

The Marathon of Italian Taste and Beauty

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At the Italian Government Tourist Board representatives from various Italian regions illustrate the beauties of their homelands and how they conjugate tourism with sport

The New York Marathon has always been a celebration of popular sport. Its peculiarity of being open to both professional sportsmen and simple amateurs may well be one of the cornerstones of its success and makes it the perfect platform for those who want to pass on an intrinsically universal message of sport and health. Such a message is the one promoted by the Italian Tracks and Fields Federation ([FIDAL](#) [2]).

Indeed FIDAL took up the opportunity and organized “The Marathon of Italian Taste and Beauty” at the Italian Government Tourist Board ([ENIT](#) [3]) on the evening of November 4. In this institutional

setting, representatives of various Italian regions illustrated how, in their respective lands, food and sport come together and offer a unique opportunity for a different kind of tourism.

Riccardo Strano, director of the Board, opened the event and, after greeting everybody, introduced Mr. Renato Montabone, Secretary General of FIDAL.

The latter explained the philosophy behind the event: sport is always in conjunction with healthy food, and food is connected to the land it is harvested from. This event wants to promote tourism in those Italian places that offer a mix of healthy culinary tradition, enchanted landscapes and cities, and top-notch sport facilities.

The first featured area was the [Province of Siena](#) [4], represented by Annamaria Betti, Councillor for Tourism. This is one of the regions with the highest biodiversity in Italy: 380'000 hectares in size, half of it is agricultural land, 150'000 hectares are woods, and 20% of it is made up of reserves and protected areas. The commitment to nature of this Province is so deep that they plan to become the first Carbon Free region of Italy in 2015, the Councilor revealed to us after the conference. On top of this, tourists can visit four [UNESCO sites](#) [5], thermal facilities, museums and much more. It is a very relaxed land, that can be discovered by foot, horse or bike, and which has received many national and international awards.

Filippo Olivieri, Councilor for Sport, and Raffaele Rossi, President of the Tourism Commission, represented the charming town of [Ascoli Piceno](#) [6], in the Marche region. Offering ski slopes not even an hour away from the sea, this area is a paradise for sport fans, but also a treasure chest of culinary delights. Among them the "Brodetto Sambenedettese", a fish broth whose intense flavor is due to the high salinity of the Adriatic sea; some outstanding wines such as the "Pecorino", a very low yield/high quality white that has been rediscovered during the past decade; and the "oliva ascolana". This treat is famous all over Italy and beyond and consists of a large green olive filled with ground beef, breaded, and eventually deep-fried.

[Molise](#) [7] is the second smallest region in Italy - after Valle d'Aosta - but as Francesco Cocco, Councilor of the President of Molise, explained, it has high aspirations. Its size allows for a very tight social system that merges together the cities and the countryside in a highly efficient system, ensuring smooth business and the lowest crime rate in Italy. With a landscape encompassing mountains, hills, a bit of countryside and even a coast, this region has something to offer to every kind of sport lover.

On the tip of the Italian boot lays the city of [Reggio Calabria](#) [8]. The Town Councilor for Economic Policies, Paolo Anghelone, introduced us to its beauties. Situated on the sea, just opposite Sicily, this area has an extremely long history, even for Italian standards. It began as a Greek colony in the 8th century BC, and this long heritage is evident throughout its urban fabric dotted with historical and cultural sites. Among the most important of them, the Aragonese Castle, the public library and the Greater Greece Museum, one of the most important of its kind in the world. Here one can admire the famous [Riace Bronzes](#) [9]: two original Greek bronze sculptures that are extremely rare, unlike the much more common Roman marble copies. However one of the treasures of this land is not an archaeological one, rather a gastronomical one: the Bergamotto, a citrus fruit known for the flavor it bestows on the Earl grey Tea (and with 373 beneficial properties, according to tradition), flourishes here and nowhere else in the world.

Last to take the stage, but certainly not least, came [Friuli-Venezia Giulia](#) [10], showcased by Councilor Giuseppe Donno. This region, sited in the North East corner of Italy, spans from the shores east of Venice to the Alps at the border with Austria, encompassing the easternmost part of the Po valley.

Such a topographical diversity naturally brings forth an equally vast gastronomical variety. Game meat and cheeses can be enjoyed in the mountains while fruit and vegetables are the pride of the countryside.

The 2003 Universiade was held here, consequently the sport infrastructures are brand new and extremely diverse: Swimming pools, Velodromes, Soccer Stadiums, Athletics Stadiums, Ice rinks....



you name it, they have it.

On top of this, the Region sports one of the most efficient regional government in the country and a long time hospitality tradition. It is easy to imagine how a trip to Venice can be made even more unforgettable with a visit to this dynamic neighbor.

Political personalities, however, were not the only ones who took part in the conference. This event had a sport undertone and two Italian athletes were present as ambassador of the Italian sport spirit: Mara Carraro, part of the organizing committee of the [Venice Marathon](#) [11] and a runner herself, and Giacomo Leone, winner of the 1996 New York Marathon (and the last European to achieve this victory).

Leone stressed the importance of the Mediterranean diet for a sportsman. He believes so much in it as a fundamental base on which to build a training program that in 1998 he started a project with the Italian Sports Federation aimed at having all Italian national teams followed in their competition around the world by Italian chefs, allowing them to maintain their food habit anywhere they go. As it turned out, results proved him right.

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