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GUIDE TO ITALIAN MEAL COURSES AT A TRADITIONAL DINNER

written by [Franni Monari](#) | April 8, 2019

*From authentic street food to full nine-course meals, Italian cuisine includes some of the most exquisite dishes ever taste. However, there is actually a science behind the series of courses in a typical Italian meal. In this guide, we'll explore which **Italian meal courses** are served when, and what to expect at a traditional Italian dinner.*

In this blog, we'll cover:

[The best food tours we offer that will guide you through the art of Italian cuisine](#)

[What each course of a traditional Italian meal includes](#)

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spectacular food tours that will allow you to experience our favorite spots in each city. Want to go a step *further* and learn how to make local cuisine? Check out our new [Rome Walking Tour With Pasta Making Class and Lunch](#).

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Italian Dinner Culture

Before diving into the courses themselves, it's important to understand why dinner is taken so seriously in Italy. At family gatherings and especially holidays, dinner can last up to four hours or more. Traditional Italian dinners are a **no-phones-allowed ritual**. Families and friends can get together and enjoy the pleasure of each other's company. Italian dinners are long, and for good reason. As our CEO likes to say, "the beauty is in the process." **An Italian meal is an art**, with each course as a different step to create a finished and delicious product.

Aperitivo

Why do Italians eat dinner so late? When visiting Italy, you'll notice that locals don't typically eat dinner until 9 or 10 p.m. Restaurants typically don't even open until 7:30 or 8 p.m. Why? [Aperitivo](#)! Traditional Italians like to enjoy a casual drink and small plates before dinner to socialize with friends and family. At a traditional *aperitivo*, you will find yourself enjoying light drinks such as wine, prosecco and spritz as well as various nuts, cheeses and olives that are local to the region. Light crackers and cheese or plant-based dip are examples of some great items to feature in an aperitivo spread. Don't overindulge just yet, as you still have more courses to eat. Aperitivo can give you a tiny glimpse of the delectable meal that is to follow.

Appetizers: *Antipasti*

If you are a fan of meat and cheese, then **antipasto** is a perfect course for you. **Why is antipasto called antipasto?** Well, the word actually comes from the Latin prefix "anti" meaning "before" and root "**pastus**," meaning meal. So it quite literally translates to "**before meal**." This course is a little heavier than the aperitivo and often features a spread consisting of the best cheeses, meats and even vegetarian dips that the restaurant can offer. Salami, mortadella and prosciutto take their spots on the serving platter while cheeses like *Pecorino*, *Mozzarella* and *Parmigiano-Reggiano* assume their positions right alongside them. *Crostini* are often served and paired with bruschetta for added flavor. Some restaurants might have vegetarian options available, Balsamic Eggplant or Roasted Vegetable Bruschetta are both delicious choices that you should keep an eye out for.

Primi Piatti

Primi Piatti is the first official course in a **traditional Italian meal**. Pasta, Risotto, Soup, Polenta, Casserole...the “pastabilities” are endless when choosing what *primo* piatto you want to indulge in. By the time *primi* rolls around, you’re absolutely famished. You can tell, this course is definitely heavier than the first two but will be a little lighter than the *Secondi Piatti*. You may want to save yourself with your first course, but keep in mind, *secondi* is right around the corner. Luckily, you will have about 30 minutes between courses to get hungry again.

If you are interested in making your own pasta, we offer a [Rome Walking Tour with Pasta Making Class and Lunch](#). This tour offers you a walking tour of all the main landmarks in Rome and ends with a pasta making class. You’ll even enjoy a delicious lunch complete with pasta, wine and tiramisu.

Secondi Piatti

Secondi Piatti will feature different types of meat and fish. Sausage, veal, steak, rabbit, chicken and lamb are just a few mouthwatering examples of *secondi* that can be served at a typical Italian dinner. Italians will typically only eat gamey meats if you’re wondering how you eat an entire protein meal after a full plate of pasta, keep in mind that **Italian portions are small**. *Secondi* also is often a smaller portion than *primi*, and can be shared between people.

Contorni

Contorni is a side dish that is primarily served along with the *Secondi Piatti*. Some of the most popular *contorni* include chicken, Broccoli Romano, salad and potatoes. The two dishes are meant to balance each other out and together, become the perfect side that anyone can enjoy. *Contorni* is not a staple of the Italian meal, but definitely a great addition if you’d like to pair your *secondi* with a side.

Insalata

Insalata is exactly what it sounds like, salad. Although its name sounds predictable, its timing throughout the meal is definitely not. This salad is served after *Secondi e Contorni* and just consists of crisp, leafy greens dressed with a little oil and vinegar, a little bit of salt and pepper. Depending on the restaurant, this course will sometimes be omitted. However, if you get the opportunity to have *Insalata*, trying the seasonal greens from the region are always tasty, refreshing and worth it.

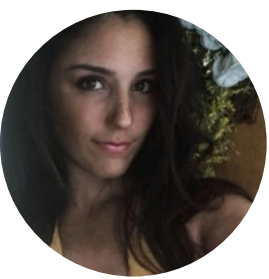
Dolce

Last but not least, any sweet tooth's favorite course is **Dolce**. You may recognize the term dolce from **La Dolce Vita**, a classic film. Dolce or dessert is usually the last course of an Italian meal, though sometimes you may be served a digestif. There are also Italian-American dessert traditions that do not fly over the in the motherland. For example, drinking cappuccino after dinner is a tourist's mistake. **Don't expect cannoli in restaurants**, but not to worry, tiramisu is popular in both Italian-American and **authentic Italian culture**. Tiramisu, panna cotta, tartufo, millefoglie are all delicious examples of desserts you can choose from.

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ITALIAN MEAL COURSES



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