



Sonnino Olio

Olive oil and wine are two of the most important cultural and agricultural products in Mediterranean countries. Italy ranks as the third largest producer of extra virgin olive oil in the world. One of the courses of the fall semester program at Gustolab International is 'Olive Oil and Wine'. Fall is the perfect time for in depth study because the period for harvest and production is typically between September to December.

We strive to bring our students to an environment that gives them the opportunity to see and learn specifically about olive oil first hand. This fall, we took a trip to Sonnino, a small town in the Latina province of the Italian region of Lazio, where they visited the Frantoio Rossetti, Frantoio Lannotta and the Sonnino Food Museum. Frantoio is the Italian word for olive mill, where the raw olives are pressed until oil is extracted.

At Frantoio Rossetti, the students learned about the various phases of olive oil production and how the frantoio collaborates with other producers to mill their olive oil. They also enjoyed an olive oil tasting. At Frantoio Lannotta, the students observed the dynamics of a family-run business, saw the olive oil extraction process and participated in the packaging of their truffle-flavored olive oil.

These two visits were complemented with a cooking class organized with Sonnino Food Museum. Here, the group learned how to make 'cecapreti', a typical fresh handmade pasta and 'ciambelline al vino', traditional wine infused cookies, which they later enjoyed for dinner. In the evening, a representative from the Terre di Confine Museum showed the students around the narrow streets of the beautiful historic center, while telling stories about the traditions, celebrations, and legends of the bandits of Sonnino.

The following day, we visited Priverno, another town in the Latina province where students met with the owners of Frantoio Orsini and learned about their organic award-winning extra virgin olive oil. They discovered its effect on health and the various organoleptic characteristics, which are the aspects of food that an individual experiences through the senses. They also discovered different types of certifications and the characteristics of the 'Monocultivar Itrana' olive variety. Then, they learned about the Frantoio's marketing strategies and the group took a stroll in the beautiful olive tree grove. Here millennial trees grow amidst spontaneous herbs and lemon trees, which together with the sea breeze, contribute to the flavors of this particular Monocultivar Itrana olive. The students then learned how to harvest the olives.



The next stop was the city of Latina where the group met with the owners of Oliocentrica, an oleoteca, which is an olive-oil tasting room, with a selection of the best quality products from the most important olive oil producers in Italy. There, students had a guided tasting to discover the differences between three types of extra virgin olive oils from Sardinia, Puglia, and Le Marche regions.

The last stop before returning to Rome was Caseificio dei Pini at Latina Scalo, where students learned about 'mozzarella di bufala' and the differences between cow milk and buffalo milk mozzarella. They tasted mozzarella di bufala, ricotta di bufala and caciocavallo.

We acknowledge the passion, dedication and fantastic collaboration of the various local partners who worked with us. A huge thanks to each one of them for their time, energy and knowledge and also for transmitting the value of their work to our students.

Have you ever thought about how olive oil gets to your table or about the people who are involved in the many parts of the process? What about the rich culinary traditions, the countless varieties of olives and all the special places where olives grow? There are endless points of interest to explore when it comes to this magical plant.