


Food specialities
from
Sardinia





DURUM
WHEAT





“Seated in a circle, on the ground, the guests ate from wooden dishes or platters of cork: for cutlery they used razor-sharp knives and nothing else. Rather than wine, honey which had cooled but not completely, acted as accompaniment to the meal; in it they dipped the white slices of fresh cheese, the grilled cheese patties, lettuce, bread and even meat.”

G. Deledda

Extract from her novella “The Tree Murderer”

HISTORICAL NOTES

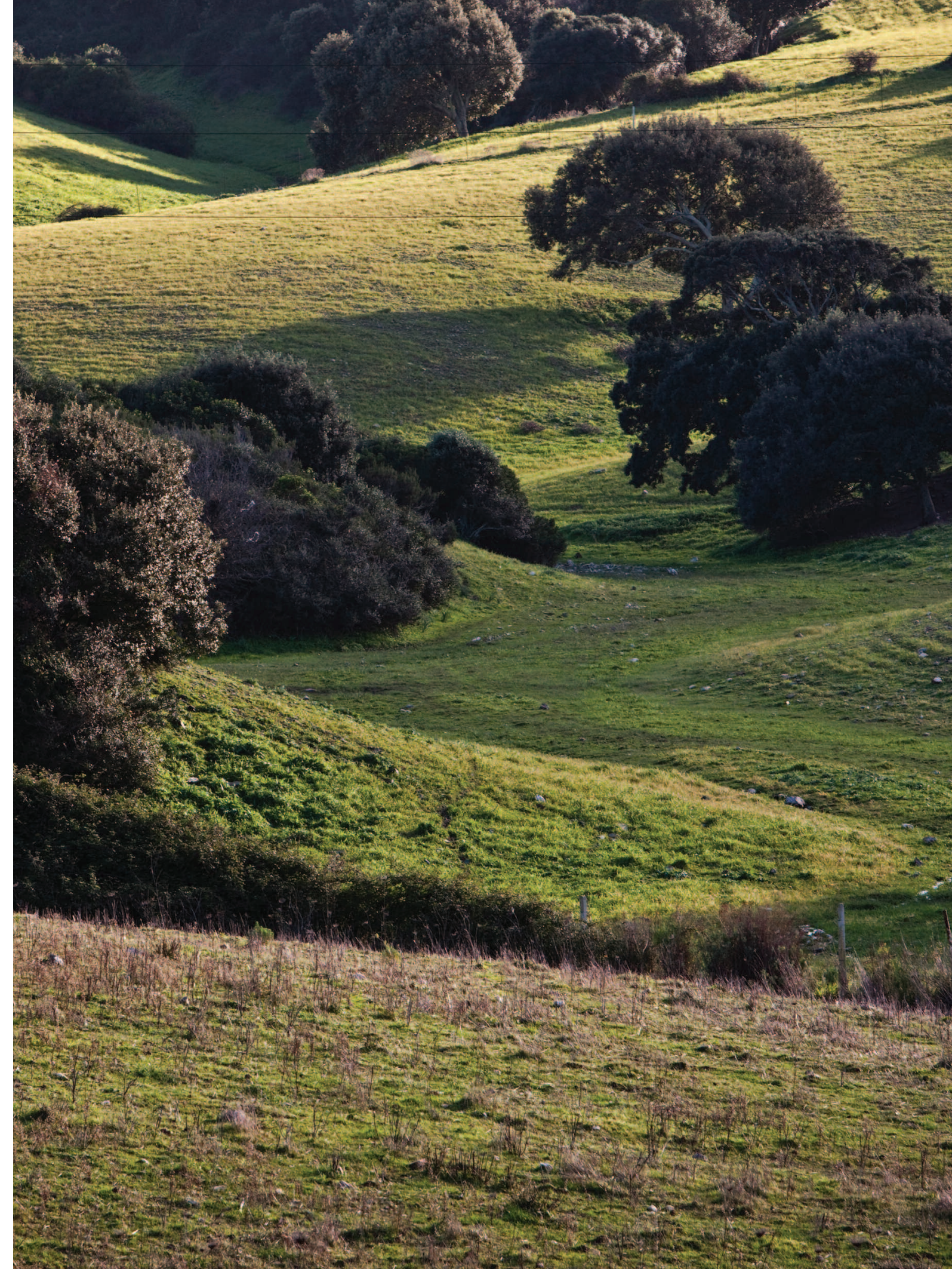
For many centuries, Sardinia maintained its identity in the face of the invaders from the sea, defending and preserving its most authentic values.

From the dawn of its history, Sardinia was a favourite port of call for the mariner peoples who sailed the Mediterranean in search of raw materials and new trading opportunities. For many centuries, the long-inhabited island confronted these raiders preserving its identity. While the islanders did come under the cultural influence of the seafaring peoples to a certain extent, they also managed to defend and maintain their most authentic values, while enriching them and thus creating a multiform, extensive heritage of knowledge, customs and traditions.

Tangible signs of this capacity for self-preservation are to be found in the island's natural, social and cultural environment which over the centuries has maintained characteristics of great uniqueness. In the collective imagination, Sardinia evokes ancient memories, sensations, scents, gestures and sounds shaped over time, which have survived and come down to us intact. This strong sense of identity is to be found in its material culture, its food, its ancient rites and rituals and in the traditions which the Sardinians continue to preserve with untiring, rigorous fidelity.

The territories of Sardinia, with their great cultural heritage, have withstood the challenge of globalization. Vineyards, olive groves and pasturelands dot the landscape, bearing witness to the hard work and passion of the local people and shaping the identity of this land. In an age in which the pressure of consumerism entices us towards industrial products all similar as to shape, colour and flavour, on this island – at times harsh but more often hospitable and generous – there are still elements of a specifically local nature, which mark it out unmistakably. They include our raw-milk cheeses, wines made from native grape varieties, our extra-virgin olive oils, our monofloral honeys, special artistic bread and loaves prepared for high days and holidays, our hand-made sweets and pastries and all those products which are the fruit of wise and patient labour and which indeed become an art form faithful to tradition.







OLIVES AND EXTRA-VIRGIN OLIVE OILS

The olive tree, in the same way as the wild olive, grows all across the island and is a fascinating and widespread feature of its landscape. Olive groves in Sardinia cover in all more than 40,000 hectares, including mixed and single growth, on both the plains and hilly areas, under varying soil and climate conditions. Regional olive production, in excess of 500,000 quintals, is dedicated almost exclusively to the production of extra-virgin olive oil, with an average annual yield of about 90,000 quintals. Although olive groves are found throughout the island, they tend to concentrate in certain districts.

In the countryside round Cagliari there are three main areas of olive cultivation: the Parteolla, around Dolianova; Monte Linas around Gonnosfanadiga and Villacidro, and the Sulcis. The varieties most commonly cultivated, yielding both olive oil and table olives, are the *Tonda di Cagliari*, the *Nera di Gonnos*, the *Nera di Villacidro* and the *Pitz'e Garroga*. Excellent extra-virgin olive oils come from these varieties, with slightly fruity olive flavours and mild taste, especially well-matched with delicate-flavour dishes and fish recipes.

In northern Sardinia, the Sassari area sees the predominance of the *Bosana* variety which is also the most common in Sardinia. Here, the two main olive-growing areas are the Nurra, between the cities of Alghero and Sassari, and the territories of Ittiri, Sorso and Sennori, where major processing and marketing operations have also developed. The extra-virgin olive oil from these areas has the characteristic *Bosana* flavour: an intense, fruity note with grassy hints, fresh, slightly bitter, tangy and with notes of artichokes and cardoons. The inner areas of the Barbagia, Baronia, Marghine and Planargia districts are also marked by the cultivation of the *Bosana* variety and to a lesser extent the by *Nera di Oliena* or *Ogliastrina*. The oils from these areas are intensely fruity, with a bitter, tangy flavour and overall grassy notes.



Olive groves in Sardinia cover in all more than 40,000 hectares, including mixed and single growth, on both the plains and hilly areas, under varying soil and climate conditions.

*A Lampadas tràmula ebbia,
a Nadale est cotta s'olia.*
No more than blossoms in
June - the olive ripens at
Christmas.





OLIVES AND EXTRA-VIRGIN OLIVE OILS

The olive-growing areas round Oristano are concentrated along the coast and in the hilly areas of the Montiferru, in particular in the countryside round Cuglieri and Seneghe, home to an important national extra-virgin oil competition. The varieties grown in this area are mainly the *Bosana* and the *Semidana* with an intensely fruity flavour, slightly bitter taste and overall grassy notes.

Over the last two decades, despite its relatively small olive production, Sardinia has made substantial investments to improve its oil production, achieving high quality standards and growing commercial recognition. Sardinia-produced oils have reaped many major awards in national and international competitions, and have been praised by world-famous gourmets. The key of this success lies in the combination of territory, varieties and processing techniques. Ideal soil and climate conditions, unique and distinctive local varieties and pressing techniques that preserve the full flavour of the olive, yield a scented, fresh product, unique in the world.

Since 2006, the EU has protected the region's oils with the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) label "Extra-Virgin Olive Oil from Sardinia" – DOP Olio extravergine di oliva di Sardegna.



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*Dognunu friet
in s'ozu sou.
Let each man fry
in his own oil.*





TRADITIONAL TYPES OF BREAD

“*Saludi e trigu*” (Good health and wheat), is an ancient Sardinian greeting, a wish for prosperity coupling two fundamental elements of life: good health and a full granary, symbolising sustenance. A basic foodstuff of all Mediterranean peoples, a material symbol of both pagan and religious rites, wheat has been grown in Sardinian since Nuragic times and for centuries has been a staple cultural and social – not to mention economic – asset for the island. Its production, consisting exclusively of durum wheat, is concentrated primarily in the plains of Campidano and Nurra and in other territories of ancient wheat-farming tradition, such as Trexenta and Marmilla whence, under the Roman Empire, its abundant harvests were also exported to the mainland, resulting in the island being nicknamed the “granary of Rome”. Today the production of excellent-quality durum wheat is still a significant economic resource for the island, providing the basic ingredient for several local food specialities, in particular various types of traditional bread and pasta, whose link with the territory is becoming increasingly recognised. Over the centuries, this ancient cereal crop has been an important element of social life. The craft of bread-making is steeped in traditions stretching back thousands of years and which still today, thanks to an enduring culture, maintain a strong continuity with the past. In many areas of Sardinia, the tradition of home-baking still survives, often using sourdough, known as *fermentarzu*, that is a portion of the dough which is preserved and carefully stored from one baking session to the other. The evening before the bread baking, it is soaked in water and mixed with a small quantity of flour to form *sa madrighe* or mother, that is the leavening which will be used to make the bread and which will produce its distinctive flavour and taste. The breads belonging to Sardinian tradition are very numerous – by blending simple ingredients such as flour, water, salt and yeast, over time the housewives (*sa meri 'e domu*) created a whole host of breads differing from village to village as to baking, shape and religious or civil feast days. Everyday bread, or holiday, ritual or ceremonial bread, often beautifully and artistically shaped. *Coccoi*, *cozzula*, *carasau*, *pistoccu*, *zicchi*, *chilbarzu*, *civraxiu*, *moditzosu*, *pillonca*, *tundas*, *pan'e scetti*, *pan'e simbula*, *pani biancu*, *lada*, *civraxieddu* to quote just a few types. But there are also other special types of bread, enriched with additional ingredients: lard, potatoes, pork rind, ricotta cheese, onions, tomatoes and again eggs, cooked must, nuts, honey and raisins.



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Pane pius savoridu cand'est cun suor"e cuidu.
Bread is tastier when it's made with elbow grease.



TRADITIONAL TYPES OF BREAD

The great variety of types of Sardinian bread may be classified according to different qualities, such as type of flour, dough consistency, rising, baking method. However, a first broad distinction can be made between breads with crust and a soft, more or less compact, interior, and those produced in sheets or flat disks, either soft or crisp. To the first group belongs *moddizzosu*, a small round loaf with soft porous interior found under different names throughout the island. Another example is *civraxiu* or bread of the peasant, produced in larger loaves, rounded and with a flat base, characteristic of the plains and hilly areas of the centre and the south. A more compact interior and varied shapes mark out *coccoi*, often artistically crafted and embroidered with crests and perforations by skilful cutting and modelling of the dough using rollers or small knives and scissors. Amongst the bread made in soft disks, we find the *spianata* of Ozieri also known as *pane fine* or *pan'e poddine* and the characteristic *zicchi* of Bonorva, used in its crisp form for the preparation of *pan'uddidu* and *pan'a fittas*, recipes in which the stale bread is crumbled, cooked in boiling salted water and dressed with grated *pecorino* cheese. Amongst the breads produced in a double crisp sheet, also made using leavening, we have *pistoccu*, rectangular in shape, thicker and more compact, found mainly in the Ogliastra area, and the wafer-thin *carasau*, either circular or semi-circular, typical of the area round Nuoro and in the Barbagia. The traditional double-baking process makes these varieties very special and extremely long-lasting, an essential feature for the shepherds who carried it in their knapsack during the long periods they spent away from home with their flocks. *Carasau* is also known by the poetic name of 'music paper' due to its distinctive parchment-like aspect but also to the sound it makes when broken. *Carasau* is used to prepare the traditional *pani frattau*, obtained by alternating sheets of bread, dipped in boiling water, dressed with tomato sauce and grated *pecorino*, and topping the final layer with a soft poached egg. Dressing *carasau* with a dash of olive oil and a pinch of salt and warming it briefly in the oven, we obtain *pane guttiau*, tasty and delicious in its simplicity. Bread, a staple of the local diet, is also found in many recipes that remind us of a time when nothing went wasted: stale bread was habitually used to prepare tasty soups, main courses and other delicious, hearty dishes. Wholesome flavours, tasty memories of food traditions preserved to this day in Sardinia to enchant and entice the palate.



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*Su poveru, mischinu,
cand'hat pane no hat binu.
When the poor man has
bread, he has no wine.*



PASTA

Another traditional product made from durum wheat is pasta, a staple of Sardinian cuisine, coming in so many types and shapes that we would be hard put to list them all. Amongst the best known are *malloreddus* with their characteristic shape of a small, ridged shell, made with semolina, slightly salted warm water and with the addition, in southern Sardinian tradition, of a pinch of saffron. They are most commonly served Campidanese-style, that is dressed with a tomato and fresh sausage sauce, and sprinkled with a generous dose of grated *pecorino*. Another speciality is *fregula*, typical of the south of the island and similar to African *couscous*; traditionally it is prepared by hand, in a characteristic terracotta bowl (*sa scifedda*), mixing and working with the fingertips large-grain semolina and water and forming small spheres which are left to dry in the open, quickly baked in the oven and then used as an ingredient in delicious stews and braised dishes. *Lorighittas*, a unique type of pasta still today hand made with great patience and skill, consists of artistic fine plaits of pasta, closed in a circle shape, produced only at Morgongiori, a small village in the Marmilla. Then there are *andarinos*, in the shape of small spirals, and the *ferritus* and *macarrones de busa*, obtained by winding small portions of pasta round a fine knitting needle. *Su fillindeu*, an ancient dry pasta from the Barbagia area, which only few women are still able to make by hand, is made by rolling out the pasta in very thin strips which are left to dry in the sun in criss-crossed layers, almost forming a woven pattern.

Amongst the pasta with filling, pride of place goes to *culurgionis*, a type of *ravioli* filled with ricotta cheese and chard, and which in the Ogliastra version are filled with fresh cheese, mashed potato and mint – they are easily recognisable by their typical shape in the form of an ear of corn. Another dough-based food are the *panadas*, savoury pies baked in the oven, of varying sizes depending on their place of origin. These double-crust pies have mouth-watering fillings of stewed lamb, eels or green vegetables.



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*Li maccaroni,
si no so caldi,
no so boni.
Maccheroni must
be eaten hot to be good.*





SWEETS AND PASTRIES

In Sardinian tradition the ancient art of producing sweets and pastries has always been almost exclusively the preserve of the women of the house. In the past, an extraordinary variety of shapes, scents and flavours emerged from the skilled hands of the housewives to mark feast days such as Carnival, Easter and All Saints' Day, not forgetting Christmas, baptism celebrations, confirmations and weddings: each event had to be celebrated with its own particular kind of sweets or pastries. Today, a flourishing artisan production ensures that this tradition is kept alive. The same ingredients as in the past are used: they are staples of the local agricultural tradition such as honey, almonds, walnuts, eggs, cheese, milk, flour, but also fresh and dried fruit and *saba* or *sapa*, a delicious dense syrup obtained by the long simmering of grape must. The range of these Sardinian sweets is surprising, from the extra light, slightly crunchy *pirichitus*, made with refined flour, eggs, sugar and lemon, to the *bianchitus*, a type of meringue prepared with beaten egg white, sugar and sweet chopped almonds. The famous soft *amarettus* with their slightly bitter flavour are prepared by mixing sweet and bitter almonds, sugar and eggs. Amongst the most sought-after specialities are also the *pardulas* or *casadinas*, consisting of a pasta shell with a soft filling of ricotta or fresh cheese, eggs, sugar and saffron. The pleasantly scented *aranzada* is a sweet from the Nuoro area, made of orange peel and almonds candied in honey. Other examples are the *candelaus*, enticing sweets made of almond paste, sugar and orange blossom water; the *sospiri di Ozieri*, small spheres of almond paste wrapped in coloured tissue paper, the *copulette*; the *gueffus*; the sweets of Oliena; and again the *pistoccus* of Serrenti; the *mustazzolus* probably of Arab origin, typical of the area round Oristano; the *coccois de saba*; the *gattò* made of caramel sugar and almonds; the famous *sebadas*, flat pastry shells with a fresh cheese filling, fried and served with a dribble of honey or a sprinkle of sugar. And finally, the *torrone* (nougat) from Tonara and Desulo prepared with almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, egg white and honey, sold by street stalls at the many folk festivals celebrated on the island.



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*A chie aggradat su dulce,
aggradet puru s' agru.
If you like the sweet, may
you also enjoy the bitter.*





SAFFRON

Sardinia with its 35 hectares cultivated with saffron and a production of some 350-500 kg of this precious crop is the largest saffron producer in Italy. Production is mostly concentrated in the municipalities of San Gavino Monreale, Turri and Villanovafranca, the only ones to have obtained the PDO label “*Zafferano di Sardegna*” – DOP Zafferano di Sardegna.

Obtained from the dried stigmas of the flowers of a charming small plant, *crocus sativus*, saffron in Sardinia has from time immemorial been associated with local history and culture, shaping the social and economic life of the communities which produce it to this day. On the island, plants of the crocus genus also grow wild and the origin of this crop is very ancient. The first historical document to mention saffron is the Pisan Regulation of the Port of Cagliari of 1317, which established precise rules for the export of this spice. Today, as in the past, production is entirely manual and largely done by family concerns, using natural agronomic techniques. This, together with favourable soil and climate conditions, yields a prime quality product, bright red in colour and with a very intense aroma.

In autumn during the harvest period, soft carpets of violet petals can be seen scattered in front of the farmhouses where saffron is processed, a tradition to attract good luck after removing the precious reddish-orange stigmas. The plucking and drying of the stigmas are traditionally handled by the women, who have passed down their skills from mother to daughter. The fragile threads are set with great care to dry in the sun on wooden boards or by the chimney fire. Only after drying are they transformed into the precious spice with its unmistakable aroma and flavour.

Widely used in traditional Sardinian cuisine to flavour and colour dishes, bread, sweets and liqueurs, Sardinian saffron also has a lesser known, but ancient and fascinating use in Barbagia, to colour the headscarf of the traditional costume of Orgosolo.



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Papa pagu e pigadindi.
Eat little and buy it.





HONEY

Thanks to the abundant and varied presence of honey plants, and to its mild climate, Sardinia offers ideal conditions for beekeeping, and is perhaps the top Italian region for the production of quality honey. Honey is widely used, mainly as an ingredient in various traditional sweets, pastries and cakes, and has long been part of the Sardinians' diet. The signs its ancient roots in Sardinia are found in the myth of Aristaeus who legend has it introduced to the island the grape, the olive and beekeeping. Indeed, a small bronze figure of this god, found in the Medde (meaning honey!) locality near Oliena shows him covered with bees. The word honey also crops up in many Sardinian surnames, such as Medde, Mele, Melis, Melinu, Melachinu, Melaiu, Abe, Ape and others.

Beekeeping started in Sardinia with the collection of honeycombs found in fissures in the rocks, the hollows of trees and other sheltered spots. This was soon followed by the use of cork hives. In the late 19th century, frequent diseases and poor productivity led to the replacement of the traditional beehives with removable frame hives.

Today beekeeping takes place all over the island, with an estimated production of some 15,000 quintals of honey, of excellent quality and flavour. Many local producers have won important quality awards in regional and national trade shows and competitions.

Sardinian honey can boast of unique scents, flavours and nutrition values, mainly on account of the endemic plant and flower species found on the island, including some found nowhere else in the world. Various types of monofloral honeys are produced, including eucalyptus, citrus fruit, heather, rockrose, rosemary, honeysuckle, myrtle, thyme, chestnut, lavender and clover, not forgetting the highly sought after and entirely typical and exclusive cardoon, strawberry bush and asphodel blossom honeys.



Today beekeeping takes place all over the island, with an estimated production of some 15,000 quintals of honey, of excellent quality and flavour.

*Cha mugni lu meli,
si licca li diti.
He who presses the
honeycomb licks his fingers.*





LIQUEURS AND SPIRITS

Sardinia can boast of an ancient and rich liqueur-making tradition drawing on the generous and varied abundance of endemic and wild plants which mark the island's landscape. As with the other traditional foods, liqueurs too reflect the nature of a traditional rural economy which used simple, effective processing methods and genuine ingredients rich in scents and flavours. Sardinian liqueurs, in their wonderful simplicity, express distinctive flavours and aromas, well-balanced and integrated with a water, alcohol, and sugar or honey solution with moderate alcohol content.

Over the past decades, as the demand for genuine natural products has increased in the Italian market, a specialised segment of liqueur producers has developed, and has obtained national and European recognition. Some of the best known and appreciated Sardinian liqueurs are *Mirto rosso* (red myrtle) a dark intensely aromatic liqueur, obtained from the purple berries of the myrtle plant, picked by hand and immediately processed, and *Mirto bianco* (white myrtle) a transparent, or slightly green liqueur obtained from the fresh shoots of the same plant. Other specialities include: the original *Liquore di Villacidro* from an ancient recipe based on saffron and aniseed. The elegant, delicate notes of the liqueurs made of lemon, mandarin, prickly pear, the fruit of the strawberry tree, and the digestive bitters based on cardoons and wild herbs. Finally, the spirits, with pride of place going to *Abbardente* also known as *Fil'e Ferru* from the times when the country folk set up clandestine stills and hid the product in a hole dug in the countryside, marking the spot with a piece of metal wire stuck in the ground to be sure to find it.



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*Buffalu a ticcu a ticcu,
su licore lichitu.
A tasty liqueur should be
sipped slowly.*





COLD CUTS AND SALAMI

The origin of Sardinian salt-cured meats and salami is said to date back to the Punic-Phoenician period. These traditional products are found in almost all areas of the island. The cured meats and dry sausages from Sardinia have unique and inimitable characteristics, as they are still produced with artisan methods perfected over thousands of years. Favourable environmental factors together with the skill of the shepherds and farmers in processing meats, especially pork but also, to a lesser degree, mutton and goat's meat make these products unique and recognisable.

From the well-known, flavoursome *prosciutto*, produced especially in the area of the Gennargentu massif, to the delicious sausages, dried for varying periods, and flavoured with local spices and herbs. Each producer has his own secret recipe, which has often been handed down from generation to generation and which makes the individual cold cut or sausage unique, so much so that experts can tell the place of origin of any one product simply from its taste and flavour.

Among the other specialities is *pancetta* (bacon), in various types (straight, rolled, smoked or unsmoked), salami and pork cheek or *grandula*. *Capocollo* (neck cut) and the flavoursome *lardo* (cured fatback) complete the range of Sardinian salami and cold cuts whose distinctive qualities derive from the genuine ingredients used and the traditional pastoral and farming culture which is still very much alive today.



The cured meats and dry sausages from Sardinia have unique and inimitable characteristics, as they are still produced with artisan methods perfected over thousands of years.

Prosciuttu e sartitza umpare sun alimentos antigos chi solet cumbidare su sardu a sos amigos.
Prosciutto and dry sausage are ancient foods, habitually offered to visiting friends.





BOTTARGA (DRIED TUNA OR MULLET ROE)

Bottarga, whether made from mullet or tuna roe, from very ancient times represented a source of wealth and goods for barter much sought-after throughout the Mediterranean. Both these products enjoy well-deserved fame albeit they have differing organoleptic qualities and cultural origins. In Sardinia, mullet *bottarga* is produced in the wetlands of the eastern coast, in particular Tortoli, and along the central-western coast where, between Cabras and the Sinis peninsula, we find the marshes with the richest biodiversity in the Mediterranean. From the time of the Phoenicians this area, as a result of its climate, marine environment and the rare skills employed in processing, was known for the excellence of the *bottarga* produced. The word *bottarga* comes from the Arab *buttarikh*, meaning salted fish roe. The egg masses, which after processing are called *baffe*, are removed intact from the female fish, carefully washed and salted and pressed. Dosing of the salt is a delicate step in the production process: too much would impair flavour but too little would compromise the product's conservation. Salting lasts for a fortnight or three weeks during which the roe, set out on wooden shelves in large, well-ventilated rooms, are periodically turned. Once ready, they are dried and left to mature before being put out for sale, either as whole *baffe* of typical amber colour, or grated in glass jars.

Bottarga is by now well-known world over, and is considered as the “caviar of the Med” by the most demanding gourmets who seek out its unique flavour, more salty and intense in the tuna roe, more delicate in mullet roe. Cut into thin slices and dressed with a drop of extra-virgin olive oil, it gives a touch of style as a starter, grated it makes a simple plate of spaghetti a *cordon bleu* experience.



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*Chini arreguat papat
candu bollit.
He who makes preserves
is never short of food.*





TUNA

Tuna is one of the most prized fish species to be found in the seas round Sardinia. Evidence of tuna fishing dates back to Neolithic times. The word tuna comes from the Phoenician *than* (large animal), and probably the first tuna fisheries and processing workshops were set up in Sardinia by the Phoenicians. These great seafarers, experts in the ways of the sea and its resources, always in search of resources which were scarce in their homeland, organized the catching and processing of the tuna, considered so valuable that it was even shown stamped on their coins.

Tuna fishing in Sardinia using the traditional sustainable trapnet (*tonnara*) fishing technique is currently carried out almost exclusively in the Sulcis area, between Carloforte and Portoscuso. Each spring the trapnets are lowered into the sea to capture the tuna incoming from the ocean and in transit to reach their breeding grounds.

The tuna caught round the coasts of the island belong to the bluefin species, in Italian known as *tonno rosso* on account of its red meat, which is considered superior as to compactness and flavour to the yellowfin species.

Bluefin tuna, also known as *tonno di corsa*, is much appreciated both in Italy and abroad. The quality of its flesh is widely recognized and indeed at the moment of the *mattanza* (slaughtering) many buyers are usually present to select the best cuts and transfer them, intact and at controlled temperature, all over the world.

In Sardinia traditionally several different parts of the tuna are consumed: apart from eating it fresh in a variety of recipes, there are several preserved products such as *bottarga* (dried roe), the heart, *musciame* (fillet), *ventresca* (underbelly), which are either salt-cured or smoked to ensure their long life. *Tuna bottarga* is perhaps the best-known product, in the kitchen it is used in the same way as mullet roe, but it comes in larger *baffe*, weighing up to 1 kg, and has a stronger taste. It is brownish in colour with the interior varying from light to dark pink.



The only remaining trapnet tuna fishery in Sardinia is on the small island of San Pietro (Carloforte). Each spring the trapnets are lowered into the sea to capture the tuna incoming from the ocean and in transit to reach their breeding grounds.

*Chini est lestru a papai
est lestru puru a traballai.
He who eats quickly is also
a quick worker.*



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