

off the fence.

Finding Little Italy

6 x 60'

EPISODIC BREAKDOWN

1. Liguria

Liguria is more than just a glamorous stretch of Riviera coastline; it is a land of picture-perfect villages, atmospheric ghost towns, elegant seaside gems and grandiose villas. Looking out to sea we will visit a varied selection of places starting with the opulent and ending in ruins. Bordighera, a classy 19th century resort where Monet painted and Queen Margherita - of pizza fame - used to summer; then to Alassio where Hitchcock found inspiration to film, Giorgio the chef cooks for us and we pop into a local sweet shop; then further still to the towers of Albenga and the postcard views of Cervo; and finally the ruins of Bussana Vecchia and its colony of artists. Liguria is a region rich in food but even richer in artists.

2. Toscana

The word Tuscany conjures images and ideas that no-one can deny. From the wines of Chianti to the great artistic cities of Florence and Siena, Tuscany is the most Italian of regions. But there's much more to it than that. In this episode we will drive through the UNESCO-protected Val d'Orcia to find a different Tuscany. In lieu of Chianti we will visit the eco-friendly Salcheto winery in the area's great Montepulciano region. After that we'll take to the road again to party with the locals at the Viareggio carnival, famous for its enormous papier-mâché floats. Then it's time to head north to the under-visited mountain region of Garfagnana. There we will pass the Scottish-flavoured town of Barga, cross the Bridge of the Devil and visit the smallest theatre in the world. Before our time runs out we'll also have time to take the vespa to the beautiful walled town of Lucca and even visit the house of Puccini.

3. Umbria

Umbria, the 'green heart of Italy', the 'wilder Tuscany', is an area not hindered by grand centres of tourism. This is little Italy in its purest form. An attractive region of hills and mountains stuffed to bursting with hidden treasures. In this episode we shall have a brief stop at the tallest man-made waterfall in Europe before exploring some of the area's towns. Orvieto, with its medieval centre and underground Etruscan ruins sets the stage. Following that we will see the picturesque towns of Spoleto and Todi before shooting north. We will end up in the gorgeous old hilltop village of Montone where we will meet up with the Vespa fan club and even TERRY GILLIAM's Umbria Film Festival.

4. Lazio

Lazio is more than just Rome. It is an ancient land of Etruscans and Romans, of burst open volcanoes and forgotten coliseums; Lazio is an enormous and complex region that comprises medieval castles, pretty villages and shimmering lakes. In this episode we shall discover the north of the region: a place rich in equal parts wildness and luxury. We will visit the twin fairytale villages of Civita de Bagnoregio and Calcata that are scarcely populated and are teetering on the brink of destruction. At Viterbo we will investigate the 13th century Papal Palace where the first Papal Conclave was held and find out why the provincial town was, for a time, the capital. After enjoying a tour of the small Roman town of Sutri we shall explore Lake Bracciano: its castles, villages, museums and vistas. There is even time to watch a local chef prepare us a regional favourite in his kitchen. After this episode when you hear the word Lazio, you'll never again think of Rome.

5. Emilia

What do Parma ham, parmesan cheese, balsamic vinegar and Bolognese sauce all have in common? They are all from the agricultural area of Emilia-Romagna, a vast region that hugs both the Apennine mountains and the Po Valley. In this episode we shall visit a traditional family-run vinegar factory near Modena and meet a cheesemaker to taste some parmigiano-reggiano cheese straight from the ageing shelves. As well as the food we will be taken around one of its handsome, but intimate, cities: Modena, place of theatres, palaces and UNESCO buildings. The quirky hilltop village of Dozza gleams in the sun with its tradition of painted walls and its bulging castle housing the regional wine centre whereas Comacchio, out east near the coast, presents a wholly unique image: a 'Little Venice' of canals and waterways lined with centuries-old fishermen houses and crumbling churches. Before leaving this region it would have been folly not to visit the region's two Ferrari museums and sample a little of life in the fast lane.

6. Piemonte

Piemonte is a land full of culinary riches. From arguably the finest Italian wines to those nuggets of delight, the truffles, this wealthy region is an epicurean's dream. In this episode we will visit the Langhe hills, which are covered in the vineyards that produce the country's legendary Barolo wine; experience the beauty of Barolo artisanal life and its viticulture heritage; hunt for truffles with one man and his dog; discover hidden pasta shops and palaces; and, before leaving, check out the Alba Truffle Festival and enjoy a hazelnut-inspired dish prepared by a Michelin Star chef. All this gastronomic wonder set amid a backdrop of undulating autumnal countryside and picturesque hilltop villages.