

Learning to cook Italian – with Bookings for you & Giovannini Enterprises

I love Italy. The people, the scenery, the culture and also, the food!

If I was asked to choose one type of cuisine to eat for the rest of my life, without a doubt, Italian is what I would choose.

Sadly I've only been to Italy twice. Once to Sicily (Zak our middle one was 1.5 years old at the time and he screamed for the ENTIRE time we were queuing at for our flight at the airport. It was hideous. People looked like they wanted to exterminate us and we haven't managed to get back on an aeroplane with him since) and once to Venice when I took Mr Knutts for his 'milestone' birthday. (Note to husband – when it is my 'milestone birthday', I would quite like to go back.

Hint, hint). It's such an enormous country, varied in landscape and cuisine as you travel, and there is so much to explore but, as yet, it is a country relatively unexplored for me which I definitely need to remedy over the coming years.



Before Christmas, I was approached by the truly lovely Jo Mackay, owner of [Bookings for You](#). Jo asked if I would like to attend an Italian cooking masterclass which would be hosted by herself and led by the [Giovannini family](#) who hail from Volterra, Italy. I couldn't say yes quick enough. The thought of gorging myself on pasta and cheese all day was as exciting as being told the news that Tom Hardy was to be reading CBeebies bedtime stories (such a hardship having to watch that with Ben...ahem). I digress. In summary, I was very excited.

About Bookings for You

Bookings for You was started in 2011 by Jo Mackay. Not only is Jo a savvy superstar business woman, and she is honestly lovely with it, she is also a mum. I'm in awe of what Jo has achieved with her company in a short space of time whilst juggling being a parent. After studying History at the University of Edinburgh, Jo Mackay joined the sales and marketing team at Procter & Gamble. In 2006, Jo and her family purchased a holiday home on Lake Maggiore in Italy. Jo quickly developed a passion for all things Italian and a few years later, Bookings For You was founded. The company initially focused on offering holiday villas and apartments in the Italian Lakes but Bookings For You quickly spread their travel wings and in 2011 expanded their portfolio to include villas and apartments in Tuscany and Umbria. Further expansion followed soon after, with villas now available to rent in Lazio, Florence, Le Marche and Puglia. In 2017, the company crossed the border and launched a range of villas to rent in France and Monaco.

Bookings For You now have over 300 holiday villas and apartments for guests to choose from, catering for a variety of budgets, tastes and party size. The Bookings For You team have personally visited every property on the site and can advise you on everything, from travel arrangements to where to eat in the evening.

Bookings For You is not a typical '9 to 5' business. Recognising that planning a holiday doesn't fit within normal office hours, Jo personally aims to be contactable every day of the week, both during the day and in the evening. She will do her best to answer any question you might have about any aspect of your holiday. If she doesn't know the answer, rest assured she will do the research to find it out!

If you have time to have a peek on the Bookings for You website, I defy anyone to not want to immediately [book a holiday](#) there and then. The properties are utterly stunning..



[Villa Le Capanne, Volterra](#). Image from Giovannini Enterprises.

About Giovannini Enterprises and Villa le Capanne

[Giovannini Enterprises](#) is a family run business based in Volterra, Italy. Founded by Giancarlo and his wife, Fabiola, and now run by his son Dario and daughter in law, Vera. This family have a real passion for Italy, their village of Volterra, tradition and authenticity.



Giancarlo started out in the industry by working in the family pastry shop, [Dolceria Del Corso](#). Many years later, the Giovannini family have expanded from these humble beginnings to what they are today, a successful and busy Enterprise business. They still own the pastry shop which you can visit should you be lucky enough to visit Volterra, and they also have a holiday complex, [Villa del Corso](#), which is used for holidays and weddings. Finally, they also have a [catering company](#). The Giovannini family really were entrepreneurs from the off.

The pastry shop, and Giancarlo himself, are famous for their signature Italian Cake, Millefoglie. Their customers say it is unique, fragrant, crisp and delicate in flavour. For weddings, the cake itself is created and brought to life on scene, directly in front of the guests. They get to see first hand, how the cake is assembled, watching the mastermind Giancarlo

create a cake unique to the beautiful couple. The biggest wow factor is the cake itself, unlike anything you have tried before, it is truly melt in your mouth delicious. Honestly, I got to sample this cake and I can honestly tell you it's like nothing I've had before. Ever. I just wish I lived closer so I could have some every week...



Giancarlo at work at a wedding. Image from Gioianni Enterprises.

I set off for the Italian cooking masterclass, on a crisp winters morning, to Haslemere, deep in the Surrey Countryside. It's a beautiful part of the country – full of sleepy little villages and rolling hills.

Upon arriving at the most incredible house I've ever set foot in, I was greeted by Jo from Bookings for You (have I mentioned how lovely she is?) and offered coffee and cake. Yep, cake for breakfast – from that point onwards I knew it was going to be a good day. I have to just mention, the cakes were baked by [Miranda Gore-Browne](#) who was a finalist in the first ever series of the Great British Bake Off – she was also at the Masterclass for the day. I'm really not ashamed to say I was a little starstruck and I left at the end of the day

very cross with myself that I didn't get a cheeky little selfie with her. She was so lovely, bubbly and really down to earth – it made an already wonderful day even more wonderful! If you're interested, Miranda has a kitchen school and does seasonal cooking classes as well as other workshops. You can find out more about this by visiting her website, [here](#).

The Giovannini family were already busy prepping for the workshop and the smells coming from the kitchen were already amazing. Fresh herbs and garlic. Utterly delicious.

The menu for the day was;

Tomato and Basil Bruschetta

Chicken liver Crostini

Slow roasted Wild Boar with black olives

Homemade Ravioli with spinach and ricotta filling and a homemade cherry tomato sauce

(Vegetarian option was Aubergine with Mozzarella and Tomatoes)

Pici pasta with herbs and pecorino

Tiramisu

...and finally...

The show-stopping Millefoglie cake by Giancarlo himself.

Wow. What a menu!

Each dish was prepared whilst we watched and I truly wish computers could portray smell because it really did smell incredible.

Here are some interesting tips and points I took away from the day...

When making Tomato Brushetta, brush the toasted ciabatta with a cut garlic clove. Just a couple of strokes downwards to flavour the bread. It really makes so much difference.

When slow roasting a tough piece of meat, Wild Boar leg is one of these cuts of meat, pierce holes in it and stuff lard into the cuts. The lard melts when cooking and it helps tenderise the meat.

When Giancarlo was making the Wild Boar, he chopped all the fresh herbs and garlic by hand (you can use a processor but he prefers to do it by hand). Once they were finely chopped he seasoned them all **REALLY** well. Lots of salt and lots of black pepper. I was quite shocked at how much he put on them but when I tasted the roast boar at the end, it was to die for. I can't describe it to you but trust me, it was amazing. The herb/garlic mixture was mixed with pork fat and then pushed into the cuts made in the meat. This is what helped give it it's flavour.

The Giovannini family's Tiramisu contained, shock horror, no alcohol, but it tasted divine. They just quickly dipped the lady finger sponges in espresso and layered them up. No Tia Maria in sight.

Fresh herbs will always taste better than dried ones. Fact. Fresh anything for that matter. The Giovannini family are passionate believers in having fresh, authentic ingredients. Each dish was really simple to make and there weren't any complicated processes to follow. You really can recreate them in your own home (if you can find Wild Boar that is).

When making the cherry tomato sauce, leave the tomatoes to cook down and don't blitz the sauce until it resembles Dolmio (I'm pretty sure the Giovannini family would consider Dolmio a swear word). All that was put in the pan to make this sauce was a load of cherry tomatoes, garlic, Basil, salt and pepper.

That's it. That said, the family bought their own tomatoes over from Italy with them and I have to agree that their taste superior to British grown ones. I should hazard a guess the lack of sunshine in good old Blighty is to blame for that one.

Food made with love and passion and care, always tastes delicious. I will remind my children of this when they are telling me what I've given them for dinner is disgusting...













I can't tell you how much fun I had at the Masterclass. I met some lovely people and bloggers, I ate myself into a food coma and I learnt some really useful skills and tips to take away

with me.

If you're looking for a bit of sun and a holiday to remember, do check out [Bookings for You](#). Jo is truly a lovely lady who cares so much about her customers and her business. You will get a service that is second to none and a holiday to remember for all the right reasons.

Thanks again Jo, I had a wonderful time.

Ciao.x

Disclosure: I was offered a place at an Italian Cooking masterclass in return for this review. All words, thoughts and opinions are my own.