

## "AMERICAN" FALL FESTIVITIES IN ITALY

The United States and Italy have always shared only three holidays: New Year's Day, Easter Sunday, and Christmas, and one festivity, *Mardi Gras*, not to be missed in New Orleans and in Venice. Then, about two decades ago, for no apparent reason, but maybe because Italians are always game for a party, they started celebrating Halloween.

The medieval walled town of Corinaldo, northeast of Ancona in central Italy's *Le Marche* region, calls itself the Italian Halloween Capital. However, the first place in Italy (since 1993) and still No. 1 Halloween venue is at the Devil's Bridge in Borgo a Mozzano, a few miles north of Lucca in Tuscany. Elsewhere, head to the small town of Triora in Liguria, famous for its 16th-century witch trials during the Inquisition.

Although, like Halloween, Thanksgiving originated to celebrate the end of a plentiful harvest, America's most heartfelt festivity isn't commonly celebrated in Italy. Italy's non-adoption is probably because the event was originally a Protestant affair and has always been a patriotic all-American day without European origins. Cranberries, sweet potatoes, and marshmallows aren't indigenous to Italy, and most Italian ovens still aren't big enough to accommodate a whole turkey, which may help to explain this bird's general lack of popularity. Roast chicken is served ubiquitously, as well as duck, especially in the Veneto, and pheasants and other wild birds wherever hunting is popular, but especially in Umbria and Tuscany.

My first Roman Thanksgiving experiences were at The American Academy in Rome where I was associate editor during the 1970s, a few years before ITV's founder and publisher, Robert Moynihan, was a Fellow in Post-Classical Studies there.

In my day the arrival of the pumpkin pie was always a tense moment. That's because jack-o-lanterns didn't exist in Italy then and the pie filling, an annual variation on the theme, was usually slightly watery, zucchini pale green, and peppery with a cinnamon additive.

Today, however, whether you're an ex-pat living permanently in Rome, a temporary employee of an American company, an Academy scholar, a student on a junior year abroad, or a tourist, there are several places to celebrate Thanksgiving. Wherever you choose, it's always best to reserve in advance.

The most rustic and made entirely of organic ingredients, so most similar to Plymouth 1620, is the suppertime buffet (after

8 PM) at *Vivi Bistrot* by an entrance to Rome's large park *Villa Pamphili* at *Via Vitellia* 102, tel. 06-5827540, cell 392-9405100. Otherwise you can book its "Thanksgiving Lunch" at *Palazzo Braschi* just outside *Piazza Navona*. Other informal celebrations are at two downtown pubs: (1) *Hard Rock Café*, across the street from the US Embassy, at *Via Vittorio Veneto* 62, tel. 06-4203051, has a lunchtime seating from 12-2 PM and two supper seatings:

6:30-9 PM or 9-11:30 PM. Starting at 8 PM a Gospel choir accompanies the feast; and (2) *The Highlander* near *Piazza Fontanella Borghese* at *Vicolo di San Biagio* 9, tel. 06-68805368, serves an all-you-can-eat buffet with a drink included from 6-8 PM. After dinner bonuses include NFL football on TV and late-night Karaoke.

For a family ambiance and live jazz, if off-the-beaten-track in the city's suburb called Labaro at *Via Bellagio* 2, gastronomically-speaking the trip to *Mamma's* is well worth the long taxi ride, tel. 06-33614537.

For gourmet food prepared by Neapolitan Michelin-starred chef Francesco Apreda in one of the Eternal City's most elegant settings, enjoy a relaxed fireside evening at the deluxe *Hassler Hotel* at the top of the Spanish Steps. For another evening feast fit for a king, there's also the *Brunello Lounge and Restaurant* in *Hotel Baglioni Regina* at *Via Vittorio Veneto* 70.

Instead, if you're the gourmet chef, you can usually find your turkey at the open-air markets: *Mercato Esquilino*, *Mercato Testaccio*, or *Mercato Trionfale*. For organic ones, head to the butchers, *Macelleria Stecchiotti* on *Via Panisperna* or *Bio Eno* on *Via Labicana*. For sweet potatoes, ask for *patate americane* at the above open-air markets or at the more expensive *Campo de' Fiori*. As for all your trimmings: marshmallows, apple and cranberry sauces, and pumpkin pie filling, *Castroni*, Rome's "international" food emporium, carries them all. If anyone offers to bring dessert, suggest American-owned *Homebaked* at *Via Fratelli Bonnet* 21 in *Monteverde Vecchio* or *Bakery House* on *Corso Trieste* 151 b/c or on *Via Riano* 11 near *Ponte Milvio*, where half the proceeds will be donated to "Save the Children."○

