

WINE LOVERS, LISTEN UP! ITALY'S FRANCIACORTA REGION IS WORTH A VISIT

Don't miss the chance to tour this up-and-coming wine region, known for its sparkling wine and lush landscapes.



BY JAMIE MILES NOV 2, 2018



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There's something special about having the chance to discover something for yourself — whether it's food, wine, culture, history, a new city, or in my case, all of the above. So when I had the opportunity to visit Franciacorta to learn about this Italian wine region that I had (admittedly) never heard of before, I was enamored and immediately said yes faster than you could say “formaggio.”

Everyone knows Tuscany, but few travelers are well-versed in the wine region of Franciacorta. Nestled east of Milan in the province of Brescia, Lombardy, this destination is known to locals and savvy oenophiles for its Classical wine-making method, which involves secondary fermentation and extended aging, resulting in complex, dry sparkling varietals named after the region.

During a three-day trip to this gorgeous storybook region, I chatted with local vineyard owners, tasted many different varietals of the region's Franciacortas, explored the nearby city of Brescia, sampled gelato overlooking Lake Iseo, made homemade pasta true to Italian tradition, and lived off cheese, wine, and more cheese. If you read *Eat, Pray, Love*, you'll know exactly what I mean ...

Add this undiscovered wine region to your travel itinerary, and I promise you won't be disappointed. Here are five recommendations for your time in Franciacorta that will no doubt result in exciting stories from your adventures in northern Italy. As winemaker Ricci Curbastro shared with me while touring his family-owned vineyard: "Wine is an excellent excuse to tell stories around the table. The wine is why you are seated, but it's the stories that keep you there."

1. Learn How Franciacorta Wine Is Made

And by learn, we mean *taste*. There are 117 wineries in the region, ranging from small operations like Villa Franciacorta and Ricci Curbastro, located on a rustic family farm estate, to larger wine producers like Berlucchi, which is credited with creating the first Franciacorta varietal. At these vineyards, you can schedule a property tour and visit the cellars where you can see how the wine is made firsthand.

What amazed me was how much care and control there is in the cultivation and harvesting of the grapes to guarantee the quality of the wine. A distinctive secondary fermentation happens in the bottles, not in barrels, and many of the smaller vineyards actually rotate the bottles by hand (turning 45 degrees daily to get the yeast to form at the neck) during the minimum 18-month aging process. Learn about this process and look for a DOCG label on any Franciacorta bottles once back home — it guarantees the origin and controlled process.



2. Take a Guided Tour of Brescia

This entire area is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and as you tour, you'll learn that it's packed with history. The Capitolium temple, erected in 74 A.D., is a highlight that showcases original Roman ruins, including the remains of the historic Corinthian columns. Don't miss the Museum di Santa Giulia, one of the jewels of the region, where you'll find a vast collection of Roman portraits, bronze sculptures, frescoes, and artifacts dating back to prehistoric times.



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Brescia

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3. Make Homemade Pasta at Villa Calini

You know what they say: Teach a man to fish and he'll eat for life. Here's your opportunity to learn from the pasta-making masters and be able to not only learn alongside them, but eat all you've created! Villa Calini is family-owned, and everything (I mean everything) is made by hand using local ingredients, many of which were grown on the property. I helped make a delicious cheese and spinach ravioli, fresh pappardelle with tomato and basil sauce, and an apple cake for dessert. The best part? When you return home, you can recreate some of your favorite Italian dishes.

4. Explore Lake Iseo by Ferry

Iseo is the fourth largest lake in Italy, and while you likely won't have a George Clooney spotting (as you might on nearby Lake Como), you *will* feel like celebrity royalty touring this charming lake, which is surrounded by breathtaking mountains. The lake notably contains Monte Isola, the largest lake island in Europe, which you can see best while touring around by boat. Stay close by at the gorgeous L'Albereta, Relais & Chateaux where you can enjoy sweeping views of the water below.



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5. Dine at a Michelin-Starred Restaurant

You didn't come to Italy to calorie-count. Reserve a table at [Due Colombe](#), Franciacorta's 1-star Michelin restaurant located in the small town of Borgonato. Chef Stefano Cerveni offers a seasonal tasting menu starting at 75 euros (\$85) per person. Menu highlights include "psychedelic eel" and mouthwatering homemade pastas. Past diners have said this may be one of the best restaurants in all of Italy, so you know you're in for a treat! Save this for your last night in town to make it an extra memorable end to your trip.