
Melina Puntariero
COOK THE MOUNTAIN
SPRING
SEASONAL CULTURAL & CULINARY RETREAT
BEDONIA ITALY
19th -25th APRIL, 2027 . 7 days, 6 nights

Your Host:

Melina Puntoriero

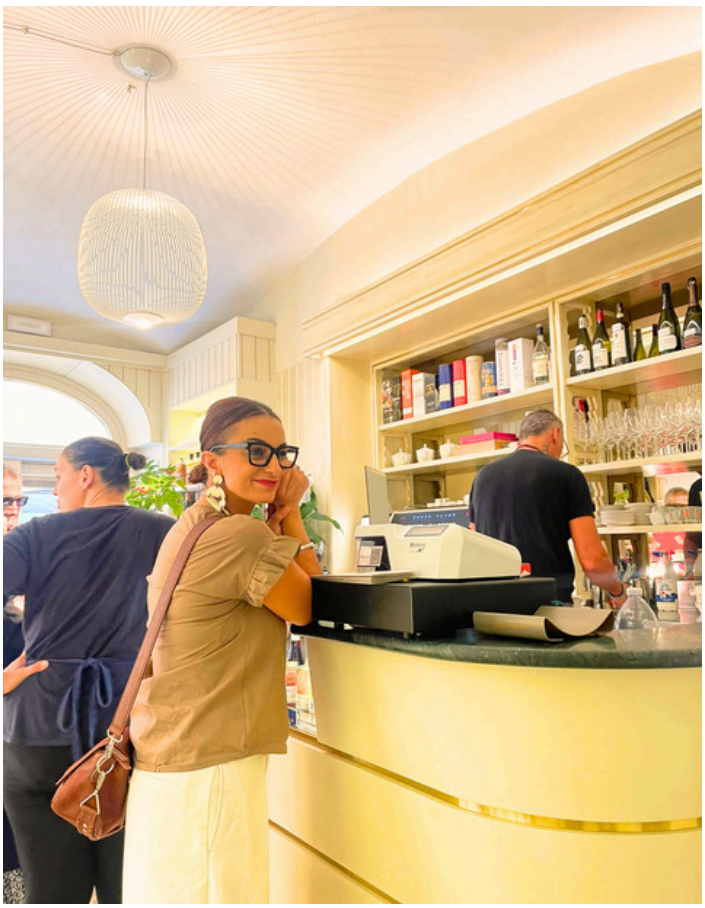
“Spend a week in my mountain village near Parma, cooking with me and the locals I’ve known for years”

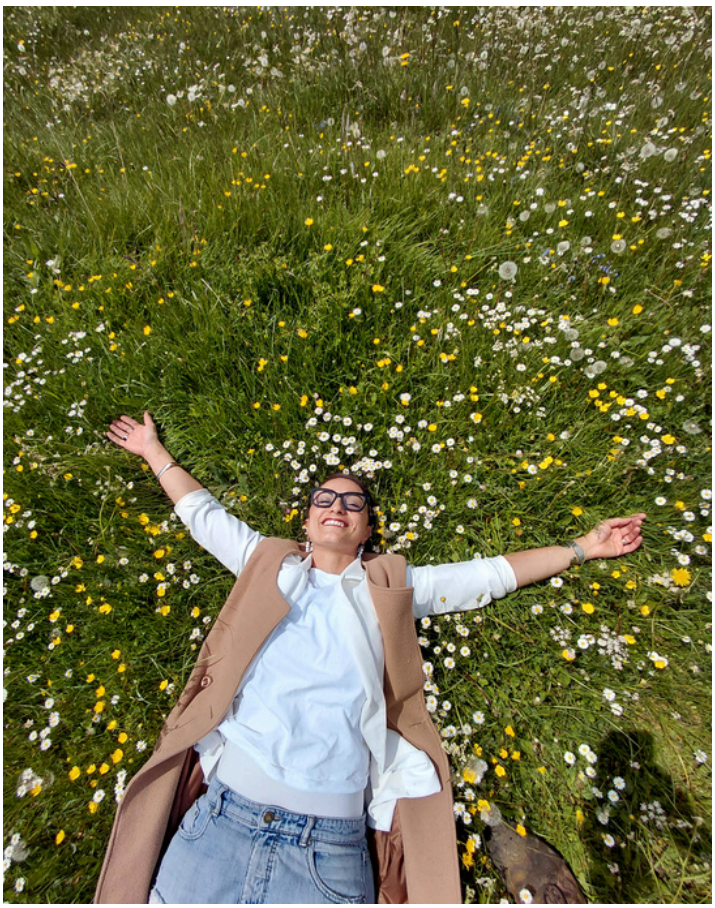


Join Chef Melina for a slow week in the gastronomic heart of Parma and on the quiet artisan coast of Liguria. One base, six rooms, twelve guests at most, and Melina with you at every meal.

This is the hands-on Italy the big tours leave out!

dont’t just *visit* Italy, live it!







Step into
real Italy

In the days we visit
the *local artisans*, producers
and in the evenings we cook .

You are not *a tourist!*
Here, you are living
in Italy the way Italians live it!

You **dont't** just *visit* Italy,
you live it!

slow down
unwind
reset

Live like an Italian,
laugh like an Italian,
l*earn to be* Italian!



where you come *to live like* an Italian.

Welcome to your 1 week long Culinary Retreats set in the northern region of Emilia-Romagna. Bedonia -Province of Parma.

This is your week to unwind and to see Italy not through a guidebook, but through its food, its wine and its people, with your own host, Melina, beside you the whole way.

We meet the artisans behind our cheese, grains, vegetables and even our pasta tools. We forage the mountain with Pietro and his dog Maya, then cook what we find, together, in the kitchen at Il Mulino.

We visit local wineries and cross the pass to a fishing village the crowds haven't found. We eat in restaurants where everyone else at the table is local, walk through castles, and stay in an old stone flour mill turned into a six-room retreat that is ours for the week.

April in Bedonia
In Spring the mountain wakes up.

This is the mountain before anyone else sees it. Spring is 'The Awakening', the excited anticipation before summer, before the visitors, while the village is just coming back outside.

The waterfalls around Il Mulino start running again, the first wildflowers come through the meadows, and the forest floor gets ready for the year. Up in the woods it's prugnoli season, and tender greens and herbs push up through the first light.

It's an important season for our artisans too. The milk for Parmigiano is at its best, the castles open their doors after the winter, and the bees get busy. We move from cooking indoors to open fires outdoors.



day 1.

Arrival at Il Mulino

Your home for the week is Il Mulino, a converted old stone flour mill on the river Taro, ten minutes from Bedonia. Il Mulino features a pool, a spa room, forest all around, and a kitchen at the centre of the house.

After settling into your rooms, we will gather downstairs for an Aperitivo and a welcome dinner prepared by Chef Melina herself.

Your week at mountain pace starts here.



day 2.

The King of Cheese & the Castle

We start early, because that's when the cheese gets made. Our Parmigiano Reggiano comes from a small mountain dairy, made with milk from cows grazing these hills.

It carries the "Prodotto di Montagna" mark, which only mountain cheese can wear. The cows are out on fresh spring grass, and you can taste it. You'll watch the milk turn to curd in the big copper vats, then see the cheesemaker lift it out in one piece and split it in two.

Then we step into the ageing room: 20,000 wheels on wooden shelves, floor to ceiling. Every one of them waits at least 12 months before an inspector from the Consorzio taps it with a small hammer and listens. Only the ones that sound right get the brand. It stops everyone in their tracks.

On the way back to Bedonia, we stop at Compiano. The Landi princes once ruled their own small state from this castle, and the village around it is one of the most beautiful in Italy.

We then sit down to lunch with chef Fabio Giulianotto, looking down over the Taro valley.

Cook with Melina: tonight is our first cooking evening, around the fire at Il Mulino. The star is a proper antipasto-style board with cheese at its heart, local mostarda (the sweet and spicy preserved fruit that belongs with cheese) and a few drops of real Aceto Balsamico Tradizionale, aged at least 25 years. We build the rest of dinner together from what's in season, with local wines alongside.







day 3.

Into the Woods with Pietro

Pietro is a young farmer and forager who grows heirloom varieties on his family's land above Bedonia. He knows the woods behind his farm the way most of us know our kitchen, and so does Maya, his truffle dog. This day is spent with them. We start at his farm and walk into the woods behind it, with Maya out in front.

At this time of year, we're looking for: Prugnolo (St George's mushroom), it's the mushroom everyone up here waits for after winter. Aglio orsino (wild garlic). We pick the leaves and buds, and Pietro shows you how to tell it apart from the plants that look like it and aren't safe to eat.
Nettle tips, dandelion and wild greens. The everyday stuff mountain families have always picked in spring, because it was free and it was there.

Back at the farm we sit down to a picnic lunch among the chestnut trees: local specialities and products from Pietro's own agriturismo. Before we leave, we raid the vegetable patch for the rest of the week's dinners, picked that afternoon and cooked at Il Mulino over the days that follow.

About the prugnoli: they don't keep to a calendar. Pietro's woods sit at a different altitude from Bedonia, so they don't always come up at the same time. If they're not out on his land, we stop at a second spot on the way back.

Cook with Melina: that evening we cook what we found. Think tagliolini with prugnoli, crocetti with wild garlic pesto, and nettle pasta, rolled by hand.

The practical bits: a full day, with about 4 hours of walking on easy terrain. Bring proper walking shoes, layers and a rain jacket, because often the mountains changes its mind. Baskets and knives are provided.





day 4.

The Food Trail to the Sea





We cross the mountain pass into Liguria and stop in Varese Ligure, at the workshop of Alessandra. She carves corzetti stamps by hand, a wooden pasta tool that belongs to this valley and that you won't find in a shop. Then a browse and a coffee at the local market before we carry on to the sea.

Sestri Levante is a small fishing town, just as beautiful as the Cinque Terre but with the locals still in it. Its vinaccieri used to throw their wine barrels straight off the ships into the sea and roll them up the beach into the cellars. Today we taste wine in a cellar where it is still aged in sea water.

Then some free time at Baia del Silenzio, the Bay of Silence, which the wind can't reach and the sun stays on all day.

Take your shoes off and walk on the sand, a rarity on this coast, or sit with a piece of warm focaccia and watch the fishing boats.

Cook with Melina: dinner tonight is back at Il Mulino, cooked together. With Alessandra's stamps fresh in mind, it's often a pasta night.



day 5.

Village life & limoncello

This morning is slow, a sleep in and a long breakfast.

Just down the road from our accommodation, At Laboratorio Bioflora, We have a local distillery, where Michele, his wife and their two small children do the foraging together. The history here is quite bizzarre, you won't believe it when i tell you.

Michele trained in naturopathy and turned it into this: a zero-impact business that follows the lunar and natural cycles for every bottle. Nothing is made until the mountain says it's ready, so what's in production depends on what the season has given that year: herbs and flowers just gathered, lemons, or the berries of the forest. You see it being made, taste your way through their bottles, and can take a piece of the mountain home.

Today you make your own limoncello. The lemons come from the Tigullio coast, not far from Bedonia, and they're in prime season.

We will stop for lunch at a local trattoria, famous for its Torta Fritta!

This evening we head into Bedonia. As summer gets closer, the village comes alive, and we enjoy it the way the locals do. I'll take you for a walk through the cobblestone streets and pastel buildings (it's small, so it won't take long), then we join the locals for aperitivo before dinner at a village restaurant. And after dinner? Gelato, of course.





day 6.

The King of Salumi & Michelin Lunch



We start slowly, in Bedonia. Coffee at the bar with the locals, then a wander through the market. This is where the village does its shopping, catches up and swaps the week's news. Take your time, and watch how a mountain town starts its day.

Then we come down out of the mountains to the flat, misty banks of the Po and Antica Corte Pallavicina, a 14th-century castle on the river. This is where Massimo Spigaroli makes what many consider the finest culatello in the world. He takes us down into the old cellars, where the culatelli hang in rows and age slowly in the damp and the river fog. No machine can do that job. This is Culatello di Zibello, and you won't find much of it outside this stretch of the river.



Then lunch at Massimo's own table, in his Michelin-starred restaurant: the cooking of the Po, refined but rooted in exactly what you just saw in the cellar.

Cook with Melina: the last dinner: in the evening we head home to Il Mulino and cook our last dinner together. This one is my pick: the dishes I think you need to see and taste before you go home, chosen from everything I've learned about the group during the week. My family has an old saying: "A tavola non s'invecchia." At the table, with family and friends, you never grow old. You arrived as strangers. Tonight we sit down as friends.





day 7.

Departure

After breakfast at Il Mulino, it's time to say goodbye. You go home with more than recipes. You'll have made pasta by hand, more than once, you'll know how to choose a real Parmigiano, and how to cook with the season at home. You'll also know how to sit at the table a little longer. You've met the people who grow, make and cook the food of these mountains, and they'll remember you too.

We don't say addios here. We say "A Presto": see you soon.





Cook with Melina

What is it & How it works





Four evenings of the week (days 2, 3, 4 and 6) are "**Cook with Melina"** evenings at Il Mulino.

On the first night I cook for you. The rest of the evenings we gather in the kitchen together to prepare our dinner...

Join in, or pour a glass: Every session is hands-on, and you're welcome to cook every step with me. If you'd rather sit back with a glass of wine and watch, that's fine too. You're on holiday.

No set menu: I don't fix the menu in advance. I cook with whatever the season and Pietro's garden give us that week, and with what you feel like eating. Had enough pasta? Want a salad tonight? Just tell me, and we'll build dinner on the spot.

Why seasonal matters: I want you to go home knowing that cooking with the season is cheaper, better for your body and better for the land it comes from. That's the real skill, and it works in any kitchen.

Pasta, guaranteed: Everyone makes pasta by hand at least once during the week, and usually several times.

Farewell dinner: The last dinner is my pick. On the final night I cook the dishes I think you need to see, based on the week we've shared.

home for the week

Il Mulino is a magical retreat tucked away in nature.

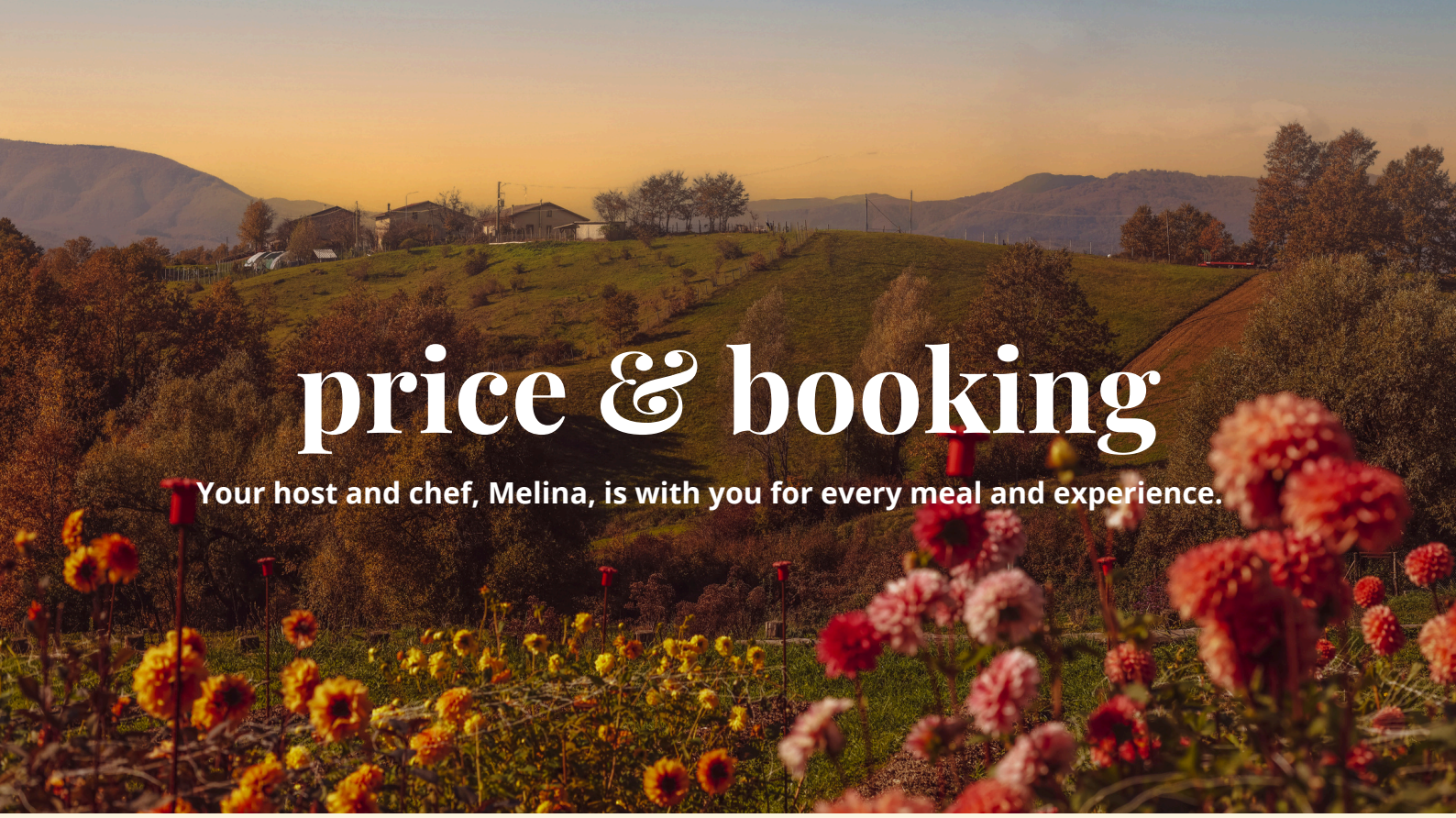




Your home for the week sits on the Taro river in the small hamlet of Masanti, only 10 minutes from the centre of Bedonia. Masanti is known for its waterfalls, and loved by locals for the truffles that grow quietly in the forest around it.

Il Mulino has six rooms, and the whole mill is ours for the week. It sits in large grounds with a private tennis court, a swimming pool and a spa room: the perfect place to unwind, recharge and take in the Italian countryside, a stone's throw from town.





price & booking

Your host and chef, Melina, is with you for every meal and experience.

€4,200 per person, sharing a double or twin room. The single supplement is €600.
This includes everything: every experience, all food, wine and drinks with meals, and private transfers from Borgo Val di Taro station and on every excursion.

Dates: 19–25 April 2027.

To book: a €1,000 deposit holds your room. The balance is due 90 days before arrival. If your plans change, the deposit can be moved to another date within two years.

PRICE EXCLUDES

- International airfares
- Items of a personal nature, laundry, phone, and drinks outside meals
- Tips
- Passport and, if needed, visa
- Travel insurance, which is compulsory. Please arrange it when you pay your deposit, through your travel agent or an insurance provider.

Private transfers directly from the airport to Il Mulino can be arranged for you at extra cost.

- Meet the artisans, properly. Not a one-hour, in-and-out visit. Spend time with Pietro, Michele and Adele as they show us the traditions that shaped this valley. Listen to their stories, walk into their homes, and through the castles and palaces that shaped the valley's history.

- Cook with your hands, properly. Cooking and dinners are led by Melina as your chef. You don't just learn recipes: you get her 27 years as a chef and her life as an insider in Italy. Join in, or sit and share a glass of wine.

- Eat where the village eats. Restaurants chosen because the locals choose them, cooking what the valley grows

- Travelling solo? You're with the group at every meal and every outing, and every transfer is handled. Come alone and take a single room, or bring a friend and share a twin.

Don't *just visit* italy, **Live it!**



whats included

You are in the beautiful mountains of Parma - Italy's gastronomic capital.

- **7 days, 6 nights** at Il Mulino, an old flour mill turned into a six-room boutique retreat. The property is ours alone, with a wood-fired oven, a professional kitchen, a tennis court and a pool.
- **All meals, with wine and drinks** at the table. On artisan visits, a light tasting lunch is included.
- **4 Cook with Melina evenings** (hands-on, or watch with a glass of wine), plus a welcome dinner cooked by Melina.
- **4 restaurant lunches and dinners**, chosen for their quality and for what they say about the province of Parma.
- **Parmigiano Reggiano dairy** guided visit.
- **Compiano castle**, one of the finest castles of the old Duchy of Parma.
- **Foraging day with Pietro**, a local forager and environmental guide, shaped by the season.
- **Picnic lunch** on Pietro's farm, and a visit to the farm and its vegetable patch.
- **Visit to Alessandra's workshop**, where she carves traditional corzetti pasta stamps.
- **A day on the Ligurian coast**, with a walk in Sestri Levante.
- **Tasting at a vinaccieri cellar**, where the wine is aged in the sea.
- **Limoncello-making class** and tasting at Laboratorio Bioflora.
- **Aperitivo with the locals**, Bedonia style.
- **Visit to Massimo Spigaroli's** culatello cellars at Antica Corte Pallavicina, then lunch at his Michelin-starred restaurant.
- **Private transfers** from Borgo Val di Taro train station, and daily transfers for every excursion. You never need a car or a timetable.
- **A small group:** 12 guests at most, all here for the same reason, to experience Italy rather than just see it.

what my clients say...

Chef Melina was glowing. Her joy, her warmth, the way she shared history behind every ingredient and dish made the entire room feel connected. It felt like learning, laughing, tasting, and traveling all at once.

This was not just dinner. It was storytelling.
It was culture. It was one of those experiences you leave feeling fuller in every way."

Anna Day

"Our tour guide, Melina, was excellent - she was good fun to be with and she had a wealth of knowledge about everywhere we visited."

Bob Hitchens

"What a fantastic experience! Everything is organised and done amazingly. There wasn't a day where we didn't have fun, enough food and laughs. This tour has been etched in our memory and hand on heart was worth every dollar. Our guide, Melina was just the best with her knowledge, interaction and friendliness"

Darren & Donna Maher

"Our host, Melina was knowledgeable, friendly, energetic with a great sense of humour. She made each of us feel special. The food experiences were to die for! We tasted food that we would probably never have tried on our own"

Tracey & Grant Luhrs

Melina Pistorino

COOK THE MOUNTAIN

The Italian *Culinary* Retreat–



slow down, unwind &
live like an italian
in my village

7 DAYS, ALL INCLUSIVE.
FORAGE, COOK, WINE & DINE, BAKE
VISIT LOCAL ARTISANS &
FOOD PRODUCERS.