

Tuscan Food – Savoring Livorno’s Seaside Specialties

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Tuscan Food – Livorno Part III

The Best Dishes and Restaurants in Livorno

As a port city, Livorno’s dishes are heavily influenced by the sea, with techniques that are working class rather than refined. They reflect the city’s cosmopolitan yet populist history — a mélange of Tuscan food as well as Italian and international offerings, with a strong influence from Sephardic Jews who immigrated here in the early 1600s. For example, the use of [tomatoes in Italy](#) was brought by Jews who had learned about this fruit from Spanish explorers returning from the Americas.

Tuscan Food at Livorno's Central Market

[Livorno's Central Market](#), the largest enclosed food market in Italy, is the city's star attraction for foodies. You can even do a [Food and Market Tour](#) or a [Tuscan Food Cooking Class](#) here.



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The maximum experience for a visiting epicure is to reserve (ahead of time) a glass-enclosed private dining area smack in the middle of the art nouveau/art déco structure and enjoy a snack, a wine degustation, or a full meal. I and some friends were guests recently in one such private room, organized by Alle Vettovaglie, a group of passionate food and wine lovers from Livorno. (The name comes from the location, as the Central Market is also known as *Il Mercato delle Vettovaglie*, the victuals market). Their simple menu is based 60 percent on products from the market, and the rest from nearby suppliers.

Must Try Tuscan Foods

We sat at a civilized table and watched the life of the market go by, while feasting on two kinds of local bruschetta made from classic Tuscan

unsalted bread, a *tagliere* selection (two salamis, prosciutto, fresh and aged Pecorino), caiccucco (THE local fish soup), Tuscan wine, and three different desserts. The origins and preparation of each dish were explained to us by Fabio Baroncini, one of the founders of Alle Vettovaglie.

Had we been inclined, we could have organized a pasta-making class or a Tuscan wine tasting. All you have to do is ask, claims their website (www.allevettovaglie.com. If it is not yet in English, run it through google translate).

[>>Must try Tuscan Foods according to the Tuscan Tourism office](#)



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Cacciucco – Livorno’s Iconic Dish

The Central Market is not the only place to sample *cacciucco*, the city’s emblematic dish. You find it everywhere – thick like stew or thin like a soup, lively with pepper or blandly fishy. Locals claim that there must be five kinds of fish in *cacciucco*, just as there are five “c’s” in the name. {It is as hard to spell for Italians as for foreigners}. The fish stew was born as a way of using up fish that fishermen hadn’t sold at the end of the day. It may include squid, monkfish, octopus, cod, mussels, and *cicale di mare*

(mantis shrimp). It always includes garlic, wine, and red pepper. You will always need extra napkins when you are done.

The stew evokes not only Livorno's seagoing traditions but also its multinational roots: the word *cacciucco* comes from the Arab '*Kuçük*', meaning "small sizes". A city celebration called *Cacciucco Pride* is becoming a tradition every June, with three days of events, tastings, exhibits, and restaurants vying for the best version of the dish.

(www.cacciuccopridelivorno.it. Also requires google translate).



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Baccala alla Livornese & Riso Nero alla Livornese

Other seafood-centered dishes typical of Livorno are *baccalà alla Livornese* and *riso nero alla Livornese*. Baccalà is dried, salted cod, found all over Italy: the Livorno version is a simple one with sautéed fish smothered in a sauce of tomatoes, onion, garlic, and parsley. The cod is soaked before sautéing so it is not as salty as it sounds. The black color of the risotto comes from squid ink; other ingredients include sage, red onion, red pepper, and olive oil.

Cinque e Cinque

The number five appears in another typical dish of Livorno – *Cinque e Cinque*, or “five and five”. In the 1930s, a serving of bread was about five lire and a serving of pressed *ceci* beans (called a *torta di ceci*) was also five lire. The Livornesi began to ask for the *ceci* in a bread sandwich, requesting five lire’s worth of each, and the name was born. Today the snack is popular with teenagers and 20-somethings; you can find it in almost any city bar that offers snacks.

Ponce



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Bars here invariably offer another local specialty – *ponce*. (Think “punch” with an *e* at the end). This is a mixture of coffee and rum, served with a twist of lemon peel. Supposedly it originated when an American ship bound for Livorno encountered rough weather and its cargos of coffee and rum were mixed. The resulting drink was a big hit with sailors and locals alike and still is. Think coffee with quite a punch.

Coffee goes with nibbly things, and a typical nibble of Livorno is *roschette*, rings of flour, olive oil and water that are baked like little doughnuts but are not sweet. They originated with Jewish immigrants who separated meat and dairy foods in their kitchens.

Livorno is a great place to try some authentic Tuscan food. And while you could just spend your time eating all the delicious dishes of Livorno, there is a lot more to do in this charming seaside city. Read part I and part II of our Livorno mini-series.

Tuscan Food – Savoring Livorno’s Seaside Specialties was written and photographed by [Claudia Flisi](#). Her trip organized and partially sponsored by the [Tourism Board of Livorno](#).

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