



Indulge in the tastes of Turin

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With delicious food and drinks served in cosy bars, the Turinese have a lifestyle to envy, writes Carla Caruso

IT FEELS strangely delicious to stamp the cold out of my iceblocky feet and allow the warm inside air to seep through my boots.

I am in the northern Italian city of Turin, near the Alps, doing what the locals do best — propping up the bar while I await my bri che and coffee. It has become a twice-daily addiction — morning and afternoon tea. Who can wait for lunch or dinner?

To my left is a young Russian woman, with coiffured blonde curls and a fur-trimmed velvet jacket. To my right a pair of gossiping nonnas, dressed in obligatory black. Young, old, rich, poor, they all pile in. If this were the Bowery in Brisbane's Fortitude Valley, it would be a particularly hectic Friday night. Instead, it's a lazy Saturday afternoon in Turin's famed Baratti e Milano cafe, within the glass-roofed Galleria Subalpina arcade. It was opened in 1873 by partners Milano and Baratti, who quickly gained the title of "suppliers to the royal household".

The decor and fare remain fit for royalty — cascading chandeliers, gilt-framed mirrors and velvet-flocked

wallpaper, complemented by delicious pastries, chocolates, candied chestnuts and tramezzini (sandwiches with crusts removed). Plus, of course, excellent cocktails and hot beverages.

I sample a cioccolata calda (hot chocolate) and almost get a tooth cavity from its thick, syrupy goodness. Maybe I didn't need the added cream topping, after all.

It's no surprise then Turin is, in fact, the birthplace of solid chocolate, thanks to inventor Mr Doret, and that the city hosts a Chocolate Festival every February. This is a sweet tooth's heaven.

Turin (Torino in Italian) may be well known as the automobile capital of Italy (Fiat, Lancia and Alfa Romeo have headquarters here) and as host of the 2006 Winter Olympics, but food-lovers will note it mostly for its indulgent culinary habits.

Coffee and brioche breaks are just the beginning. Another culinary ritual Turin can wholly lay claim to is the aperitif. For some, it is as holy as the controversial Shroud of Turin.

Although the alcoholic treat may

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Bar bonanza: Turin is famous for its hot beverages, cocktails and tasty food treats, notably chocolate

be popular the world over. Turin is its birthplace, courtesy of Antonio Benedetto Carpano. In 1786, he invented vermouth — a white wine infused with 30-plus herbs and spices (and famously found in a martini).

The appetiser has since evolved into a regular Torinesi engagement to mark the end of the day or the beginning of the evening, however you like to look at it.

The protocol? You meet with friends over a glass of wine or a cocktail in a bar or cafe and the drinks come accompanied (for free) with food. Anything from a plate of snacks to a buffet: drink prices are jacked up to absorb the food costs.

When in Turin, do as the Turinese do. I say. So, I make an appointment with a friend for my own aperitif engagement later that night within the Museo Nazionale del Cinema, which is also home to five levels of film history.

My friend and I pick from the gratis cold cuts, cheese, omelette, pizza, sushi and roulades while nursing glasses of wine (my pick: a local rose). I could live like this.

The Turinese have a lifestyle to be envied in their city that has expensive white truffles on its doorstep thanks to the Piedmont hills, and more sweet temptations than Willy Wonka's chocolate factory.

TURIN

GO Several airlines fly direct from Brisbane to Turin including Air France, British Airways and Qantas, from about \$2100.

STAY Pacific Hotel Fortino, Strada del Fortino 361 0152, Turin. Standard double room about \$135 a night; the top-range suite is about \$340. www.pacifichotels.it.

MORE Details at www.turismotorino.org.