

# 2024 Draft Itinerary

Northern Italy

Food and Cooking Tour  
September 2024



## The Tour Concept

This is a food tourism and cooking tour (with some passive sightseeing on the side). Our international food touring program was created through the friendship, and enthusiastic business partnership, between Luke and Bill. Luke is an award winning chef, restaurant owner and wine maker, and Bill operates a small group tour business. Our design concept is simple, create a food focused tour that we would love to do ourselves.

Luke has worked and studied at a number of Michelin restaurants in Italy, one of which we will visit as part of this tour. Unfortunately, due to expanding family and business developments, Luke is not able to join us in 2024, but using his knowledge, family and work connections, he has been able to put together this great itinerary for us. Our 2024 tour will be about half the size of our normal tours to Italy (max 7 guests in 2024) which will create a lovely intimate tour. It will be like your own private tour of northern Italy!

We will explore three very different regions of northern Italy on this tour.

Region 1. We start in Bologna in the Emilia Romagna region (the food bowl of Italy). We will base ourselves at the one villa and stay 5 nights.

Region 2. We head north to the Alps in the South Tyrol region. We stay in a village surrounded by the incredibly beautiful Dolomites close to Cortina D'Ampezzo (home of the 2026 Winter Olympics). Again, we will base ourselves in the one hotel for 3 nights and do excursions from our accommodation.

Region 3. Our last location is around Lake Garda. We will spend a couple of nights in the north of Lake Garda at Riva Del Garda (where Luke's extended family are based) and 3 nights at the south of Lake Garda. Lake Garda is bordered by the regions of Lombardy, Trentino and the Veneto. We will be in the Lake Garda region for 5 nights.

This itinerary has been carefully curated and will include

- Food focused touring days.
- Two group cooking days where the menu will be based on regional specialities.
- Destination dining days including long lunches at two Michelin rated restaurants. Luke has worked at one of these restaurants (Tivoli located in Cortina D'Ampezzo), so luckily we will be treated as special guests.
- Visits to wineries, cheese producers, coffee roasters, grapa distilleries, olive oil producers and a lovely afternoon visiting the famous Prosecco region of Italy with a guided tasting to help the hours pass by in a very pleasant location.
- A day of art, history and architecture in the beautiful city of Bologna and incidental sightseeing as per the features of the area we are visiting (such as short hikes or excursions up mountains in the Dolomites).
- A couple of free days (or half days) to explore the city/village where we are situated (or to have as rest days). And a couple of optional excursions that we will organise for the rest days if you are feeling rest-less (additional costs may be required (viz, entry tickets and similar)).

Our tour ends at Lake Garda. We will transfer you to Bologna airport for your ongoing travel.

## **OUR ACCOMMODATION**

For all our accommodation we are staying at villas, chalets or what the Italians call Agriturismo places. We choose this type of accommodation as they are perfect for groups and often in historic buildings and villages that permeate atmosphere. They can be in centuries old charming buildings with lovely gardens, pool, and rural views.

# Itinerary

## 2 weeks of touring – Monday 9 to Sunday 22 Sept. 2024

### Day 1. Monday 9 Sept. BOLOGNA (5 nights)

#### *ARRIVAL - Travel Day*

Guest to make their own way to Bologna Italy. Aim to arrive in the early afternoon at either Bologna International Airport or the main railway station. You will be collected from the airport or railway station in the afternoon.

Our home for the next 5 nights is at the Palazzo Minelli. Palazzo Minelli is located 30 km from Bologna in Bagno di Piano. It is a complex of buildings built between 1400 and 1700 whose most characteristic parts are the tower, the courtyard and the chapel.

In 1611 the Palace was left in inheritance to the Convent of the nuns of Santa Maria Assunta by Andrea and Paolo Bonfigli. Confiscated by Napoleon as property of the Church, it was then resold.

Palazzo Minelli is now owned by the Minelli family. The main building is the homestead for the surrounding working farm. The layout of the other structures and gardens have been developed over the years according to the canons of a typical sixteenth-century villa.

Our accommodation has been upgraded since the 16th century. All rooms have private bathrooms.



After being collected from the airport or railway station we travel the short distance to Palazzo Minelli. Settle into our villa accommodation. If you have arrived early you have a free afternoon to explore the Palazzo Minelli and surrounds. We will have some snacks available for the early arrivals. This evening we will have an informal welcome dinner and drinks at the accommodation.

Night 1: Villa accommodation at Palazzo Minelli.

Included: Airport or railway transfers for mid afternoon arrival. Welcome drinks and snacks.

Dinner (D)

## Day 2. Tuesday 10 Sept. BOLOGNA

### ACTIVITY DAY

Today we will spend discovering Bologna at a leisurely pace on a city walking tour with our Italian English speaking tour guide. We will take the full day to explore the monuments and history of Bologna and visit the porticos, monuments and towers of what UNESCO has defined the best preserved medieval centre in the world. Bologna is also home to Europe's oldest university.

The two towers that dominate the Bologna skyline are commonly recognised as the symbols of Bologna and are located in the heart of the city at the point where the ancient Via Emilia (Aemilian Way) enters the city. They were built during the Middle Ages and had a military function (signalling and defence) as well as representing the grand social prestige of the family that had them built.

We will stop for lunch at a Bologna trattoria where we will sample some of the famous products of the Bologna region. Our walk will include a visit to the Bologna Central Food Market where we will purchase seasonal local foods for dinner in the evening. In the afternoon we



will return to Palazzo Minelli for dinner.

Night 2: Palazzo Minelli



Included:

B = at our accommodation

L = at a trattoria during our Bologna walking tour

D = Dinner at our accommodation.

E = Experiences including entry to ticketed buildings that are included in the Tour and our Guided Walking Tour.

## Day 3. Wednesday 11 Sept. BOLOGNA

### ACTIVITY DAY

Regional tour. The tour will include visiting:

Modena – for balsamic vinegar

Parma – for parmesan cheese and prosciutto

Today is an early start. We have a full day where we will visit three of the region's landmark products. First stop the full making, tasting & cellaring process for Parmigiano Reggiano. Our next visit will be where they produce Balsamic Vinegar, and then we will learn about the Prosciutto curing process and have a tasting at the prosciutto production house. Our lunch will be a trattoria style Italian experience. In the afternoon we will return to the Palazzo Minelli for a lite supper.



Night 3: Palazzo Minelli.

Included:

B = at Palazzo Minelli

L = during the regional tour at a trattoria

D = supper at home prepared by Luke

E = Extras include entry to all sites and tastings visited during our regional tour.

## Day 4. Thursday 12 Sept. BOLOGNA

### COOKING DAY

This morning we will discuss what we want to eat and with our Italian chef, develop a menu based on what is in season, what the specialties of the region are and what you may have seen during our city and regional



tours that you might like to try. With the menu in hand we will go to the market to purchase ingredients, return to the villa and

cook a lunch and dinner.

Afterwards enjoy the fruits of your labour with a dinner of the great food that you have prepared.

Night 4: Palazzo Minelli

Included:

B = at Palazzo Minelli

L = at Palazzo Minelli – a lite lunch created as part of cooking day

D = prepared by you - product of our cooking day

E = Regional cooking lesson.



## Day 5. Friday 13 Sept. BOLOGNA

*FREE DAY - Optional Tour of Ravenna*

Today is our rest day. Stay at Palazzo Minelli and sleep in, laze by the pool or read a book (or all 3). Anyone wanting to be a little more active, there will be an optional excursion to Ravenna. Ravenna is an earthly paradise of Byzantine Art and in particular religious



mosaic art. Well worth the trip. The mosaics date from AD430 and are on the UNESCO World Heritage List. As this is an optional tour, the entrance tickets and lunch will be an additional cost (our transport services to Ravenna are free of course).

Night 5: Palazzo Minelli

Included:

B = at Palazzo Minelli

L = Fix yourself from our supplies at Palazzo Minelli

D = We will book a table at local restaurant.

E = Transport for the optional afternoon excursion to Ravenna is included but the cost of entry into the mosaic art establishments is additional.

## **Day 6. Sat 14 Sept. THE DOLOMITES (3 nights)**

### *TRAVEL DAY*

Today we head towards the beautiful mountainous region of Italy close to the Austrian border. Our temporary home will be at Al Capriolo or similar) in Vodo di Cadore. Our hotel is the converted post office built in the mid 1800s. The village is located in the stunningly beautiful natural setting of the Italian Dolomites, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, near Cortina d'Ampezzo (or Cortina). Cortina is also home to the Michelin starred restaurant Tivoli where Luke previously worked.

This region of Italy was once part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It became a part of Italy after WWI. Despite attempts by Mussolini and others to "Italianise" the region, the area has a distinctive Austrian feel and German is widely spoken.

It is about 280km to Vodo di Cadore and we will take the entire day to get there. We will be stopping at a number of places en route to explore, eat and drink!

### *ACTIVITY*

Enroute we stop at Bassano del Grappa. As the name suggests, Bassano del Grappa is famous for grappa – a spirit made from the discarded skin, seeds and pulp of wine making. Bassano is an old town nestled into the foothills of the alps. It has a picturesque square (Palazzo Sturm) and a photogenic bridge that span the river Brenta.

We will have an in depth grappa distillery tour at Poli Distillery followed by an extensive tasting of grappa and other spirits that are distilled at Poli.

We will have lunch at Bassano and have a little time to stretch our legs and explore the town square to admire the it's impressive architecture.



## ACTIVITY

Fortuitously, enroute to Vodo di Cadore we also pass through Italy's most famous Prosecco producing region. We will need to pop into Campion cellar door for a comprehensive Prosecco lesson and tasting (including learning why the best stuff isn't even called Prosecco).

Night 6: Capriolo Inn and Chalets, Vodo di Cadore.

Included:

B = Palazzo Minelli

L = Bassano del Grappa en route

D = At our hotel.

E = Grappa tasting, Prosecco tasting



## Day 7. Sun 15 Sept. VODO DI CADORE and CORTINA

### MICHELIN RESTAURANT DAY

Yesterday was a big day so after a sleep in and breakfast we will head up the road a little to explore the village of Cortina. Cortina is playground for the rich, beautiful and famous. Spend some time poking around the shops or retreating to a café to see if we can spot anyone more beautiful than we are (forget the famous as fame is temporary and we appear to be rich enough to be able to spend some time in beautiful Italy).

Lunch today is a real treat. In the early mid-afternoon we head to the restaurant Tivoli, a Michelin rated restaurant where Luke trained and worked, and have a delightful long lunch curated by Luke's former boss Graziano. If the weather is favourable we will sit in the sun on the deck overlooking the picturesque alpine valley and the Dolomites.

Under Graziano's stewardship Ristorante Tivoli has long been one of the brightest and most exciting culinary destinations in the Dolomites. He has been in Cortina since 2002, and was certified with a Michelin star which has confirmed Tivoli's long standing quality and consistency.

Night 7: Capriolo Inn.

Included:

B = Capriolo Inn

L = Restorante Tivoli

D = on your own, however we don't think that you will need it.





## Day 8. Mon 16 Sept. VODO DI CADORE + CORTINA d'AMPREZZO

### *MICHELIN RESTAURANT DAY (AGAIN)*

For the weary we will take this morning slowly. Sleep in, read a book, soak up the mountain air, wander around the village, purchase a few essential take-home items.

Later in the morning we will head into Cortina again and take the cable car to the peaks of the Dolomites at Faloria Refugio. The views are unbelievable, you can't express a way that the landscape could be improved upon. Many scenes from the movie Cliff Hanger were filmed here so you get the idea. You can enjoy your morning coffee at the Refugio while soaking in the stunning views.

### *DESTINATION DINING.*

The destination dining restaurant that we will visit in the Dolomite region is high on Luke's "must eat" dining destination wish list. We have organised a degustation lunch at San Brite a benchmark high end Michelin starred restaurant in a stunning location. Chef Riccardo's family have farmed the land for generations. Riccardo is passionate about bringing the rich seasonal produce from the farm straight to his restaurant kitchen. In Riccardo's words he tries to elevate the dedicated farm work of his father and grandfather and to celebrate this land and heritage through his dishes. Riccardo says that the secret to his recipes is that the ingredients are created first, then the dish is composed.



Night 8: Capriolo Inn

Included:

B = Capriolo

L = San Brite Michelin Restaurant.

D = on your own but we don't think that you will need it.

## Day 9. Tues 17 Sept. VODO DI CADORE - RIVA DEL GARDA (2 nights)

### *ACTIVITY*

This morning we will spend the day high in the beautiful Dolomite Mountains at Cinque Torri on our way to Riva del Garda. We travel up the mountains via cable car to Cinque Torri (Five Towers). Cinque Torri are one of the symbols of Cortina D'Ampezzo thanks to their peculiar shape. They are instantly recognisable



from any other peak or valley in the area. This mountainous area was also a significant theatre of war during WWI and WW2. In WWI Italy was trying to push back the boundary of the huge Austro-Hungarian Empire which included this area of current Italy and which the Italians long considered their own. In WW2 the Italians were fighting to halt the advancing German armies who were marching to fulfil Hitler's ambition of uniting all regions with German-speaking populations including northern Italy. There are interesting remains of battlements and trenches with a good interpretation signage to wander around and ponder the hard life and misery of high altitude warfare.

Lunch will be at Refugio Scoiattori with stunning views over the mountains.



### *TRAVEL AFTERNOON*

This afternoon we drive through the Dolomites for a few vista filled hours before we leave the mountains. We drive through Bolzano and head for the lakes district. On our way to Lake Garda we will make a couple of stops to explore and experience.

We then drive on to Riva del Garda. This region is where Luke's family hail from, in fact we will be eating tonight at the restaurant where Luke's cousin Francesco is working.

Through history Riva was much fought after as it is a key access point to the north. In 1815 it became part of the Austrian Empire and soon became a popular resort for the Archduke and the northern intelligentsia. Stendhal, Mann and Kafka all holidayed here. Tonight we stay at the Grand Hotel Liberty, an easy walk to Lake Garda. The hotel was once an elegant Art Nouveau style palace during the days of the Austrian Empire.

Night 9: Grand Hotel Liberty Riva Del Garda

Included:

B = Capriolo Inn

L = Mountain refugio restaurant

D = Cousin Francesco's restaurant

E = Cable car ride and transfers.



## Day 10. Wed 18 Sept. RIVA DEL GARDA

Riva Del Garda is a very pretty compact town hugging the land between the edge of the lake and the mountains. Yesterday was a long day so have an easy morning this morning. Explore the town or there are a number of walks along the lake to do. There is also a short scenic railway to some castle fortifications to explore which continues onto a hike for those who like a challenge to a chapel perched high on the mountainside. Find your own early lunch while you are exploring.

### ACTIVITY

In the early afternoon we will visit Foradori cheese farm and winery near Trento. Foradori farm follows interesting biodynamic agricultural practices and is a place that Luke has been following on social media.



Their biodynamic practices are relevant to Luke as he is applying the same biodynamic principles at his farm (Piccolo Family Farm) for the production of produce that he uses at his restaurant *Limone* in Griffith.

We will take a 2 hour farm tour and tasting of the vineyards, gardens and cellars and learn about their biodynamic agricultural journey and experiences. We will end the visit with a tasting of 6 wines paired with their raw milk cheeses.

In the afternoon we will head to a coffee roaster for a tour and tasting and on our return we will stop for an Aperitivo and grazing plate at The Lido on the northern shore of Lake Garda. Find your own dinner.

Night 10: Grand Hotel Liberty,

Included:

B = Grand Hotel Liberty

L = Own

D = Own

E = Coffee roaster

E = Cheese factory and winery tour and tastings.

E = Aperitivo and grazing plates at The Lido Hotel.



## Day 11. Thurs 19 Sept. LAKE GARDA (3 nights)

This morning we drive the length of Lake Garda hugging the shoreline as much as possible. We pass through Limone and head on to Gargnano where we stop to soak up the scenery and wander around the town. Gargnano is a charming town on the north western shore of the lake. It is in an idyllic setting (yes, another picturesque photo opportunity) nestled between the mountains and the lake.

Around this area are interesting lemon plantations that have been terraced into the cliff side. It was an important area for growing produce to support the various war efforts. We will take a short tour of the Limonaia La Minora and look at the engineering to support growing orchards on mountain slopes and while we are here we will taste their various limoncello ambrosias.



In Gargnano we visit a family run cheese factory perched over the lake and have a lunch featuring their cheese in a picturesque cobbled alleyway leading to the lake. After lunch we continue on thorough towns such as Gardone Riviera and Salo until we arrive at Padenghe sul Garda.

It is only about 65km from Riva del Garda to our day's destination at Padenghe sul Garda situated towards the bottom of Lake Garda.

Our accommodation tonight is at Agriturismo Pratello. Pratello was founded in the mid 1800s and is located in the hill country on the south western shore of Lake Garda.



Well-known for its friendly environment and proximity to great restaurants and attractions, Agriturismo Pratello makes a convenient base for us to enjoy the best of Padenghe sul Garda attractions. Towards the end of the afternoon we will have a wine tasting of the Pratello winery wines. Followed by dinner on the terrace.



Night 11: Agriturismo Pratello (pictured above)

Included:

- B = at Grand Hotel Liberty
- L = Gargnano cheese factory
- D = Agriturismo Pratello
- E = Limonaia tour and tasting.
- E = wine tasting at Pratello



## Day 12. Friday 20 Sept. LAKE GARDA

This morning we visit a cooking school to pick up a few more tricks on how to make a few regional dishes that we can impress our friend and family with when we return home.

In the afternoon we visit an olive grove and olive oil processing plant. We learn about this great feature of the Mediterranean diet. A tasting is also available.

While we are out we will visit one of our favourite lakeside bars.

If we are hungry we can call in at a little family trattoria near our accommodation.



Night 12: Agriturismo Pratello

Included:

B = at Agriturismo Pratello

L = Cooking school lunch.

D = Local trattoria.

E = Olive grove, oil press and tasting

E = Cooking school.



## Day 13. Saturday 21 Sept. LAKE GARDA

### ACTIVITY



For our final full day of our tour to northern Italy we have arranged a day on Lake Garda. We will hire a private boat to take us on a lake cruise and live like the beautiful people.

Our cruise will focus on the southern half of Lake Garda. First off we sail towards the pearl of the lake: the village of Sirmione. Sirmione is a 4km long narrow peninsula jutting into the southern end of the lake. The old city is very beautiful in an idyllic location. It is a popular tourist destination but visiting by boat will give us the best opportunity to take in the sights without the jostle of the crowd. We will stop for a visit of the city and then

sail again around the peninsula, including the largest Roman ruins the Acquaria or thermal baths, Maria Callas' Villa and the ruins of the biggest roman villa in the north of Italy called Catullo's Grottos (grotte di Catullo).



We have arranged a special lunch on Lake Garda to celebrate the end of a great tour.



Night 13: Agriturismo Pratello

Included:

B = At Agriturismo Pratello

L = Lunch at Baia D'Oro (or similar) perched by the lake

D = We don't think that you will need dinner but we will have some snacks available.

E = Boat cruise on Lake Garda

## Day 14. Sun 22 Sept. BOLOGNA

*DEPARTURE - END OF TOUR*

Start your travel home or on to your next destination if you are extending your European tour. We will transfer you to Bologna international airport by 1pm.

Included: B = at Agriturismo

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Remember that on all cooking days on our tour, your participation in the food sourcing and preparation is optional. For those who know that they are better off staying out of the kitchen, can join Bill in a local excursion or you can have free time to do as you will. We recommend a relaxed morning then perhaps wandering around the local village or take a walk along the lake shore, or perhaps it is a chance to buy that souvenir?



## **TOUR COSTS**

\$8,600 based on twin share travel. Additional \$1,950 single supplement.

## **TOUR INCLUSIONS**

- Thirteen nights unique and comfortable accommodation with private bathrooms – a wonderful mix of at villas, chalets and what the Italians call Agriturismo places.
- Cooking participation days and cooking class with Italian chefs.
- All meals (with 1 or 2 exceptions as per the itinerary). Our meals are a combination of fine dining, traditional and street food. At each of our 3 main regions visited there will be at least 1 multi course or degustation meal.
- Dining at Michelin starred restaurants as per the itinerary.
- All ground transport.
- Excursions to food destinations and local points of interest and short hikes and easy walking tours.
- Entry into attractions/activities and tastings of food, wines and grappa as per the itinerary.
- Intimate small group tour - maximum 7 people.
- Carefully curated itinerary by chef Luke Piccolo and hosted by tour operator Bill Balding.

## **EXCLUSIONS**

- Travel to and from Bologna.
- All beverages (except for welcome and farewell dinners as specified in the itinerary), items of a personal nature or tipping.
- Passport & (if needed) Visa.
- Travel Insurance (you will be required to have independent travel insurance).
- Incidental snacks, coffee, drinks etc as per your individual requirements.

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

Bill Balding @ Outback Beds Tours: [info@outbackbedstours.com.au](mailto:info@outbackbedstours.com.au) 0457734465

### **Can't make it in 2024?**

#### **Here are our international food and culture tours for 2025.**

- September 2025 Luke and Bill will be doing another food tour of Italy.
- April 2025 we will be heading to Japan for a cycling and food tour.