

"Makes me want to pack my bag and follow Van Allen's alluring suggestions... she reveals an intimacy with Italy and a honed sense of adventure. *Andiamo!*"

— Frances Mayes, author of *Under the Tuscan Sun*

5th  
Edition

# 100 PLACES IN ITALY

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SUSAN VAN ALLEN



# 83

## *Cooking in Tropea- Calabria*

COOKING IN TROPEA IS TAKING THE straight shot into the rustic, generous spirit of the Calabria region, a treasured spot in the toe of Italy's boot.

The program was created by Tania Pascuzzi, an Australian-Italian whose parents were born in Calabria and then emigrated to Melbourne. Tania, who grew up around delicious Calabrian food, came to live in Tropea after fourteen years of high-pressure work as a New York stylist. She's a sophisticated woman, the type who looks glamorous even when she's wearing faded jeans.

Tropea is a beautiful school base. It juts out above the sea, a jumble of crumbling sandstone baroque buildings, tiny piazzas that look like opera sets. I'm staying in a seventeenth-century renovated palazzo, right off the main square. Inside is a modern surprise: a spacious suite, sleekly designed, with filmy taupe curtains and balconies where I can overlook the action in the piazza below.

The cooking program includes a food tour of Tropea, where with Tania by my side, everyone treats me like I'm part of *la famiglia*. This is hot red pepper territory. They're dried and tied up in garlands all over the place. They're minced up and made into *n'duja*, a spread that sizzles on the tongue or has me choking and gasping, depending on intensity.

"It's so much more than a cooking school," says Nicole Gait, a New Yorker, who went on the adventure with her husband. "The

week was about becoming a part of this authentic community, an experience we never would have had without Tania's guidance."

Guests rave about how Tania customizes their experiences to match their desires and the changing seasons. Along with cooking classes, she can add mushroom hunts, visits to award winning wineries and cheesemakers, a historic flour mill, or a fish auction. She can also arrange guided hikes by the seaside or in the mountains, painting classes, or you may find you've arrived in time for one of Calabria's many festivals for saints or harvests. All Tania's programs are set up at a leisurely pace, so there's time to relax on Tropea's beaches, which are praised as some of the best in Italy.

Genealogy tours, Tania tells me, are becoming increasingly popular. She enjoys escorting travelers to villages where their ancestors came from, so they can find their relatives' names in record books, and visit hidden cemeteries. Depending on how much background information a traveler can provide, it may be possible to find living relatives and make arrangements for memorable reunions.

The coastline offers beautiful opportunities for boating excursions with Tania's friend Francesco, who takes guests on fishing expeditions, dropping anchor at choice spots where they can swim or snorkel. Francesco doubles as a chef and will cook up the catch-of-the-day right on board, for a memorable lunch.

Hands-on classes take place in home kitchens with a range of teachers who passionately share Calabrese traditions. One day you'll be learning how to make the region's specialty pasta—*fileja*—a shape similar to *cavatelli* (or what Calabrian moms in New Jersey called "gavadeels"), while another class will be with Signora Anna teaching you to make a sweet tart, using the local honey and almonds.

Class at the agriturismo of Laura and Daniele is a beloved highlight of the week-long program. Students stroll around the 7-acre farm, picking grapes from the vineyards, vegetables from the

gardens, fruits from the trees, that are then incorporated into the day's recipes. An outdoor table is set up amidst all this beauty, with views of the vineyards and olive groves. Finally, course after course that celebrates the season is served, along with the generous, fun-loving spirit of Calabria.

## TOUR

**In Italy Tours** ([www.initalytours.com](http://www.initalytours.com)) offers cooking classes in Tropea and throughout Calabria.

## RECOMMENDED READING

*Cucina di Calabria: Treasured Recipes and Family Traditions from Southern Italy* by Mary A. Palmer

*My Calabria: Rustic Family Cooking from Italy's Undiscovered South* by Rosetta Costantino with Janet Fletcher