

LE CESARINE: AMBASSADORS OF CUCINA ITALIANA

by Lucy Gordan | Travel, Travel blog | 0 comments



In 2004 Egeria di Nallo, a prolific author and professor of anthropology, political science, sociology, and marketing at the University of Bologna with a group of committed citizens founded the Association for the Protection and Enhancement of Italy's Culinary Gastronomic Heritage under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture and the University of Bologna. Although at first its members were exclusively in the region of Emilia-Romagna, it soon became Italy's first nationwide community of local home cooks. According to their Senior Communications Advisor, Maria Rita Tattini, there's no list of the original *cesarine*, but several, among them Mara from Forlì, Costanza from Trento, Barbara from Montepulciano in Tuscany, Raffaella from Modena, and Rosa from Bologna, have been *cesarine* for some ten to fifteen years.

The *cesarine*'s mission was and still is to safeguard Italy's food culture by organizing authentic

culinary experiences for guests first in hundreds, now in thousands, of local homes all over Italy. In 2014 the Association was taken over by tech entrepreneur Davide Maggi – creator of some of Italy's first digital startups and executive director of the Digital Marketing & Communication Executive Program at the Bologna Business School. In 2017 he set up its online platform, www.cesarine.com, the first in the world devoted solely to food, making it accessible to anyone who wanted to book remotely. In 2018 Maggi's initiative became an innovative SME (Small or Medium-sized Enterprise) and in 2023 a Benefit Society, while in 2019 it had received recognition as a Slow Food widespread community. That same year members hosted some 10,000 guests, 80% of whom were foreigners mainly from the USA, Canada, France, Germany, England, and Switzerland. Four years later its community of 1,500 amateur cooks and chefs, 80% of whom are women between the ages of 45 and 50, opened their homes in some 450 locations in Italy to 50,000 guests (an increase of 65% compared to 2022) to offer not only dining experiences, but also cooking classes and local food, wine and market tours. (Its most popular classes concern how to make tiramisù and local pastas, the most popular being: tagliatelle, gnocchi, tortellini, orecchiette and lasagne). In 2024 the *cesarina* who hosted the most guests was Barbara in Riomaggiore, Cinque Terre. A *cesarina* since 2022, her specialty is *pesto genovese*. The link to her profile is: <https://www.cesarine.com/il/h/barbaro-riomaggiore>.



Barbara from Riomaggiore

Over the years other investors joined Maggi, among them Niccolò Branca of the homonymous company of *amari* or bitters, Daniele Ferrero the CEO of Venchi, and the Finalca Group, a holding company in Bologna belonging to the Cazzola family. According to the latest figures provided by Tattini, in 2022, the turnover was 2.120 million euros. In 2023, *Le Cesarine*, still

headquartered in Bologna with c. 40 employees, effectively doubled that result, reaching 4 million euros. “To become a *cesarina* or *cesarino*,” Tattini wrote me, “of course you have to be an expert cook, but also an expert in local history and traditions, and not only the enogastronomic ones. All *cesarine*, are freelance and earn a percent of the tailor-made event or events offered depending on each individual’s level of expertise.”

The most popular *Cesarine* destination has always been and remains Bologna (in 2024 +25% guests over 2023). In fact, *cesarine* means “little Caesars”, the pet-name for housewives from Emilia-Romagna, thus “the empresses of their homes, especially of their kitchens”. Other popular locations for foreigners are Venice, Lake Como, Florence, Cinque Terre (+ 200% guests in 2024 over 2023), Sorrento and Positano, Bologna, Milan, Rome and Naples. Interest in Sicily is growing exponentially, with the most popular destinations being Palermo, Taormina, Messina and Catania. Reservations in Sicily increased last year by 60% in Palermo and by 130% in Messina.

As for foreign clients, with 30,000 guests in 2024 Americans continue to be the most prevalent clients, followed by Australians, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Northern Europeans, in particular Germany, France, and Switzerland.

With so many destinations, offers, and prices to choose from, not to mention instructions on how to become a *cesarina*, it’s essential to consult the website (in both Italian and English) mentioned above because every experience is tailor-made. Here it’s also possible to book an “experience” as a gift. For specific questions you can also telephone to +39-340-1564661 or +1(985) 531-9607 from Monday through Friday 9:30-11:30 and 16:30-18:30 Central European Time.

The year 2024 brought additional successes. The Italian guests increased 25%; in comparison their non-*Cesarine* enogastronomic tourism increased 12%. Very popular was the new group event “*Seratine*”, every Wednesday evening for now in 10 Italian cities: Milano, Torino, Bologna, Modena, Rimini, Verona, Pesaro, Assisi, Fasano, and Catania, where the guests prepare a dish and enjoy an *aperitivo* (*Mani in Pasta*, 59 euros) or enjoy an already prepared dish and *aperitivo* (*Aperitivo Experience*, 35 euros).

Also in 2024 the *Cesarine* joined forces with *Borghi più Belli d’Italia* (*The Most Beautiful Villages in Italy*) and with *Dimore Storiche d’Epoca* (*Historical Homes*) to introduce tourism off-the-beaten-track, not to mention that in June they opened their first permanent cooking school in Assisi. Their non-profit Benefit Society also grew: giving lessons on how to make pasta to female inmates in Bologna’s jail; **Emmaus** in Alba which supports people in fragile health; and **Tortellante** in Modena, a project for young people with autism. At the end of the year, several *Cesarine* crossed the Atlantic to introduce authentic Italian cuisine via two cooking classes for journalists and influencers. It was organized by ENIT (Italy’s National Tourist Board) in collaboration with Bologna Welcome and Destination Verona Garda and held at New York’s Italian Cultural Institute with the hope that thanks to the participants even more Americans would opt for a *cesarine* experience.



Aurora from Verona, Davide Maggi, and Cristina from Bologna at the Italian Cultural Institute in New York

Last but certainly not least, with the number of applications to become a *cesarina* growing by leaps and bounds domestically (so far there are no *cesarine* outside Italy), the main project for 2025 is to enroll Italians who live abroad.