Pèsach: Passover in Italy



This year, March 30 marks the first day of Pèsach, or Passover, the eight-day festival commemorating the liberation of Israelites from slavery in ancient Egypt.

While Italy may be known for its Catholic culture, Jewish traditions have prevailed for more than 2,000 years. In fact, the oldest Jewish community in the world has been in Roma since at least the second century B.C.E.

Like many Italian holidays, Passover [2] typically includes religious rites, family-focused festivities, and – happily for us – food! La cucina ebraica, Jewish cooking, originally reflected a mixture of Middle Eastern, Spanish, and Sephardic influences; over the centuries in Italy, it has blended with the local cuisine. This influence is evident today: many of the resulting Jewish-Italian dishes are now mainstays of classic Italian cooking, such as ravioli di zucca; pumpkin-filled ravioli; and carciofi alla romana, "Roman-style" artichokes [3] with mint and parsley.

During Passover seders, the familiar customs remain the same in Italy — with a distinctive (and delicious) Italian twist to the menu. With the limited diet, dishes like stracciatella [4] (egg-drop soup) are enjoyed in the place of the traditional betzah, a roasted and hard-boiled egg; dinner often ends

with bocca di dama for dessert, a tasty Passover almond sponge cake.

Finally, after Passover is over, leavened bread is back on the table. The first challah [5] after Passover is especially delicious: stop by our bakeries to see if our bakers are making their usual variety!

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