

Resort has master class in tastes of Tuscany

By Neece Regis

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

BARGA, Italy — The damn birds wake me. Tweet tweet tweet. I pad to the veranda and am stunned by the view from my mountaintop aerie. The Serchio Valley has disappeared in a thick river of clouds illuminated by the rising sun. As the sun climbs higher, the fog slowly dissipates and the medieval town of Barga reveals itself. First the limestone tower of the Collegiate Church of San Cristoforo, then the pointed tips of cypress trees, and finally the 12th-century, terra-cotta-topped buildings stacked tight like pastel Legos. I'm not religious, but have to acknowledge a mystical sense of wonder at a scene I imagine has been occurring for hundreds of years. Thanks, birds.

Located in a lesser-explored mountainous area of Tuscany, north of Lucca, the thriving farming community around Barga is known for its pecorino cheeses, porcini mushrooms, pork, wild boar, prosciutto, and honey. In an attempt to better experience the local cuisine — not just by eating out in restaurants, although I love that, too — I signed up for a one-day cooking class offered at my hotel, Renaissance Tuscany Il Cocco Resort & Spa.

After breakfast, a small group of fellow hotel guests and myself board a van for the short drive to Barga where we'll buy ingredients for the class. We alight near Porta Mancianella, one of the historic gates into the walled city, and embark on a brief walking tour led by Chef Alessandro Manfredini. A maze of narrow streets and steep stairways lead in several direc-



PHOTOS BY NECCEE REGIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

tions but it's difficult to get lost. Head uphill toward the Romanesque church tower for spectacular valley views, and take any downhill path — past small piazzas, shops, and restaurants — to circle back to where you started.

The winding stone paths within the walled center are completely different from the wide streets with tall Georgian townhouses in the newer part

of town, which is where we head to find grocery stores and markets selling regional specialties. The city is a surprising blend of sophistication (with jazz clubs and summer opera festival) and small town charm. (Barga is sometimes referred to as "land of wolves and outlaws," because of its location on the edge of broad chestnut forests.)

We stop at several shops. All of them cause me to swoon. In a meat market, rows of aged prosciutto dangle from steel rods above displays of sausages, fresh cuts of meats, and an almost-holy litany of salumi: mortadella, prosciutto pratomagno, pancetta, coppa, lardo, mondiola, biruldu. Even if I don't know what something is, I want it. In the vegetable store, artichokes, fava beans, radicchio, tomatoes, carrots, leeks and squash blossoms are so artfully arranged as to shame any Whole Foods market. At a small outdoor market in the town square, dozens of rounds of variously aged pecorino cheeses compete for my attention with enormous bags filled with dried porcini mushrooms. Our last stop of the morning is at Alimenti Caproni. Open since 1913, this family run shop selling wine, cheese, dried legumes, coffee, fresh and boxed pasta, salami, olive oil and more, is operated by the personable brothers Enrico and Agostino Caproni. Would I like a taste of pecorino and a small glass of wine while we shop? Why yes, yes I would. Grazie.

Too soon, we head back to the hotel to begin preparing lunch. I've taken cooking classes abroad where the chef does most of the work and the class mainly watches. This is completely different. Within minutes of arriving, our hands are damp with flour and eggs to make "maltagliati," translated as "bad cut" pasta. (Once rolled out, the dough is haphazardly cut into wide strips, giving the pasta its name.) While some of us in a prep area are finely chopping a soffrito of celery, carrots, and onions for a traditional Barghigiana meat sauce, and then shelling fava beans and peas for a 16th-century Garmugia Lucchese soup, I realize that half the class has gone missing. I race to the stove where Chef Manfredini is supervising scalding milk with sugar and vanilla for panna cotta.

Once the panna cotta is poured into individual serving cups, and stowed in the refrigerator, the real chaos begins. And I mean chaos in the best possible way. Every burner of the stove is put to use. A vegetable stock of parsley, potatoes, tomatoes, celery, carrots, and onions simmers in one pot. In another, chopped onions, ground beef and pancetta sizzle and pop, releasing a heady aroma. The soffrito, tossed with olive oil, glistens as it heats. And what would a cooking class be without at least one vegetarian? In a wide sauté pan, smashed garlic and porcini mushrooms — rehydrated with boiling water then squeezed dry — are tossed with fresh marjoram,



Top: The medieval town of Barga emerges from the morning fog in Tuscany. **Clockwise (from bottom):** Brothers Enrico and Agostino Caproni at their store Alimenti Caproni in Barga; rounds of pecorino for sale at a street market; a view of Barga from the Collegiate Church of San Cristoforo; Chef Alessandro Manfredini teaches a cooking class of traditional food from the Serchio Valley of Tuscany; Porcini mushrooms soak in a pot for pasta sauce, and milk and vanilla bean steep in another for a traditional panna cotta; 16th-century Garmugia Lucchese soup.

That's when the first course and the wine are served, and I'm handed a printout of our menus. I stop worrying and start eating.

Indigenous Culinary Experiences at Renaissance Tuscany Il Cocco Resort & Spa, \$200-\$300 per person. www.renaissance-tuscany.com/en

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MOVIE THEATER DIRECTORY

SHOWTIMES AND LISTINGS FOR AREA THEATERS

INFO VALID 7/04/18 ONLY

- ()** Bargain show times are shown in parentheses
- *** Restrictions apply/No Passes
- ♿** Handicapped accessible
- 🎫** Stadium Seating
- 👂** Hearing Impaired
- AD** Audio Description
- CC** Rear Window Captioning
- DOL** Dolby Stereo
- DIG** Digital Sound
- DSS** Dolby Surround Sound
- D** Descriptive Video Service

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ARLINGTON

CAPITOL THEATRE

204 Massachusetts Ave. 781-648-4340

♿ CC DIG AD

www.capitoltheatreusa.com

INCREDIBLES 2 (PG) 1:45, 2:40, 4:25, 5:20, 7:00

JURASSIC WORLD: FALLEN KINGDOM (PG-13) 1:00, 4:00, 7:00

OCEAN'S 8 (PG-13) 2:45, 5:20, 7:40

SOLO (NR) 1:10, 4:10, 7:10

BOSTON

SIMONS IMAX THEATRE

New England Aquarium, Central Wharf
617-973-5200

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www.neaq.org

OCEANS 3D: OUR BLUE PLANET (NR)
10:00, 2:00, 4:00

PANDAS 3D (G) 11:00, 1:00, 5:00

GALAPAGOS 3D: NATURE'S WONDERLAND (NR) 12:00, 3:00, 6:00

BROOKLINE

COOLIDGE CORNER THEATRE

290 Harvard St. 617-734-2500

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DEADPOOL 2 (R) ★ 1:15, 6:15, 11:00

THE FIRST PURGE (R) ★ 4:00

THE FIRST PURGE (R) ★ 11:05, 1:30, 6:20, 8:40, 11:00

JURASSIC WORLD: FALLEN KINGDOM (PG-13) ★ 11:00, 12:00, 1:45, 2:45, 4:30, 5:30, 7:15, 8:15, 10:00, 11:00

OCEAN'S 8 (PG-13) ★ 1:15, 3:40, 6:40, 8:35, 11:00

SANJU (NR) ★ 1:55, 4:50, 7:20, 10:30

SANJU (NR) ★ 11:00

SICARIO: DAY OF THE SOLDADO (R) ★ 11:00, 2:40, 5:15, 7:50, 10:30

SOLO: A STAR WARS STORY (PG-13) ★ 11:00, 4:00

TAG (R) 11:00, 4:00, 8:50

INCREDIBLES 2 (PG) ★ 11:00, 12:00, 1:20, 1:45, 4:05, 4:30, 6:45, 7:50, 9:30, 10:30

UNCLE DREW (PG-13) 1:45

UNCLE DREW (PG-13) ★ 11:00, 6:05, 9:00, 11:00

LEXINGTON

LEXINGTON VENUE

1794 Massachusetts Ave. 781-861-6161

♿ DOL DSS

WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR? (PG-13)

12:00, 2:15, 4:30

RBG (PG) 11:45, 2:00, 4:15

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JURASSIC WORLD: FALLEN KINGDOM --

THE IMAX 2D EXPERIENCE (PG-13) 4:50

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50 Walkers Brook Dr. 781-944-9090

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JURASSIC WORLD: FALLEN KINGDOM

-- AN IMAX 3D EXPERIENCE (PG-13) 11:00, 1:55

JURASSIC WORLD: FALLEN KINGDOM --

THE IMAX 2D EXPERIENCE (PG-13) 4:50

SALEM

CINEMASALEM

1 E. India Square 978-744-1400

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www.cinemasalem.com

JURASSIC WORLD: FALLEN KINGDOM (PG-13) 11:10, 1:50, 4:30, 7:15

INCREDIBLES 2 (PG) 11:00, 1:30, 4:00, 6:45

HEARTS BEAT LOUD (PG-13) 12:15, 2:45, 4:45, 7:20

OCEAN'S 8 (PG-13) 11:00, 1:40, 4:15, 7:00

THE TRUE 1692 IN 3D (NR) 2:00, 6:30

THIS PERFECT PLACE: A NATURAL HISTORY OF THE MASSACHUSETTS NORTH SHORE (NR) 4:30

SOMERVILLE

SOMERVILLE THEATRE

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<http://sommervilletheatre.com/>

DEADPOOL 2 (R) 2:00

HEREDITARY (R) 1:30, 4:30, 7:15

RBG (PG) 12:45, 3:00, 5:15, 7:30

SICARIO: DAY OF THE SOLDADO (R) 1:15, 4:15, 7:15

TAG (R) 4:40, 7:40

WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR? (PG-13)

1:00, 3:15, 5:30, 7:40