





Broccoletti, Bread and a Beemer

Part 2

By Tamela Rich #161425

If you missed Part One of this story, I'm on a nine-day motorcycle tour of the Lazio, Tuscany and Umbria regions of Italy.

There's nothing like a few days in Italy to turn even a fast-food junkie into a foodie. Italians are proud of their culinary heritage and my tour guide, Enrico Grassi of *Hear The Road Motorcycle Tours Italy* is a good-will ambassador of all things cultural and gastronomical in the boot-shaped country.

Even scenic pullovers are an opportunity for Enrico to give us a lesson in Italian cuisine. At Tuscany's Crete Senesi, which was formed by sediments of the 2.5-4 million year-old Pliocene Sea, we behold a remarkable lunar-like landscape. Enrico explains that all kinds of edibles are rooted in its grey clay. Sheep milk from this region owes its unique flavor to the scented bushes and herbs of the Crete region the sheep eat, and that is why pecorino cheese is the local specialty.

When we pull into Pienza for lunch, I notice that nearly every shop boasts *il miglior pecorino* (the finest pecorino) and an offer of international shipping.



Above: Pecorino.

Below: Crete Senesi.



A Pienza Dance Party

Entering the city, an accordion player and percussionist are singing and playing in the *Piazza Martiri della Liberta*, and I am delighted when a dance party breaks out. Two slim bicyclists in their 60s or 70s and wearing yellow hi-viz riding gear steal the show with their flamboyant moves while an American woman in dark sunglasses dances and twirls, holding the ten-euro bill she intends to place in the buskers' suitcase.

The players call themselves "Chorobodo" and specialize in Brazilian-Italian peasant songs. Brilliantly so. Here I am living la dolce vita. No electricity, lights or backstage passes required. Simple living, simple instruments, simple pleasures.

The American Stomach

The day ends at the fabulous Altarocca Wine Resort in Orvieto. Our Siena country house, *Podere la Strega*, oozes Old-World charm while Altarocca is all about modern decadence. Orvieto sits on the top of a rock plateau made of consolidated volcanic ash that we call "tuff" in English. Altarocca's buildings are made of this tuff rock, as is most everything else in the area.

My room has a wraparound patio looking down over the fertile valley 1000 feet below that is pinstriped by vineyards. I put my motorcycle boots outside to air out for the night before unpacking and getting ready for dinner, which will be the restau-



Etruscan and Roman ruins in Orvieto.

rant's tasting menu.

The wait staff makes the "mistake" of bringing bread to the table before our meal. As an advocate for the "right" way to eat Italian food, Enrico is firmly on record not to touch the bread before the meal arrives.

Although we've been in Italy for nearly a week now, our stomachs are still not on Italian time. An 8:00 meal feels like midnight to me and no doubt like the middle of the night to Christin from Los Angeles.

Dan bravely makes his move on the bread

basket, and as Enrico begins chiding him, we all stealthily grab a slice. Bravely, Denean asks the waiter for butter—it's been five days since we've had any. When it arrives, we all ask her to pass it along.

Yes, we "know better" by now. Like an indulgent grandfather, Enrico pretends not to notice our "English" behavior—that's how he thinks of butter on bread, as an English peccadillo. He would prefer that we use our bread to sop up the sauce and guide stray morsels onto our forks—the Italian way.

When he and the other smokers go outside for a lungful, the rest of us brainstorm ideas for a thank-you present for Enrico, whom we have come to love despite—or perhaps because of—his staunch upholding of the Italian gastronomic tradition. We decide that the gift must have something to do with bread. A fancy bread basket? A butter dish?

Orvieto

Rich food late at night is not the best recipe for early rising, but the morning air is crisp and invigorating as usual. We make the brief journey to Orvieto proper.

Orvieto is rich in Etruscan history, and we begin our day with a fascinating tour from an archeologist under a church with Etruscan and Roman ruins underground that are older than any architectural remains in the States.



Dining al fresco at Podera La Strega.

We spend the rest of the morning strolling through the city and scanning the shops for Enrico's thank-you gift.

Several of us are with him when he gets the bright idea to buy meat and cheese for a picnic on our way to Rome tomorrow. He ducks into *Norcineria Dai Fratelli*—technically a butcher (*norcineria*) but in fact we would call it a gourmet shop, specializing in foods from the region. He selects sausage and cheese with the enthusiasm and expertise of a proverbial kid in a candy shop.

You'll know *Dia Fratelli's* shop by the mounted boar head to the right of the entryway. Inside is a now-familiar sight: wild boar sausage hams hang from the ceiling, a nub of femur bone staring at you, and hide with fur intact—not only is it a reminder of where “real food” comes from, it contrasts to the styrofoam and plastic trays that disguise food origins in the States.

Lake Corbara towns

Other than the hectic Autostrada, every Italian road was a pleasure to ride. Yes, the roundabouts took some getting used to, but when I returned home to the States I missed their efficiency. Factoid: Italy was the first country in the world to build motorways.



Hanging hams.

Leaving Orvieto we ride what Italian motorcyclists call *La Strada delle Mille Curve* (“Road of a thousand curves”) toward Todi. Now, the Italian claim of a thousand curves here is no more hyperbolic than boasting 318 curves in 11

miles—looking at you, Tail of the Dragon—but I think we all enjoy *La Strada delle Mille Curve* much more.

After consulting the group to verify we don't mind a couple of miles on a hard pack gravel road, Enrico takes us to *Titignano*, a



Tour group in Todi. Photo by Enrico Grassi.



Bridge to Civita di Bagnoregio.

former castle where we gaze at Lake Corbara in its glory from high above. The late afternoon sun glistens on the water's surface as we enjoy the quiet interlude and raise our faces almost in unison for a moment of sunbathing.

When we arrive back at Altarocca, we spend a couple of hours as a group laughing and talking in the warm waters of its spa. We have truly come to enjoy each other's company and begin talking about rallies in coming years where we might rendezvous. In the morning, we're for Rome.

En route to Roma

Our final day on the road begins in *Civita di Bagnoregio*. Founded by Etruscans more than 2,500 years ago, it is now known to Italians as *il paese che muore* ("the town that is dying").

The town is dying in the most tourist-friendly way. Civita is an inland island, surrounded by a valley of grey-white clay that is eroding beneath the volcanic stone, reminding me somewhat of the Dakota Badlands. What isn't eroding has been shaken away by earthquakes, the strongest of which was in 1794. It destroyed the natural bridge that linked Civita to the bigger nearby town of *Bagnoregio*, and a foot-bridge is now the only way to reach the Civita.

Edging closer to Rome, we stop for our picnic lunch of the meats, cheeses and breads that Enrico bought for us in Orvieto while perched atop a fallen tree in *Faggeta del Monte Cimino* ("Beech Forest of Mount Cimino"). The serenity of the forest reminds me of the California Redwoods.

A couple of days earlier Derek, a

motorcycle mechanic and Millennial Mac-Gyver, did a field repair on Christin's Guzzi exhaust pipe using a piece of cellophane cigarette box wrapper as loctite. Little did he know that his best moment was yet to come in our last stop, *Civita Castellana*. This stop isn't on the tour, but as we have seen time and again, Enrico supplements the standard itinerary with things he knows will delight his guests.

Enrico is a master at understatement, telling us that a friend of his has "a little motorcycle museum we will enjoy." Parking our bikes in a cluster at *Piazza Guglielmo Marconi* we spy a gray, three-story building with a green garage door labeled "GARAGE" in contrasting yellow capital letters. Inside is a motorcyclist's equivalent of Ali Baba's cave.

Retired mathematics teacher Costante

Costantini restores and displays a fine collection of Italian motorcycles and scooters inside. We all oooh and ahhh, but Derek is ecstatic as he lovingly photographs Costante's latest project: boosting an old Italian Motobi motorcycle's engine by adding another one.

The garage is chockablock with not only bikes, but also the bric a brac of Costante's life. I laugh at an old Mussolini poster and a 2007 wall calendar featuring the executed fascist dictator on the wall of a cubbyhole for scooters from the late 1950's. Costante comes over to start one of them for me, and I think to myself that the folks at Barber Motorsports Museum would love an introduction to him.

After returning our bikes in Rome and cleaning up for dinner, we walk to a little cafe for our farewell dinner. Between the main course and dessert Jo surprises Enrico with our gift: a wrapped butter dish, stocked with pats of butter, (*burro*). At first he is surprised. "Why do you want me to have a butter dish? I do not eat the butter." And then it dawns on him. We all share a belly laugh.



Enrico and the butter dish.

Arrivederci, Enrico and my fellow Americans. Each of you brought me moments of joy and laughter. Grazie.

Tamela Rich began her love affair with the open road in the 1970's, traveling old Route 66 from the midwest to California for family reunions. Her G 650 GS is a definite improvement on the Vista Cruiser station wagon, with its vinyl seats and underpowered air conditioner! Tamela shares more of this story and others at www.TamelaRich.com. You can also find her on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, or somewhere down the road. ©



Christin at Costanza's garage.



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