



BRESCIA AND FRANCIACORTA: THE AREA TO DISCOVER

by Sonia Graupera

Three years ago I spent an evening in Milano drinking some good wines with some good friends. One of the bottles was a delicious red wine "Terre di Franciacorta", and I had no clue where this was. I was informed it's an area around Brescia and Lake Iseo. I decided to spend in the future some days in this unknown area and discover these fascinating tastes: www.bresciatourism.com

I made it last month and I spent 5 days in Brescia and the surroundings. I stayed at the heart of the ancient Brixia at the wonderful Albergo Orologio (www.albergoorologio.it) my headquarters. Every street abounds in historical buildings, that were built in different ages but whose styles combine to create a harmonious whole.

City of Art is a continuous discovery. Around the Roman Temple stands the largest archaeological site in northern Italy. The beautiful Santa Giulia Monastery houses the City Museum: unique in its design and location - a monastic complex of Lombard foundation - and with display areas covering 14,000 m², offers a journey through Brescia's history, art and spirituality from prehistoric times to the present day: The Benedictine convent of San Salvatore - Santa Giulia was founded in 753 by the last Lombard king, Desiderius. The site is composed of parts from many different epochs. The complex was built on the ruins of impressive Roman town houses and includes the Lombard church of San Salvatore and its crypt, the Romanesque Santa Maria in Solario, the Nuns' Choir, the sixteenth-century church of Santa Giulia and the monastery cloisters. One of the surprises Santa Giulia has to offer is the Winged Victory, the city's symbol, which is a large bronze statue from Capitolium, www.museiarte.brescia.it (another official website is www.bresciamusei.com, which also has the English version).

And outside Brescia, crossing the Franciacorta wine area I visited lake Iseo: It is in the north of the country in the Val Camonica area, the lake is almost equally divided between the Provinces of Bergamo and Brescia. The lake itself, is said to be one of the deepest in Europe. In the middle of the lake is Monte Isola the largest island of any lake in southern Europe. It's the pearl of the Lake Iseo it is only possible to circulate by bike (which you can rent on the island) or by the communal bus: www.cooptur.it

What made me feel attracted by this area at the very beginning were the Brescian cuisine and Franciacorta wines which have many different facets: respectful of traditions, but able to renew itself. The reason is simple: the fresh local ingredients are excellent and are prepared with careful attention to their specific nature. Lakes Garda, Iseo and Idro offer different varieties of lake fish, prepared in thousands of ways and proposed with local wines. Cheese, meat and game dishes are typical of mountain areas, characterised by several small farms. The plain offers delicious cheese, cured meats and home-made soups and pasta. Every dish is always accompanied by a yellow, steaming polenta (taragna, consa or pasticciata). The typical desserts bosolà and persicata are simple and tasty.

Among local products, it is worth mentioning extravirgin olive oil from Lake Garda, do not miss the one from Montecroce: www.frantoiomontecroce.it. Cheese: Try Brescia's Robiola lightly brushed with olive oil, or Salva and Silter, delicious eaten with honey or sweet mustards. Try the flavour of some Taleggio or the worldwide famous Grana Padano, Provolone Valpadana, Quartirolo and Gorgonzola or the renowned Bagoss. You can find a magnificent cheese buffet for lunch or dinner at the Agriturismo Spia d'Italia: www.spiaitalia.it

And of course the wines which are an a part item by itself: There are many DOC wines: Botticino, Capriano del Colle, Terre di Franciacorta, Garda Classico, Lugana, Gropello, San Martino della Battaglia. But excellence is

Franciacorta is first an area, located between Lake Iseo and the city of Brescia, in the northern Italian region of Lombardy. It is also the name given to the sparkling wines made by the classic method of a second fermentation in bottle. In this most industrialized and prosperous region of Italy, it's a surprise to find Lombardy's sanctuary of sparkling wine, made from grapes grown on the rolling Alpine foothills in vineyards that share gentle slopes with villas, manors, castles, abbeys, farms and livable towns.

The northern Italian climate is happily tempered by the immense body of water in the basin of Lake Iseo and by the air currents descending from the neighboring Camonica Valley. Adding to the area's desirability are the morainic hills, generated millions of years ago by the movement of glaciers. Here is made of pebbles, silt and sand; it is a light and perfectly drained soil, ideal for grape vines. It also means that each variety of grape and each vineyard of the DOCG area have been harvested separately, after having been cultivated by organic methods. And that the grapes have been picked rigorously by hand and then kept whole in small containers until the time for crushing. The new norms establish the longest and most exacting process of elaboration in bottle of any of the world's classified sparkling wines.

How does it taste? Pale yellow colour, abundant froth, very persistent and fine sparkle, fragrant and intense bouquet of white flowers, (hawthorn, lime blossom) and fruit (white peach, pineapple...). Full fresh and occasionally acidulous flavour with a bitter fruit aftertaste. Just delicious!

Beside this, we find in the area of Franciacorta, as well non sparkling red or white wine called "Terre di Franciacorta" predominantly cabernet franc and cabernet sauvignon mixed with small quantities of barbera, nebbiolo and merlot. Bright red when young, it develops into a deeper garnet red with age. Aged in the bottle for one or two years or longer for the vintage. And the Terre di Franciacorta white, predominantly chardonnay mixed with pinot blanc to produce a refreshingly delicate wine. Matured and aged in the bottle. I visited www.bersiserlini.it and www.ilmosnel.com

The strada del Franciacorta (Franciacorta Road), is a fascinating wine tourism route begins just outside Brescia and continues to the shores of Lake Iseo, skirting the vineyards over rolling hills studded with stately homes, castles, ancient villages and monasteries. Indeed, this substantially unique territory is ideal both for relaxing holidays to discover new tastes and of course for corporate meetings: <http://www.stradadelfranciacorta.it/>

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reached with the Franciacorta DOCG spumante, whose quality and flavour have long been celebrated by experts all over the world. The three Brescian wine routes propose interesting excursions in the province to discover history, culture, art and flavours: Strada del Franciacorta, Strada dei Vini e dei Sapori del Garda, Strada del Vino Colli dei Longobardi.

