



# TASTES OF VENICE IN ISTRIA

Influences and Fusions

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## Rich Traces of the Past in Istrian Gastronomy

Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you who you are. This celebrated aphorism by Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, French lawyer and politician, epicurean and gastronomist, rings equally true when transferred from one's personal menu to the food culture of a particular region or nation. Each meal and each menu from breakfast to lunch and family dinner reflects geography and climate, history and cultural influences, as well as traditions, customs, and identities of the gastronomy of particular peoples and spaces.

The same is true for Istrian gastronomy, which, as explained by Franko Lukež, the leading connoisseur of Istrian gastronomy, "faithfully mirrors all historical, geographical and climate features of this territory. The tumultuous Istrian past has left a significant mark on gastronomy as well."

In fact, the abundance of nature and uniqueness of this region are built into the very core of popular Istrian cuisine. Its backbone is made of foodstuffs one can find in nature: wild plants, herbs, seasonal vegetables, seafood, fish... There is asparagus and wild chicory, crab, shellfish, olive oil, wine... And this humble cuisine of Istrian fishermen and farmers, highly valuable and healthy by contemporary nutritionist standards – let us use culinary terms – is sometimes accompanied and complemented by dishes and ingredients brought along by Slavic populations, or else, spiced with recognisable influences and traditions of Roman cuisine and seasoned by cooks of Frankish and German feudal rulers, and finally, topped with Austro-Hungarian gastronomy. Nevertheless, the decisive mark on Istrian food culture has most definitely been left by the gastronomy of Venice whose rule over this territory lasted for almost five centuries: officially from 1267 when Poreč first swore fealty to the Republic of Saint Mark to its downfall in 1797.

## Unique Venetian Heritage Menu

Venetian gastronomy inherits the beauty and uniqueness of the city that was the most dominant Mediterranean power for a great part of its history. The uniqueness of Venice is reflected in its geographical location – for this is a city of magnificent architecture built on a lagoon facing the sea, with its green hinterland – as well as a rich past and culture bearing the seal of both sensuality and decadence of the Serenissima and the particularly strong cosmopolitanism. All of this is woven into Venetian cuisine distinguished by simultaneous nobility, creativity and diversity. Loredana Vareton thus pointed out at the First Study Conference of the Italian Culinary Academy that what made Venice specific at the zenith of the Serenissima was the fact that the cuisine of the rich came under the harmonising influence of the cuisine of the poor, "as the latter disposed of matchless abundance of inexhaustible natural sources that guaranteed life, freshness and genuineness: the sea and the gardens."

It is widely known that when Venetians prepared food, meaning lavish banquets for doges and nobles as well as everyday meals of Venetian merchants, artisans, fishermen and gondoliers, they used foodstuffs from virtually every corner of the world. Considering that the Republic of Saint Mark, a state with a powerful naval fleet, had developed trade relations with almost entire world, it was the route by which rare spices from the Far East reached Venice: pepper, cinnamon, coriander, cumin, nutmeg, clove... Groceries from northern Europe also arrived to Venetian tables by sea, like codfish from the Baltic countries. The richness of Venetian cuisine was also enhanced by olive oil and wine from Istria and shrimp from Kvarner. All that combined with the ever-fresh vegetables and fruits from the environs of Venice, seashells and crabs from the lagoon. Game dishes from the hinterland were also present on tables.

Purple artichokes from Sant'Erasmus island or *castraure*, the early tender artichoke shoots, *moeche and masanete*, soft-shell crabs, *sepa bianca de ciosa*, white cuttlefish from Chioggia, *schia della laguna di Venezia*, small prawns, are only some of the foodstuffs making up Venetian heritage gastronomy. It features authentic dishes with a rich aroma, colour and scent. There are *bigoli*, typical pasta resembling thick spaghetti; *baicoli*, typical Venetian cookies; *bussolai*, cookies from the island of Burano; *fave alla veneziana*, small almond and pine nut cookies; *fugassa veneta*, the Venetian focaccia; *galani e crostoli*, kroštule or sweet knot fritters; *mandorlato veneziano*, the Venetian nougat; *pagnotta del doge*, the Doge's bread; *zaletti*, typical yellow corn flour cookies, *baccalà mantecato*, creamed codfish; *sarde in saor*, sardines *in savor* or marinated sardines; *risi e bisi*, riži biži, or rice and peas; *bigoli in salsa*, *bigoli* pasta with sardines; *fegato alla veneziana*, Venetian liver with onions and white polenta...

Reading this Venetian heritage menu, we will find a multitude of dishes that have long been part of Istrian daily and family holiday meals. *Bigoli*, according to connoisseurs, are on the sea brunch menu of Novigrad's fishermen. In Pula, Poreč, Rovinj and Rabac, practically every family has its own recipe for sardines *in savor* or marinated sardines. *Risi e bisi* or rice and peas are a typical spring staple on the family tables throughout Istria, in addition to being a standard item on the nursery school menu. In the pig slaughter season called *kolinje*, *polenta alla veneziana* is a traditional dish in many villages in the interior of the Peninsula. No festivity in Istria is imaginable without *kroštule* or sweet knot fritters. Christmas Eve in Istria is unthinkable without codfish white pâté with *pasutice* or homemade pasta squares, its smell, taste and creaminess – an indispensable harbinger of Christmas.

Gastronomy researchers note that one of the ways of exchanging the manner of preparing fish and seafood dishes between Venice and Istria occurred through encounters of fishermen from Chioggia with Istrian fishermen in Piran, Izola, Novigrad and Rovinj. Whereas Venetian fishermen were versed in making *zuppe* (thick soups), risotto, especially black cuttlefish risotto, and *buzare*, fish stews, specialties of Istrian fishermen included baked crabs and the warty crab or limpet stew called *brodet* (It. *brodetto*).

## Food Culture on Both Sides of the Adriatic

An insight into food on both sides of the Adriatic, including recipes, names of dishes and foodstuffs used, and the philosophy reveals that culinary fusions between Istria and Venice are still very much with us. They are also at the very core of the modern concept of gastronomy, i.e., the tourist offer that has been promoted for almost three decades by the Istrian Region and its Tourist Board advocating the Mediterranean lifestyle and the concept of Mediterranean diet. Alongside health benefits of this way of life, the result is the popularisation of traditional Istrian homemade dishes and gastronomy products like oil, honey, cheese, as well as the protection of their origin, as is the case with Istrian prosciutto or the latest to have been added to the list – Momjan Muscat.



## Codfish – Has Its Story, as Well as Its Opera

Creamed codfish is one of the authentic dishes of Venetian cuisine. It is a recipe with a story, recently even with an opera.

Ties between codfish and Venice go back to over 600 years. The credit belongs to Pietro Querini, Venetian patrician and a fifteenth-century merchant shipwrecked in the North Sea, along the coast of the Lofoten Islands, on his trade route from Crete to Flanders. Stranded on the Norwegian island of Røest, he stayed there with the surviving sailors for a full hundred days. Fishing with local fishermen, he discovered codfish. On his way back home, Querini brought it to Venice in 1432, introducing codfish into Venetian kitchens and later to the tables of the neighbouring countries. Here it is, in our region, to this day.

Codfish appeared on the theatre stage as well: historical records about the merchant from Venice and Norwegian codfish were turned into the opera "Querini" in 2012 by Norwegian composer Henning Sommerro to Ragnar Olsen's libretto.

## Risi e bisi – Arrives from the Doge's Table

*Risi e bisi* is one of Venetian most traditional dishes. This simple and yet lively dish was served to the Venetian Doge on 25 April, on the day of the Feast of Saint Mark, Venice's patron saint, as an expression of abundance wishes. In fact, rice symbolises fertility, and peas are typical locally grown spring vegetables.



# ISTRIAN WINES

## From Tradition to the World Wine Elite

Istrian wines have been an integral and essential part of Istrian gastronomy and Istrian way of life since times immemorial, and winemaking on the Peninsula has a millennial history.

The vine was first brought to Istria by the Phoenicians and the ancient Greeks, and the Istri successfully mastered the skill of cultivating Istrian vine. While historical records state that Teran from the Peninsula was appreciated by the ancient Romans, contemporary researchers also put forward the idea that Istrian Malvasia was made of a Malvasia varietal introduced to Istria during the Venetian era, and its peculiar biological characteristics also may have been created precisely in the ecological conditions of Istria. In the Middle Ages, Istrian Muscat was a delicacy enjoyed at the courts of Europe, from Emperor Franz Joseph in Vienna to Emanuel III in Rome. Today, the wines of Istria are part of the world wine elite, as evidenced by numerous awards.

White Malvasia is one of the most important Istrian varieties and an important part of its identity. Areas planted with Malvasia are found throughout Istria, and the wine produced from this variety is straw-yellow, with a pleasant aroma of acacia flowers and moderate freshness. Golden drops of Malvasia are perfectly paired with top fresh fish and seafood delicacies.

When in Istria, listen to advice from connoisseurs and make sure you also have a glass of Teran, best paired with local prosciutto and pasta in Istrian ox sauce. In fact, one of Istrian wine magic legends has it that Istrian Teran was the longevity elixir of Empress Livia, the wife of Roman Emperor Augustus, and also the wine that inebriated Casanova, the famous lover, during his Istrian adventures in the eighteenth century. Teran has been cultivated in Istrian vineyards since ancient times, and this variety produces an excellent red wine with an intriguing note of astringency. Experts claim that it is a passionate and unusual wine – with a vibrant, unrestrained bouquet of forest berries, its colours ranging from purple to ruby red.

Sugar on top is Momjan Muscat, a wine with a rich taste and pronounced varietal aromaticity bearing the European protected designation of origin since 2021. The very name Momjan Muscat combines the name of the variety (muscat made of white muscat variety) and the name of the geographical area (Momjan) situated in the north of Istria. As a matter of fact, Momjan has long been known as a typical cultivation area of this grape. These days, this variety is cultivated in a small area from Oskoruš to Merišće, and Muscat from Momjan, wine of their ancestors, is produced by five families of Momjan's winemakers – Brajko, Kozlović, Markežić, Prelac and Sinković.

Momjan Muscat, they say, is a real aphrodisiac. Check it out: a sip of this wine complementing its heritage of primordial tradition with sweet Istrian *kroštule*.

**Bon appetit!**



# Venetian Style Creamy Codfish



## INGREDIENTS

codfish	parsley
1 dl olive oil	salt
three cloves garlic	pepe

Clean the previously cooked codfish, soaked ahead of time for two days, removing and discarding all skin and bones. Put pieces of fish into a wide bowl and keep mashing, adding a decilitre of olive oil until you obtain a smooth cream. Stir in three finely sliced garlic cloves and finely chopped parsley, adding more oil, salt and pepper to taste. Serve cold with toasted bread. (Venice, 15<sup>th</sup> century)

Veljko Barbieri "134 male priče o hrani", Profil, Zagreb, 2003



# Riži Biži (Rice and Peas)

<b>INGREDIENTS</b> (SERVES 4)	1 celery stalk
300 g Vialone Nano rice	40 g butter
1 kg fresh peas	olive oil
1 onion	grated Parmesan cheese
1 garlic	salt
1 carrot	pepper

Shell the peas, wash under running water and drain. Add the peas to the sauteed garlic and onion and keep cooking. Meanwhile, prepare vegetable stock with the carrot, celery and pods. When the peas are almost ready, add the rice and the stock and cook, frequently stirring with a wooden spoon. When the rice is cooked *al dente*, remove from heat and add the butter and the grated cheese and stir.

[visitvenezia.eu](http://visitvenezia.eu)



# Kroštule With Wine

(Robert Perić's recipe, Pula)

## INGREDIENTS

half a kilo flour

2 eggs

1 decilitre white wine

150 grams butter

vanilla sugar

lemon zest to taste

frying oil

Combine all of the ingredients and knead the dough until it is smooth. Leave to rest for half an hour; roll out dough as thin as possible, cut the dough into strips and shape them into bows. Deep fry until golden brown, sprinkle with caster sugar.

Vesna Medvedec Buršić: "Tradicionalna istarska jela – sezonska i blagdanska", Rezydent d.o.o., Račice, 2010



RECIPES



## Sardines in Savor

### INGREDIENTS

800 g sardines

2,5 dl olive oil

80 g flour

250 g onion

20 g garlic

2 dl vinegar

1,5 dl white wine

salt

peppercorns

4 bay leaves

1 sprig rosemary

Clean the sardines, wash them and pat them dry, roll them in flour. Fry them in hot olive oil and place them in a larger bowl. Using the remaining frying oil, sauté the onions sliced into strips, add minced garlic, crushed peppercorns, salt, bay leaf and a sprig of rosemary. Combine, cover with vinegar and wine and let cook for a while. Pour over the sardines so that they are entirely covered in liquid. If needed, add more oil and vinegar. *Sardele na savor* (Sardines in savor) taste better after sitting in the marinade/*savor* for a while.

Istarska kuhinja, gastronomsko-turistički vodič  
(Istrian Cuisine, Gastronomy and Tourist Guide), ed.  
Franko Lukež, Branko Lovrić, Istarska naklada 1982

# Istrian Brudet

## INGREDIENTS

500 g red scorpionfish	50 g garlic
250 g angler	300 g fresh tomatoes
250 g conger eel	40 g flour
150 g squid or cuttlefish	1,5 dl white wine
5 crabs	20 g parsley
0,8 dl oil	2 bay leaves
250 g onion	2 g peppercorns
	15 g salt

Clean the fish. If the fish is large, cut it into pieces, roll in flour and deep fry until golden brown. Add the squid, the crabs, minced onions, sliced garlic and parsley, chopped tomatoes, bay leaves, peppercorns and salt. Add the water so that it covers the fish and simmer over moderate heat. Halfway through cooking, add the wine and continue cooking for around 30 minutes, giving the saucepan an occasional shake. Serve with polenta.

Istarska kuhinja (Istrian Cuisine), Franko Lukež and Branko Lovrić, Petko, Pula, 1994



# Traditional Novigrad Christmas Fritule

(recipe by Mirjana Benjak and Đanino Božić from Novigrad)

## INGREDIENTS

3 kg apples	200 g raisins	200 g walnuts
250 g sugar	100 g pine nuts	a small glass of grappa
300 g white flour	100 g dried figs	lemon and orange zest
200 g cooking chocolate	200 g almonds	olive oil
	200 g hazelnuts	caster sugar

Chop the almonds, the walnuts, the hazelnuts and the pine nuts with a knife. Peel the apples and cut them in small pieces. Crush the chocolate and slice the figs. Cook the apples in a saucepan until the liquid evaporates to obtain a mushy mixture. Stirring, add the nuts, the dried fruits and the flour to the mixture until it is well blended. At the end of cooking, add sugar, chocolate, grappa and lemon and orange zest. Pour the mixture on a tray and allow it to cool. Shape little balls with your fingers, gently pressing and frying them in olive oil on both sides (around 2 minutes). Once fried, sprinkle the *fritule* with caster sugar.

[www.muzej-lapidarium.hr/2238-2](http://www.muzej-lapidarium.hr/2238-2)





## Bigoli in Salsa

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### INGREDIENTS

for the fresh pasta bigoli: 400 g flour 00, 4 medium-sized eggs, a pinch of salt

for the salsa: 8 anchovy fillets in oil, 45 g extra virgin olive oil,  
300 g onion, salt to taste

### Preparation of sauce:

In a large pan, cook the finely chopped onion until it becomes translucent, if necessary, adding a bit of hot water. Wash the anchovies under running water, make fillets removing the central and side bones and chop them into pieces. Add them into the pan on the sauteed onion and allow them to dissolve slowly and completely, adding pasta water until the sauce becomes well blended. Add pepper to taste.

### Preparation of fresh pasta bigoli:

Combine all the ingredients and knead the dough on the board for at least 10 minutes until it becomes soft and well blended. Shape into a ball and let it rest at room temperature for around 30 minutes. Once the dough has rested, divide it into smaller pieces and make bigoli using the machine. Lay the pasta flat on the board dusted with flour without touching and cook in lots of salted water. Put the drained bigoli into the pan with the previously prepared hot salsa. Combine making sure the pasta soaks up all sauce. Serve hot.

[ricette.giallozafferano.it/Bigoli-in-salsa.html](http://ricette.giallozafferano.it/Bigoli-in-salsa.html)

# Seppie alla veneziana

## Venetian Cuttlefish

### INGREDIENTS

1 kg fresh medium-sized cuttlefish	30 g onion	
	dry white wine	garlic
800 g yellow polenta	vegetable stock	parsley
150 g tomato puree	extra virgin olive oil	coarse salt

Clean the cuttlefish: pull off the tentacles and the head loose from the sack. Remove the beak from inside the arms and the innards, cut the ink sac and set aside. Wide open the body, remove the cuttlebone and the interior skin. Wash the cuttlefish under running water and cut into strips. Wash and chop the tentacles.

Put minced onion into the saucepan with 30 g oil, a garlic clove with skin, 10 g coarse salt, a minced parsley twig. Sauté for around 3 minutes. Add the cuttlefish and sauté for 3 minutes, add 1/2 glass of wine and cook for 2 more minutes. Finally, add the tomato puree, the cuttlefish ink sac and a tablespoon of vegetable broth. Cover and simmer for one hour and a half. Serve the cuttlefish with polenta and its thick sauce.

[www.lacucinaitaliana.it/ricetta/secondi/seppie-alla-veneziana](http://www.lacucinaitaliana.it/ricetta/secondi/seppie-alla-veneziana)



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# Bucolaj

(Marisa Šimunović, Vodnjan)

## INGREDIENTS

1 kg flour	lemon zest
20 dag sugar	6 eggs
15 dag oil	a splash of rum
6 dag yeast	a pinch of salt

Mix sugar and egg yolks, beat egg whites separately, set aside in a warm place, add the flour and knead the dough. Using pieces of dough, make circles with a ten-centimetre diameter, bake in the oven until golden brown.

Remove from the oven and sprinkle with sugar.

Vesna Medvedec Buršić: "Tradicionalna istarska jela – sezonska i blagdanska", Reprezent d.o.o., Račice, 2010





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