

## Title:

Bars in Tuscany - a Gastronomic Experience

## Word Count:

498

## Summary:

A small town in Tuscany, ancient red brick and stone, narrow cobbled streets winding around the contours of the hill upon which it is built, a few shops, all closed now, as it is siesta time. The only sign of life comes from the doors of a bar, an appetising aroma of espresso coffee wafting out to give hope of food and sustenance to the tardy traveller. If you're lucky it will be one of those bars that provide a fine array of freshly made sandwiches and pastries.

## Keywords:

Tuscany, Sienna, espresso coffee, prosciutto

## Article Body:

A small town in Tuscany, ancient red brick and stone, narrow cobbled streets winding around the contours of the hill upon which it is built, a few shops, all closed now, as it is siesta time. The only sign of life comes from the doors of a bar, an appetising aroma of espresso coffee wafting out to give hope of food and sustenance to the tardy traveller. If you're lucky it will be one of those bars that provide a fine array of freshly made sandwiches and pastries.

Italian bars are not primarily about drinking...alcohol that is. Coffee is their staple, the reputation of the barista stands or falls on the espresso he produces. (A fine, literary example is provided in 'The Food of Love' by Anthony Capella. Set in Rome, the barista is forever tinkering with his coffee machine in pursuit of the perfect coffee, cannibalising his van to add parts to the machine to build up ever-higher pressure.) Bars provide a social function: most of the neighbourhood will pass through the bar during the day, for a breakfast cappuccino and brioche (pastry), mid-morning espresso and regular doses of the same throughout the day. Even today most people stop work at lunchtime for a two or three hour siesta break, then work until 7 in the evening.

Anyone with any respect for their digestion would take a leisurely lunch either at home or in a restaurant or trattoria, but for those in too much of a hurry, wanting food on the go, the bar provides the equivalent of 'fast-food': tramezzini (sandwiches made with sliced bread, usually intended to be toasted),

panini (filled rolls of all sorts), pastries both sweet and savoury, ice-creams. Of course quality varies - at worst a sad selection of curling-edged tramezzini, at best an enormous variety of breads and fillings, tantalisingly displayed and beautifully wrapped, if you intend to take away.

My memories of the best include: Nannini's in Siena, where it can take hours just to choose; the bar in the main square of Colle di Val d'Elsa (Bassa), where you could get a slice of flaky-pastried pie filled with spinach, ricotta, egg and more that melted in the mouth and ice-cream that kept you there all day, just to try all the different flavours; a simple bar on the main road below Monteriggione, which would make you up a panino fresh, with a crusty roll and ample slices of prosciutto, carved straight from the ham, as you waited; a bar on the Via di Citta in Siena near the Duomo, which had the best breakfast brioches ever, tempting you beyond the sensible 'just one', into the realms of second cappuccino, second brioche and beyond!

It is eight years since I was last in Tuscany, (having children put a halt to travelling for a while), but I am sure that those bars still endure, serving coffee and food, the same mouth-watering treats: Tuscan 'fast-food' at its best.

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