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A Regional Italian Food Journey to Expo Milano 2015

Journey through northern Italy on a food adventure with Chef to Chef

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Courtesy of Chef to Chef

Guests who followed the "sea route" of the journey to Expo were treated to meals created by internationally renowned chefs from the Chef To Chef organization.

Highly anticipated around the world, this year's Expo Milano 2015 is most certainly one of the largest food events in history. Centered on themes of **sustainability** and feeding the world's growing population in the future, this world's fair hopes to bring new technologies and ideas about food to the forefront of the world's attention.

Participating countries have also used Expo 2015 as an opportunity to promote tourism, educate the rest of the world about their national heritage, and, of course, show off some of the best **food** their country has to offer.

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As one might imagine, with 145 countries, numerous food producers, restaurants, companies, and food organizations participating in the event, it's easy for a single group to get lost in the sheer size of it all. Well aware of this issue, one organization, Chefs of Emilia-Romagna Culinary Association (also known as Chef To Chef) decided to think way outside the box when preparing their contribution for the Expo. Rather than purchasing an expensive space and building a restaurant or display at the Expo, the association instead decided to organize a culinary journey through the heart of the Emilia-Romagna region of **northern Italy** that would culminate at the Expo.

Massimo Spigaroli, executive chef of **Michelin-starred** restaurant Antica Corte Pallavicina Relais in Italy and the President of Chef to Chef, told The Daily Meal, "It would be silly to take space in the Expo and start cooking among millions of people. It was much better and [more] intelligent to organize something along the route [to the expo] with small stops."



Courtesy of Chef to Chef

The Stradivari is one of two ships that participated in the Chef To Chef culinary journey.

The planned culinary journey consisted of three routes that visitors could follow, which ended up covering a great deal of the Emilia-Romagna region. Along each route were a number of stops where one could taste **local food** prepared by esteemed chefs, listen to culinary talks, discover local ingredients and producers, and even see live cooking demonstrations. All three routes began in Rimini in August and then went their separate ways for over a month of travel.

The first route was 'by sea'. Two **ships**, the Principessa and the Stradivari, each with room for about 100 passengers, traveled the Adriatic Sea and along the Po River. Both ships docked at several harbors along the way, all located in the Emilia-Romagna region. Each stop along the sea routes featured a gourmet meal prepared by various chefs from the Chef to Chef association.

The second route was by land, and followed Via Emilia, an ancient Roman road running from Rimini on the Adriatic coast, to Piacenza. The route along the Via Emilia featured a number of stops in the major cities that the road runs through, including the best-known Bologna, Modena, and Parma. Those following the Via Emilia were treated to samples served from **food trucks**, wine-tasting events, and live talks on topics such like well-being.



Antica Corte Pallavicina

Chef Massimo Spigaroli, President of Chef To Chef, is shown with traditionally cured culatello, a delicacy of Parma and the surrounding areas of Emilia-Romagna.

The third route of the journey followed Alta Via dei Parchi, a mountain trail. Visitors were able to hike the entire trail through the mountains and attend all events or stop in for a single event along the way. Chef to Chef members, local inhabitants of villages in the Apennines, and the Slow Food Emilia-Romagna organization participated in the events along the trail. Visitors had opportunities to taste local produce, learn about local **food traditions**, and more.

Chef to Chef made a point to emphasize local ingredients and food styles from each of the areas visited along the three routes. The Emilia-Romagna region's crown jewels of food, Parmigiano-Reggiano; traditionally produced balsamic vinegar; and the cured meats of Parma such as coppa, **salami**, and pancetta; were certainly well represented at the events. However, the association also sought to highlight lesser-known products that are still true to the Emilia-Romagna region. "It was one of my main tasks to discover very important products not sustained by the consortium, to be discovered by the regular person," Chef Spigaroli said.

For example, one chef who participated in the project, Chef Andrea Incerti Vezzani, of Ristorante Cà Matilde, was tasked with reinterpreting a traditional local dish and transforming it into a modern food truck item that could be served in the main squares of the cities along the route. He worked with **rabbit**, an ingredient commonly used in Reggio Emilia, the region the chef is from. The creative chef ended up serving a rabbit hotdog topped with an onion and traditional balsamic vinegar marmalade, mustard, and aromatic herbs. Chef Incerti Vezzani told The DailyMeal that initially local residents were "a bit scared, but also quite curious, and excited" to try a dish so outside of their normal repertoire.



Courtesy of Chef to Chef

Food carts outside of Casa degli Atellani e Vigna di Leonardo before guests attending the Chef to Chef gala to arrive.

A gala for about 200 people involved in the event and VIPs took place on September 21st at Casa degli Atellani e Vigna di Leonardo, a home and vineyard once owned and maintained by Leonardo da Vinci himself. A stunning location to hold a party, the **vineyard** was a gift from Duke Ludovico Sforza of Milan to da Vinci in 1498.

Over the centuries, the original grape vines that Da Vinci had cultivated had died out. However, recently the University of Agricultural Sciences in Milan was able to bring back the original **grapes** that Da Vinci grew from a preserved sample. The house itself was also recently restored. The grand opening of the restored house and vineyard was timed to coincide with Expo 2015 and the Chef to Chef Gala. Also notable about the location is that the Last Supper, one of da Vinci's most famed paintings, is housed in the nearby Basilica of Santa Maria delle Grazie.

From Rimini to the final gala, the Chef to Chef journey has been lauded as a huge success both by participants and visitors. Chef Spigaroli was extremely pleased with how the event turned out, saying that the journey was "something I've been thinking about for a long time. Without the Expo I might not have realized my dream!" The chef has already begun planning for a similar event next year, as he feels Emilia-Romagna still has so much in its rich food traditions to offer the world. "Under each bell tower there is a different flavor," he said. "We're just waiting for people to arrive!"

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