and colours, where the wish to celebrate the beginning of the autumn season in the company of friends in front of a good glass of wine and tasty local gastronomical products is always enticing. The traditional Autumn Festival at the start of October is returning, bringing the streets and squares of the old city centre of Lugano to life. Visitors to the pedestrianised city centre with its picturesque alleys can sample Ticino cuisine in one of the city's many grottini (local restaurants): regional specialities



such as Büsecca (Ticino tripe soup with vegetables), alpine cheese, Luganiga sausage or salami, washed down with one of the regional wines. At the autumn festival market, you can find local produce including cheese and salami specialities, jams, confectionery, wines and liqueurs. You can also see a demonstration in a small distillery of how grappa is made. Finally, there will also be a free guided tour on offer to discover and admire the beautiful architecture and landscapes of Lugano. www.luganoturismo.ch

PerBacco! Hail Bacchus!

On the first weekend in September, Bellinzona pays homage to Bacchus, the God of wine and rapture in Greek mythology. Local wine producers offer their finest wares at the PerBacco wine festival in the capital of Ticino, while two dozen music groups and bands provide the entertainment. The festival takes place in Bellinzona's picturesque old town at the foot of the three castles, which are UNESCO World Heritage sites. www.perbaccobellinzona.ch



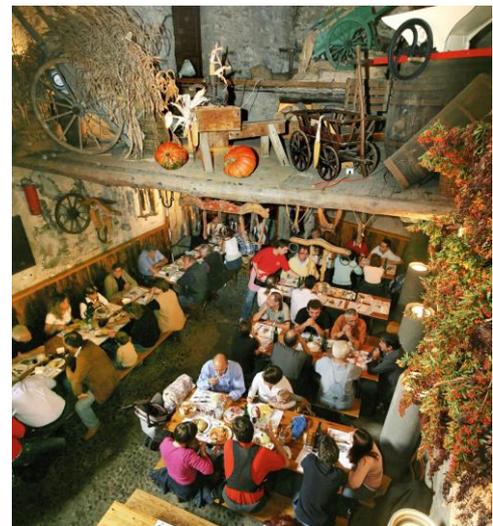
Farina bóna festival in Onsernone valley

The speciality of the Onsernone valley is known as farina bóna (a type of corn flour), which is growing in popularity among connoisseurs from outside the region. Farina bóna is made by grinding the toasted corn grains. People used to just eat and mix it with water, milk or blueberries. Nowadays, farina bóna is used for many types of recipes, from dough for shortcake to ice cream. You can try these dishes at the traditional corn festival called the “Festa della farina bona”, which is held in Loco on 2nd September 2018. The picturesque village located above a spectacular waterfall has a mill dating from the eighteenth century, where corn is still ground into polenta flour and farina bóna. The imposing building bears witness to the valley’s tradition of flour milling: at the end of the 19th century there were 27 mills in operation in the Onsernone valley. www.farinabona.ch



„Sagra del Borgo“ – wine festival at Mendrisio

A good three quarters of the Ticino Merlot grapes are cultivated in the Mendrisiotto. So, it isn’t surprising that the southern tip of Switzerland celebrates the grape crop extensively. The former rural celebrations, during which the region’s farmers and winemakers exhibit their products, have meanwhile become a folk festival, attracting people from the entire surroundings. The streets in the old town of Mendrisio traditionally always burst into life at the wine festival “sagra del borgo” on the last weekend in September. Local delicacies are dished up for the visitors in numerous marquees and inner courtyards, accompanied by background music. It is not surprising that a toast is drunk with a glass of Merlot. www.sagradelborgo.ch



Gastronomy festival at Mendrisiotto - dinner is served

“A tradition that is renewed every year”, is the motto of the gastronomy festival at Mendrisiotto and Basso Ceresio, part of the culinary month which will take place from 1 October to 4 November 2018. 50 restaurants and grotti are involved in the anniversary edition of the culinary festival in the southernmost corner of Switzerland. They offer a varied range of menus including traditional dishes from the region and classical and reinvented seasonal specialities. There are also good wines on offer to complete the experience. According to tradition, a wine producer is selected for the “Rassegna-Tropfen” award every year. This year’s winner was the Cantina Sociale di Mendrisio. Every guest at the festival also receives an elegant wine glass as a gift. www.rassegnagastronomica.ch



Ticino Wine

Merlot ushered in better times

When you hear "Ticino wine", you immediately think of Merlot. For good reason: for many decades, the southernmost Swiss canton has been producing limited amounts of high quality wines. However, the success story of Merlot del Ticino began with disaster.

Wine making has a long history in Ticino; the Romans already used to grow grapes here. Towards the end of the 19th century however, disaster struck: the wine makers had to look on helplessly as vine pest and mildew destroyed almost all of the vines in the region. As a result, many vintners emigrated to America.

However, the people of Ticino were not ready to simply accept their fate. The parliament believed that "it would be desirable for the canton to have a wine trade again". The new beginning was to be supported by scientific knowledge. A peripatetic professorship for agriculture was therefore set up in 1902. The Italian agriculturalist Alderige Fantuzzi was tasked with improving wine growing.



Fantuzzi tested sorts such as Merlot, Pinot Noir, Cabernet, Barbera and Nebbiolo. During those analyses, the first Merlot vines were imported to Ticino from Bordeaux in 1904/1905. In 1906, Fantuzzi was convinced that with Merlot he had found the best grape to lead the Ticino wine industry out of its severe crisis. And he was to be proved right!

Hobby vintners from German-speaking Switzerland and a number of cautious Ticino wine makers were responsible for the second wave of innovation that considerably improved wine growing in the 1970s and 1980s. Merlot now represents over 80 percent of the grapes grown in Ticino. The majority of production is made up of award-winning, storable Merlot wines that are often aged in small oak barrels (barriques). Rosé wines are also made from Merlot grapes, as well as the Bianco di Merlot speciality, a white Merlot that is enjoying growing popularity.



"Wine has been grown on our lands since ancient times. The wine makers' unbelievably good products now enjoy the image of hidden gems with a global reputation," said Paolo Basso of Ticino, who was named best sommelier in the world in 2013 in Japan.

The Merlot grape has therefore bestowed a unique identity upon Ticino. But what does the name mean? It is believed that the term "Merlot" is derived from merle, the French for blackbird, because the colour of the ripe fruit is similar to that of the bird's plumage. Another theory suggests that Merlot is one of the first grapes to ripen and is thus the first to be eaten by blackbirds.

The grapes ripen around mid-September with medium-sized, round fruits and a blue-black colour. Their vinification produces a fairly intense, ruby-red, balanced, full-bodied wine with an elegant ivy note. It is dry in taste, with a pleasant, slightly bitter aftertaste. Its structure makes Merlot an ideal accompaniment to minestrone, roasted meat, main courses in general and well matured, but not too strong cheese. As a rule of thumb, it can be stored for four to six years. The recommended serving temperature is 16 to 18 degrees.

On the trail of Ticino Merlot

Explore the world of Ticino wines

The mild climate of the Swiss sun-lounge is perfect for glorious wines. Over 80 percent of the grapes are Merlot from which fruity white and characterful red wines are pressed, amongst the best in the country. Enchanting walks through the vineyards which bask in autumnal colours, assisting for a day with a grape harvest or enjoying a wine tasting in one of the famous Ticino wineries make a stay here a special experience. And not forgetting the charming hotels that invite you to spend a night amongst the vineyards.

Harvest time: a day amongst the vines

Harvest grapes together with the vintner in the kingdom of the world-famous Merlot. Those who not only want to taste the wine can help out for a day with the vendemmia - the grape harvest - in Mendrisiotto and Basso Ceresio. Of course this experience also includes a well-earned respite over lunch together. After spending a day amongst the vines, the new vintners are bound to be tired in the evening - but also enriched with many unforgettable experiences. Anyone interested can get in touch with the Mendrisiotto Turismo tourist office. Participation is free of charge. www.mendrisiottoturismo.ch



Valsangiacomo – the oldest winery in Ticino

The Valsangiacomo Vini SA winery in historical Mendrisio is the oldest in Ticino. What started in 1831 as a small wine dealer is today one of the trailblazing manufacturers of Ticino quality wines. The company began as an importer of wines which founder Giovanni Valsangiacomo sold to the "grotti" and taverns of Mendrisiotto. Their own wine production only began around the turn of the century. Today, the family company is now being run in its sixth generation by Uberto Valsangiacomo and produces outstanding red and white wines which are mainly made from Merlot grapes and are a staple of the Ticino gastronomy scene. The historic winery at the foot of the Monte Generoso can be visited from Monday to Friday by prior appointment, of course including a wine tasting. Cost: 20 Swiss Francs per person. www.valswine.ch



Walking trails through the vineyards

Switzerland's southernmost tip offers a whole three walking trails. Passing by soft, vine-covered hills and the region's old villages that are intrinsically connected with wine growing and production, these three circular trails give a wonderful insight into the Mendrisiotto wine growing region. The 30 information boards that adorn the trails provide wine aficionados with interesting facts about the region's wine growing. Highlights on the tours are the southernmost point in Switzerland, a dynamic border region near the remote village of Laghetto, the village of



Castel San Pietro, and the fabulous views over the impressive Monte Generoso massif and the rustic Valle di Muggio. With an average walking time of four hours each and mild gradients, these trails are perfect for the whole family. The Merlot grape themed walks can also be found on the HikeTicino app. Installing the smartphone app makes sure you are up to speed with all there is to know, from a detailed trail route plus interactive map to information about the major sightseeing attractions, route features and up-to-date weather forecasts. www.hike.ticino.ch

Via delle Vigne: the vine trail in the Gudo hills

The "Via delle Vigne" above the Magadino plain stimulates all the senses. This trail begins in Monte Carasso, not far from Bellinzona, and leads through the vine terraces of Sementina, Gudo and Cugnasco. The almost 8 kilometre route offers the most stunning views of the plain all the way to Lake Maggiore. Along the route, vintners invite you to taste the wines made using grapes from the very same wine terraces. The dungeons in Sementina at the northern edge of the defence line to the



opposing Camorino that the Swiss used in the mid-19th century for protection against the threat of the Austrian nobility of Lombardy are of great cultural interest. The walk takes about three hours (not including food and drink and historical stops) during which an overall difference in altitude of 450 metres must be overcome. www.bellinzonaturismo.ch

Matasci Vini: a symphony of wine and artistic indulgence

Matasci Vini in Tenero has been practising the fine art of wine making since the 1920s. The company, founded by Giuseppe Matasci, is now being run in its third generation and is one of Ticino's largest Merlot producers. But Matasci Vini is not only associated with wine. It is thanks to Mario Matasci's passion for art that the company also has a small gallery above the saleroom where key works from Ticino and Lombardy are exhibited. A wine museum is to be found in the cellar. It documents the development of wine making in Ticino over the last 100 years. The Villa Jelmini, dating back to the 20th century,



is another treasure. It belongs to the wine company's estate and provides an elegant and intimate venue for

conferences, seminars, food and wine evenings, wine tastings and private celebrations. Because the Matasci family is a strong believer in hospitality, a free guided tour of the wine cellar with a visit to the wine museum and a Merlot tasting is offered every Tuesday at 4 p.m. in the summer months. www.matasci-vini.ch

Fattoria Moncucchetto: where wine and architecture meet

Star architect Mario Botta's hallmark architecture can be seen in many places in Ticino. The Fattoria Moncucchetto in Lugano is testimony to the fact that he is also an accomplished designer of wine cellars. Not far from the centre, yet far from the hectic traffic, this modern winery which he completed in 2009 is located at 425 metres above sea level. Nestled into its surroundings, the futuristic Fattoria Moncucchetto building was divided into three storeys. The two lower storeys are reserved for the production and storage of the wine, whilst the upper



storey houses a large tasting room in which events, tastings, cookery courses, aperitifs and banquets are organised for guests. Along with the impressive architecture and the enjoyment of Lisetta and Niccolò Lucchini's wine production, a spectacular view of Lake Lugano and the surrounding mountain peaks awaits guests. www.moncucchetto.ch

B&B Vallombrosa – sleep in the "Cradle of Merlot del Ticino"

The cradle of Ticino Merlot growing is in Malcantone, not far from Lake Lugano. It was here in 1908 in the quaint village of Castellrotto that the pioneering Giovanni Rossi created the first experimental Merlot vineyard, Vallombrosa. The vineyard now belongs to the Tamborini Vini winery in Lamone. Claudio Tamborini, who was named winemaker of the year in the 2012 Grand Prix du Vin Suisse, completely restructured the vineyard in 2004 and converted it into an agritourism centre with a high quality B&B and an informative grappa museum. In addition to the idyllic location amongst the vineyards, seven tastefully decorated double artists' rooms, an artist's apartment with two bedrooms and a small artist's farmhouse on the wine terraces await guests at the B&B Vallombrosa. Along with the works of local artists that adorn the rooms, numerous other artworks can be found on the property. Cultural events and wine tastings also take place there in the summer. Reservations are taken for the B&B for mid-March until the end of October at rates of 160 Swiss Francs for two people in a double room and starting at 140 Swiss Francs for a single room, including breakfast. www.vallombrosa.ch



The Chestnut: The Queen of Autumn

From Poor Man's Meal to Delicacy



In the valleys of the Ticino, up until just a few generations ago, food was scarce in most households. “Polenta and milk, potatoes and cheese, focaccia (bread made from chestnut flour): that was our lot. Rye bread was a rare treat, and meat was eaten only at Christmas and Easter and occasionally once in the summer when a cow fell off a cliff to its death,” wrote Plinio Martini (who died in 1979) in his autobiographically tinged novel *Il fondo del sacco*, which is set in the Maggia valley of the 1920s.

Back then, the earlier the sun set behind the mountains, the more monotonous the meals would become: “In the autumn there were chestnuts: that was all we had for three months: for breakfast, lunch and dinner,” Plinio narrates in the first person. No other element played such a crucial role in peasant culture as the sweet chestnut, which was brought to the foothills of the Alps from the Caucasus region by the Romans. Who knows how many families in the barren valleys of the Ticino would have starved to death without chestnuts. The chestnut tree became such a fundamental part of their lives that the inhabitants of Ticino referred to it not as the “chestnut tree” but simply as the “*albero*” (tree).

Chestnut harvesting would begin on the day of Saint Michael, namely 29 September. Traditionally, this is when people began gathering the first fallen nuts after Mass. Children were given extra days off school to help out. Harvesting generally ended on Saint Martin, celebrated on 11 November. The rule of thumb was that in this month and a half, at least 150 kilograms of chestnuts had to be gathered in order to feed a single adult through the winter.

Lighting of the *Grà*

Some people soon grew fed up of them, but the fact of the matter is that sweet chestnuts were indispensable for two reasons: Firstly, the chestnut was a food of high nutritional value, and secondly, the nuts had a shelf life of several months when dried. For that purpose, almost all villages had their own “*grà*” (a small stone building for drying chestnuts).

This windowless building consists of two levels. Nowadays, some *gràs* are put back into operation in the autumn. This is how it works: On the ground floor, a fire is lit, fuelled mainly by the dried prickly casings of the chestnuts that pile up during the year. On the upper level, the chestnuts are laid out on a lattice rack (the so-called “*graticcio*”) to dry. The chestnuts are dried by the rising heat and smoke. One has to work uninterruptedly for between 20 and 25 days to keep the embers going. In the past, this thankless chore was mostly the job of women, who had to get up several times in the night to stoke the fire and turn the chestnuts over.

At the end of the process, the chestnuts have lost two thirds of their weight. A couple of generations ago, they were then put into hessian sacks and pounded against a smoothed block of chestnut wood to remove the outer skin. That way, the chestnuts would keep for more than a year.

Part of the dried chestnuts was stored in the larder, and the rest was ground into flour to make bread. Martini wrote: “We took the chestnuts to the mill, and the miller gave us back sweet flour. Its fragrance wafted through the corridors and into the rooms, impregnating the floorboards and ceilings, our cupboards and clothes. Our homes were filled with the smell of freshly ground flour: it was the aroma of our homes, our own distinctive aroma.”

The arrival of the railway network in the Ticino in the late 19th century spelt the beginning of the end for most of the *gràs*. The chestnut now faced cheap competition from corn, rice and the potato. As a result, the region averted a catastrophe in 1948 when it was hit by an outbreak of chestnut blight, which struck half of all the chestnut groves within the space of twenty years.

Comeback of the Chestnut



The sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) experienced a comeback only towards the end of the 20th century, when the remaining *gràs* were carefully restored. In 1999, the Associazione dei Castanicoltori della Svizzera italiana (Chestnut Growers Association of the Italian-Speaking Part of Switzerland) was set up with the intent of polishing up the image of the chestnut and looking after the forests.

Words have been followed up by deeds: The chestnut groves have been thinned out, collection points set up, and chestnut-themed trails created. For example, in the Malcantone, in the hinterland of Lugano, there is the *Sentiero del castagno* (chestnut trail), a five- to six-hour walk, and in the Muggio valley in the Mendrisio region, the *Sentee de l'albur* (trail of the tree), which takes roughly two hours.

At the autumn festivals, the chestnut is the undisputed star of the show. Chestnuts are used to produce a variety of delicatessen, one favourite being the golden, sweet-tasting chestnut beer (called *Castégna*). They are versatile in the kitchen as well: The palette ranges from roasted chestnuts and meat dish accompaniments to vermicelles (chestnut paste pressed into noodle shape) and marrons glacés (glazed chestnuts). Then there is chestnut syrup, chestnut liqueur, chestnut flour for pasta and bread, and chestnut honey.

A study in an Italian health magazine goes as far as proposing a “chestnut therapy”. Chestnuts also relieve stress and improve blood flow. Managers, expectant mothers and students under the stress of exams are advised to eat roasted chestnuts three times a week. Chestnut blossom is used as a stimulant to treat depression, and the leaves are made into a tea to treat convulsive coughs. Even the prickly casings have their use: they can be used to treat rheumatism.

700-Year-Old Giants

The chestnut trees of the Ticino are being studied by the Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research (WSL), which has inventoried all the monumental chestnut trees in the Ticino and Val Mesolcina with a girth of more than seven metres. To date it has counted more than 300 specimens. Ninety per cent of these monumental trees are situated close to agricultural buildings, mostly summer settlements lying at an altitude of between 700 and 970 metres. Even experts find it hard to date the trees: A chestnut tree with a girth of eight metres, for example, could be anywhere between 300 and 700 years old.

Autumn is chestnut season

festivals and hiking tips all around the chestnut

While the chestnut used to be an essential staple of the poor, the Ticino gastronomy scene has been rediscovering the multifaceted marroni for many years now. The palette ranges from roasted chestnuts and meat dish accompaniments to vermicelli and marron glacé. There is also chestnut syrup and chestnut liqueur, chestnut flour for pasta, bread, and chestnut honey. However, the fruit not only finds its way onto restaurant menus in autumn. The chestnut is the undisputed protagonist at numerous festivals in Ticino's villages and attracts locals and tourists alike. Anyone looking to explore the Ticino autumnal landscape on Shanks's pony can combine their nature experience with trivia all about the chestnut on themed trails.

Chestnut festival on the piazza: festa della castagne and sagra d'autunnale

The fruit is an undisputed protagonist at the chestnut and autumn festival on the banks of the lake in Ascona on the 6th and 13th October 2018. Like in the olden days, 'maronatt' roast over 2,000 kilograms of chestnuts beneath the mild Ticino autumn sun and the market stalls on the piazza offer various delicacies made from chestnuts such as jams, honey and chestnut cake. Along with typical lunches of polenta and mortadella or gorgonzola, there is also a wealth of musical entertainment. Other smaller chestnut festivals also take place in the surrounding villages, for example in Brione sopra



Minusio as well as Muralto, Ronco sopra Ascona, Indemini, Arcegno, Intragna and Losone. www.ascona-locarno.com

Living valley traditions: Sagra della castagna at the Valle di Muggio

The chestnut can also be discovered in all its versatility in the Muggio Valley. Because every year in mid-October the "Sagra della Castagna" takes place here, in a different village each year. This year the celebrations will take place on 21st October 2018 at the village Morbio Inferiore. Visitors to the festival can find out about the diverse range of products that are now produced from the chestnut. But those who want to find out about the tradition of the spiky fruit in the once poverty-stricken southernmost Swiss valley are recommended to visit the Museo etnografico della Valle di Muggio, in the village of Cabbio. www.mendrisiottoturismo.ch



On the trail of the chestnut at the Malcantone region

Expansive chestnut forests surround Lake Lugano and Lake Maggiore and line the rivers in the Ticino valleys. In Alto Malcantone, south-west of Lugano, a themed walking trail about the chestnut invites visitors to find out more about growing chestnut trees and the chestnut forests. The 15 kilometre long circular trail takes about five to six hours and leads through an enchanting landscape, passing picturesque villages with breath-taking views. At various points, walkers can learn interesting facts about the importance of the chestnut and the processing steps for the various products. The trail leads through villages that are all accessible by public transport meaning that certain legs of the trail can be skipped out. Chestnut specialities can be tasted at the beginning or end of the trail in Grotto Sgambada.



The chestnut trail is also one of the routes in the new HikeTicino walking app. Installing the smartphone app makes sure you are up to speed with all there is to know, from a detailed trail route plus interactive map to information about the major sightseeing attractions, route features and up-to-date weather forecasts. www.hike.ticino.ch

Walking beneath chestnut trees of Biasca and in the Muggio Valley

Other places in Ticino are also wonderful for a walk beneath the chestnut trees. For example, a walk in the Muggio Valley in Mendrisiotto is particularly appealing when the trees radiate autumnal colours in the chestnut season. An informative chestnut trail, the Sentée de l'albur, can also be found here - it takes about two hours. The info boards along the trail between Morbio Superiore, Caneggio and Bruzella present many interesting aspects about the chestnut.



And in the chestnut forest of Biasca, a two kilometre long path at the foot of the impressive cliffs not only leads back to a past steeped in tradition, but also recalls events that influenced the canton's history. The chestnut trees here, which are all numbered and indexed, are allocated to individual owners. The fruits of the trees belong to them, and after the harvest on St. Martin's Day, the 11th November, they can also be gathered by others.. www.ticino.ch

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