



Tracking down the best gelato in Italy has been a favourite for many travellers...

The ingredients are churned in a freezer to create ice crystals that are infused with air. A dense and delicious cream that is low in fat, generally 7-8%, compared to soft ice-cream that can be as high as 19-21% fat.

The historical accounts of the origin of *gelato* are as varied as its flavours. The Romans are purported to have enjoyed iced drinks made from snow brought from Monte Terminillo, now a ski resort near Rome. Perhaps it was first invented by the Chinese, using snow, and brought to Italy by Marco Polo, as claimed by the Venetians. Then there is the Tuscan claim that it was Catherine de' Medici, that luscious patron saint of gourmets, who upon her marriage to the French King Henry II became one of the most noteworthy people in culinary history, importing Italian cuisine into France. She supposedly kidnapped Ruggeri, a modest chicken farmer and occasional cook, who had become the most wanted chef for any feast and bundled him off to France. His envied fame was too much to bear and he snuck back to Italy, leaving Catherine a thank-you note enclosing his famous recipe for ice-cream. Soon afterwards Bernardo Buontalenti, a Florentine architect and connoisseur, introduced his fabulous frozen desserts at the court of Cosimo I (Palmiro names *Crema Buontalenti* in his honour).

No less a preeminent source, the cookery writer Elizabeth David gives the gong to Naples, where the earliest recipes for *sorbetti* were published by Antonio Latini in 1692, about a century after the method of artificial freezing had been developed.

Ten minutes with Palmiro, overwhelmed by his enthusiasm, you could easily be convinced that he was the one to reinvent the simple confection and present it to the world.



TRACKING DOWN YOUR FAVOURITE

There are thousands of *gelaterie* in Italy. The sure sign of summer is when even the tiniest bar will find a place for a freezing cabinet of swirling colours. Its arrival heralds the height of summer as surely as swifts darting about.

Tracking down the best *gelato* in Italy has been a favourite of many travellers, feeling that they have not 'arrived' until they have sat in the piazza and had the obligatory *caffè* and *gelato*. Maybe you will agree with many others that the best is to be found at the Paolin in Campo Stefano in Venice, Il Gelato Vivoli or Gelateria dei Neri, both in the Santa Croce area of Florence, or even the Giolitti or Della



Above: Cabinet of delights

Above, left: Award-winning wine gelato

This image: Silvio Berlusconi with Palmiro, April 2007

Palma, both a stone's throw from the Pantheon in Rome. Or perhaps you'll have to follow the trail, island-hopping off Naples to the Bar Tiberio on Capri, Bar Calise on Ischia or Dal Cavaliere on Procida. Your research would not be complete until you tried the *gelato* in the piazza in Martina Franca, Puglia or perhaps you couldn't vote until you'd savoured the slightly denser, creamier *gelato* of Sicily, declaring it the best after trying *gelato* at I Puritani, Catania.

For me, the best is Palmiro's *pièce de résistance*, his award-winning red wine *gelato* drenched in the fabulous Brunello di Montalcino vintage. It lightly dances on the palate, it swirls with ticklish delight. It is a royal treat, fit for any queen.

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