

WESTWAYS

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA'S LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

Viva la Pasta!

Our reviewers pick their favorite local Italian restaurants

So maybe the brisk fall weather has you hankering for a slice of cheesy pepperoni pizza. Or perhaps the sight of Tony Soprano digging into a dish of baked ziti makes you want to run to your local trattoria. Or maybe nothing makes you happier than the perfect tiramisu. Never fear. Here in the Southland, we have more than our share of great Italian eateries. These are some of our recommendations:

San Diego

In San Diego County, you can eat *bolognese* sauce all over town without staining your shirt in precisely the same shade twice. At least the stains would be stylish at **Sante** (7811 Herschel Avenue, La Jolla; 858-454-1315), restaurateur Tony Buonsante's elegant, somewhat extravagant downtown La Jolla eatery, where the earthy bolognese sauce gilds plump ricotta ravioli. The bar and two sheltered terraces offer greater intimacy than the formal dining room, but any setting is ideal to enjoy such starters as marinated duck breast with caramelized onions or mussels simmered in marinara sauce. And although the entrée list highlights such luxuries as double-cut lamb chops dressed with pancetta and sage, the pasta list shines with such offerings as quail-stuffed ravioli in a savory shiitake mushroom sauce and, even better, a toss of eggy *pappardelle* noodles with zucchini, fontina, and truffle oil.

Seasonal cuisine is also a hallmark of **Via Italia** (4705-A Clairemont Drive, San Diego; 858-274-9732), a much less dressy but distinctly delightful trattoria located a few steps from a multiplex theater in bustling Clairemont Square. Essentially two restaurants in one, Via Italia caters to moviegoers with an inexpensive but excellent menu of pizzas and simple pastas and to serious diners with a changed-nightly gourmet menu that

may include fettuccine topped with Maine lobster in brandy sauce, pot roast-filled ravioli in a creamy truffle sauce, grilled fresh tuna served on a crunchy celery salad, and lamb chops sautéed with porcini mushrooms.

Via Italia's spaghetti bolognese probably is the best in town, although this claim might be disputed by the proprietors of **Antica Trattoria** (5654 Lake Murray Boulevard, La Mesa; 619-463-9919), a modest but thoroughly Old World restaurant. A pungent garlic sauce accompanies the *frittura mista*, a "mixed fry" that combines tender-crisp shrimp, baby squid, and artichoke hearts. A somewhat lighter appetizer features slices of fresh mozzarella, roasted portobello mushrooms, and bell peppers piled over a jumble of organic greens. At Antica Trattoria, the delicately flavored bolognese stars as filling and sauce for an exceptional lasagna, one of a long list of pastas that includes linguine with a quartet of shellfish, farfalle with salmon and asparagus in a creamy sauce splashed with vodka, and the elegant

fettuccine montanara mixed with meats, Madeira sauce, and goat cheese. Among notable entrées are roasted pork loin in Barolo wine sauce and sea bass with lemon and capers. —DAVID NELSON