

13. VENETO

A CULINARY VOYAGE

By Sara Hauman & Jordan Mackay

If you assign Italian regions to the zodiac, the Veneto is a water sign. After all, it has Venice, the world's most aqueous city, not to mention the Po River delta and Garda, Italy's largest lake. But Veneto's personality fits too: Water signs have been described - by Glamour magazine, no less - to be "cautious and seek comfort" and need to be "surrounded by the right people ... and ultimately consuming the right things (media, food, conversations)."

Consider the aperitivo, one of the Veneto's great gifts to the world, where people gather to imbibe a low-alcohol spritz or glass of bubbles. Yes, it's an elegant ritual. But the Venetians are wary, insular folk - they keep their own language, are famous for masks, and built a city on water to escape people they didn't like. Thus, in social situations, it's helpful to lead with a smidge of alcohol to loosen apprehensions. A slight bitterness to stimulate the appetite doesn't hurt either, hence the recipe here for the refreshing amaro Spritz and some classic cicchetti - Venetian bar snacks.

To be fair, Venetians' social anxiety is understandable. Venice was constructed in a lagoon to avoid barbarians destroying their villages. Even today, Venice is besieged by savages - its meager 70,000 residents receive some 30 million tourists each year.

Italy's eighth largest region lies in the far northeast of the country, a historical highway that has forced them to deal with everyone from the Celts and Romans to the Austrians and Napoleon. While the Veneto's Po Valley is a massive fertile breadbasket, the creation of Venice spurred a maritime republic that dominated the Mediterranean for a thousand years. During this period, the Venetians became crafty politicians, diplomats, and traders who brought great wealth to the region, as reflected in the sumptuous villas and palazzi that decorate not only Venice but the glitzy shores of Lake Garda.

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When it comes to food and drink, Veneto's legacy expresses its liquid side. Unsurprisingly, the Veneto is known for some of Europe's greatest seafood since it exists on and in the Adriatic Sea. Aperol, the beating heart of the spritz and aperitivo culture, was created here in 1919. The Veneto's Po Valley produces much of the rice that becomes its celebrated risotto.

Not only is the rice grown in watery bogs, but Venetians prefer a looser, more liquid style of risotto. And, finally, less felicitously, the Veneto produces, ahem, oceans of wine. Yes, this is the source of many Italian wines that have dotted many restaurant wine lists: Valpolicella, Soave, Pinot Grigio, and Prosecco. We love the sublime examples of them as well as the steakhouse favorite Amarone. So, to accompany this authentic and representative Venetian menu, consult your local wine shop professional and seek out the outstanding white and red wines from Veneto and without fail, any of the brisk, bracing wines from Massican, will be a perfect match for every dish.

Once you have drained the last sip of your spritz and dusted your fingertips of the salty snacks, it's time for the classic appetizer *Sarde e Saor*, which contrasts fried, fresh sardines with tart vinegar and sweet sautéed onions and raisins. In the Venetian language, "saor" means both "savor" and represents a preservation technique - so it's crucial to let this dish coalesce in the fridge for a day or two before serving.

Next up, *Risi e Bisi* - rice and peas - is a form of risotto. This is best in early summer when peas are in season, but it can be made anytime with fresh ingredients, as the broth is ingeniously made with the pea pods. Venetians like their risotto on the soupy side, so tightening it up is unnecessary before serving.

The protein course, scallops, is a small plate, so please feel free to serve it before or beside the risotto. The preparation in Venice is intentionally simple to show off the Adriatic's sumptuous scallops, so shop for as plump, fresh versions as you can find.

You will surely enjoy this classic Venetian menu even if you are not born under a water sign. But considering inviting a Pisces, Cancer, or Scorpio to dinner - you'll be sure to garner some good karma.

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ABOUT OUR AUTHORS

Chef Sara Hauman's career is sprinkled with culinary accolades: Eater Young Gun, Zagat 30 under 30, and Bravo Top Chef contestant. Having cooked in kitchens from Spain's famed Asador Etxebarri to San Francisco's Octavia, she now resides in Portland, OR.

Jordan Mackay is a James Beard award-winning writer covering wine, spirits, and food. He has written for the New York Times, San Francisco Chronicle, and Food & Wine magazine. Jordan has penned countless books including Secrets of the Sommeliers, The Atlas of Taste, Franklin Barbecue, Franklin Steak, and the recently released Maison Premiere Almanac.



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OUR VENETO DINNER PARTY MENU

Serves 6-8

1. Snacks: CICCHETTI
2. Appetizer: SARDE IN SAOR
3. Primo: RISI E BISI
4. Main Course: VENETIAN BAY SCALLOPS



13. VENETO

CICCHETTI

Serves 6-8 people

Warm Marinated Olives (about 1 pint)

Ingredients:

- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 Tbsp red wine vinegar
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 lemon
- 1 Tbsp fresh rosemary, chopped
- 1 tsp. red chili flakes
- 2 cups mixed olives, drained

Preparation:

1. Heat the oil, vinegar, garlic, and bay leaf in a small pot on low heat for 15-20 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, place the rosemary, chili flakes and olives into a jar or reusable storage container with a lid while the oil is warming.
3. Once the oil is fragrant and ready, add the olive mixture and warm through.
4. Plate the olives and let cool to room temperature.
5. You can store the olives in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks, warming gently before serving.

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CICCHETTI

Serves 6-8 people

Mixed Nuts

Ingredients:

- 2 cups mixed whole nuts (almonds, cashews, pecans, and walnuts make a great mix)
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tsp. dried oregano
- 1 tsp. fresh thyme, chopped
- ¼ tsp. paprika
- ¼ tsp. garlic powder
- ½ tsp. flaky sea salt

Preparation:

1. Preheat the oven to 350F.
2. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and add the mixed nuts, then toast until golden brown. This will take approximately 8-12 minutes, rotating and checking every 4 minutes.
3. While the nuts are roasting, add the rest of the ingredients to a medium-sized bowl and stir to combine.
4. When the nuts have finished roasting, remove them from the oven and immediately place them into the bowl with the herbs and spices.
5. Toss to combine and then serve at room temperature.
6. The nuts can be stored in an airtight container for up to two weeks, warming gently before serving.

Other Snacks

- Include your favorite potato chips, assorted Italian salumi and fresh, crusty bread.
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CICCHETTI

Serves 6-8 people

To Drink: Amaro Spritz

Ingredients:

- 2 oz. of Amaro (Italian Bitters such as Campari or Cynar), Aperol, or your favorite white wine
- 3 oz. of Prosecco (sparkling Italian wine)
- 1 oz. of club soda
- Orange slice

Preparation:

1. Fill a large wine glass with ice.
2. Add the amaro, Aperol, or wine, and the Prosecco.
3. Top with soda water, stir briefly to combine.
4. Garnish with the orange slice and serve.

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SARDE E SAOR

Serves 6-8 people

Ingredients:

- ½ cup dry white wine
- ¼ cup golden raisins
- ¼ cup good olive oil
- 1 small onion, sliced thin
- 1/3 cup white wine vinegar
- ¼ cup pine nuts, toasted
- 6-8 sardines, cleaned and fileted
- ¼ cup flour
- Vegetable oil
- Sea salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

Ingredients for serving:

- Fresh parsley leaves
- Fresh bread

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SARDE E SAOR

Serves 6-8 people

Preparation:

1. Warm the wine in a pot on the stove to simmering, then pour over the raisins and let soak for at least 10 minutes.
2. Heat the olive oil in a large pan.
3. Add the onions to the oil and cook on low to medium heat for about 20-25 minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Toast the pine nuts in a non-stick pan on the stove top for 4-5 minutes.
5. Once the onions are caramelized and soft, add the onions to the soaked raisins and wine, along with the vinegar and toasted pine nuts.
6. Stir to combine, then set aside.
7. Heat a large pan with about ½" vegetable oil to medium heat.
8. Pat the sardine filets with a paper towel to remove any excess water, then dip them into the flour.
9. Shake off excess flour then transfer to the hot oil and fry the sardines for about 1-2 minutes on each side or until golden brown.
10. Remove the sardines and place onto a paper towel to drain the excess oil.
11. Season the sardines with salt and black pepper.
12. Transfer the sardines to a storage container that will allow them to lay flat in a single layer.
13. Pour the onion mixture over the sardines and then refrigerate for at least 24 hours before serving.
14. To serve, arrange the sardines on a plate with fresh parsley leaves and fresh, crusty bread.

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RISI E BISI

Serves 6-8 people

Ingredients:

- 2 lbs. English peas in their pods
- 1 Tbsp good olive oil
- 6-8 thin slices pancetta
- ¼ cup butter
- 1 small, sweet onion, diced small
- 2 cups arborio rice
- 1 cup parmesan cheese, finely grated
- Sea salt as needed

Ingredients for serving:

- Black pepper
- Zest of 1 lemon
- ¼ cup parsley, chopped finely

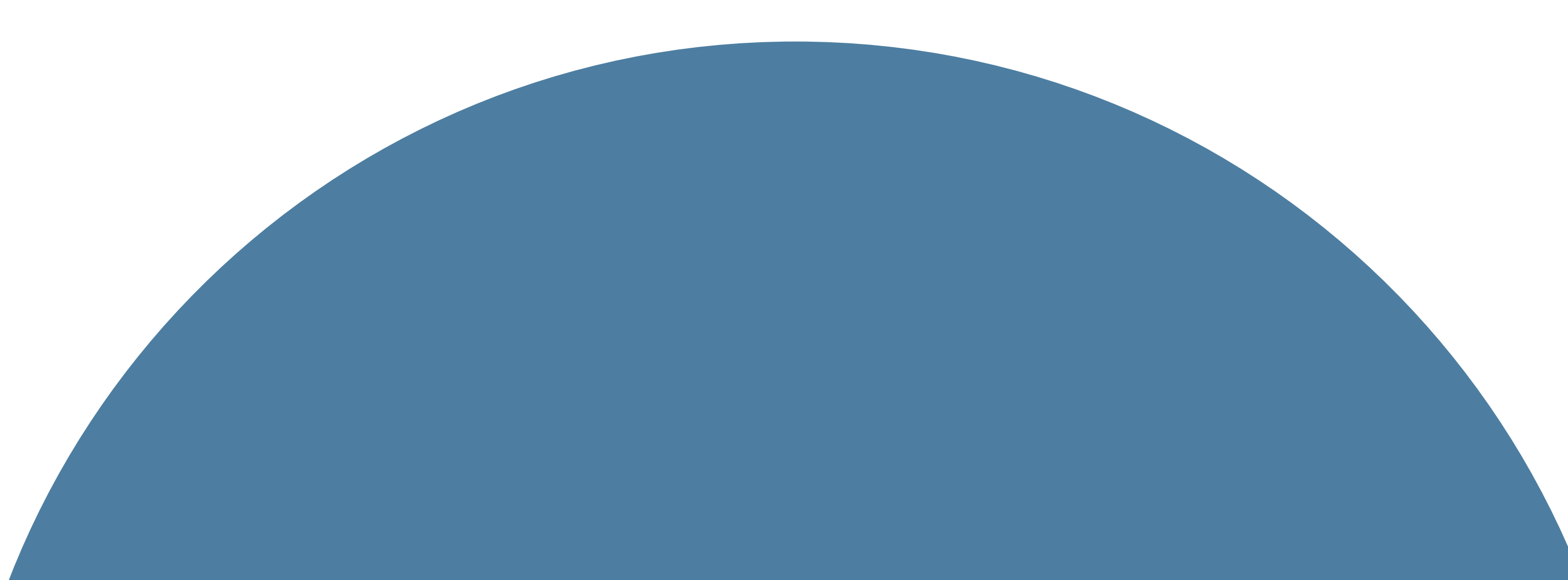


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RISI E BISI

Serves 6-8 people

Preparation:

1. Shell the peas, reserving both peas and pea pods.
 2. Boil the pods in 6 cups of water with a pinch of salt for about 15 minutes.
 3. Transfer the pods and water to a blender and process for 1-2 minutes.
 4. Strain the liquid through a fine-meshed sieve to remove the fibrous bits.
 5. Reserve the pea stock.
 6. In a large, heavy-bottomed pot, heat the olive oil.
 7. Add the slices of pancetta and fry until golden brown and crispy. Remove the pancetta to cool on a paper towel to remove excess oil.
 8. In the same heavy-bottomed pot, add the butter and let it melt on medium heat.
 9. Once the butter has melted, add the diced onion and a pinch of salt, and cook on medium heat for about 5-6 minutes or until the onions are translucent.
 10. Add the rice to the pot and stir to coat each grain with fat.
 11. Add in 4 cups of the pea broth and bring the mixture to a simmer.
 12. Continue to simmer the rice, stirring occasionally for 10-12 minutes, adding more broth as needed. The rice should be al dente and more reminiscent of a thick soup than a risotto.
 13. Add the fresh peas and cook the rice for another 5-6 minutes.
 14. Remove from the heat and stir in the parmesan, seasoning with salt as desired.
 15. To serve, ladle the risi e bisi into a bowl, grind fresh black peppercorn over the top, and sprinkle with freshly chopped parsley and lemon zest.
 16. Finally, place the reserved crispy pancetta on top.
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13. **VENETO**

VENETIAN BAY SCALLOPS

Serves 6-8 people

Ingredients:

- 4 oz. day-old bread
- ½ cup olive oil plus 2 Tbsp
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tsp. red chili flakes
- 1 Tbsp tomato paste
- 2 lbs. bay scallops
- 1 splash of dry white wine
- Sea salt
- ¼ cup fresh parsley, chopped
- Zest of 1 lemon



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VENETIAN BAY SCALLOPS

Serves 6-8 people

Preparation:

1. Cut the bread into small pieces, then pulse in a food processor until small breadcrumbs form.
2. Add ½ cup olive oil to a large pan along with the breadcrumbs.
3. Cook on medium heat, frying the breadcrumbs until they are crispy and golden brown. This will take about 6-8 minutes.
4. Remove the breadcrumbs from the pan, drain them from the oil, and reserve.
5. Heat the remaining oil in the pan with the garlic, red chili flakes, and tomato paste.
6. Cook this mixture for 2-3 minutes or until fragrant.
7. Add the scallops and a few pinches of sea salt.
8. Cook the scallops for 2-3 minutes, stirring frequently.
9. Add a splash of the wine and allow it to cook off rapidly, 1 minute.

To serve:

- Arrange the scallops with all the pan juices onto a plate.
 - Season with sea salt, sprinkle the fried breadcrumbs evenly over the top and then garnish with chopped parsley and lemon zest.
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