



Italian Historical Society of America

Newsletter

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BY JANICE THERESE MANCUSO

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Tutto Italiano **Benvenuto a *Tutto Italiano***

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By late spring in most northern regions of Italy – Piedmont, Liguria, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, and Umbria – mounds of [lavender spikes are beginning to bloom](#). Native to Europe, Asia, and Africa, and belonging to the mint family, [lavender](#) derives its name from the Latin term, *lavare* (wash). Sources note it was used during Roman times to fragrance soap; and it was the Romans who spread it throughout the Roman Empire, bringing it to Great Britain during Roman rule.

Almost 50 varieties exist, with the [most popular](#) being English Lavender, and varieties of French, Portuguese, and Spanish lavender. Although no species is currently named after Italy, several are grown in the northern regions – and in the southern region of Calabria. Blooming from late June to early August, the types of flowers and the colors vary, depending on the climate of each region.

Many of the towns where lavender grows are tourist attractions. Excursions, led by professional guides or self guided, allow visitors to stroll through the lavender fields. Bundles of fresh flowers and dried lavender – for cooking, teas, crafts, oils, medicinal and other purposes – are offered for sale; and numerous towns hold annual lavender festivals.

In the northwest region of Piedmont, the ancient village of [Sale San Giovanni](#), "Little Italian Provence," is known for its vast fields of lavender. Bee hives are often placed next to the fields, providing the bees with easy access to the flowers that flavor the honey. An annual festival "consists of a fair-market of medicinal and aromatic herbs, accompanied by a series of conferences on the topic and by refreshment points that offer recipes with local products." An arboretum "with rare plants and splendid orchids," is nearby; and at the top of the hill the centuries-old castle of the Marquis Incisa di Camerana overlooks the town.

In the northwest corner of Liguria, [Colle di Nava](#) – a mountain pass through the Alps about 20 miles north of the Ligurian Sea – is surrounded by perfumed fields of lavender. The flowers are harvested for [Coldinava Lavender](#), a fragrance company founded in the early 1900s. The lavender-scented products are very popular in Italy, and widely distributed. An annual lavender festival is held in July.

Heading east to Emilia-Romagna, in the town of [Casola Valsenio](#) – about 20 miles southeast of Bologna – [La Strada della Lavenda](#) passes through the hillsides of lavender fields. The road leads to the [Herb Garden](#) "the most important in Italy and probably in Europe due to the number and variety of plants cultivated there." Several historic buildings, including a Benedictine Abby dating to around the tenth century are located nearby.

In Tuscany, twenty-five miles south of Pisa, the [Pisan Hills](#) form the backdrop for the lavender fields of [Santa Luce](#). An alabaster museum, a world-renowned Buddhist institute, and a nature reserve are close by. For six weeks in June and July, [The Lavender Days](#) offers “guided tours of the fields, flower workshops, massages, workshops on the use of lavender in cosmetics, zen walks and bike rides, and aromatic experiences.”

Southeast of Tuscany, in Umbria, a few miles from Assisi – the hometown of Saint Francis – the hillside of Castelnuovo di Assisi is home to fields of lavender first planted almost twenty years ago. Cultivated by [Il Lavandeto Di Assisi](#), a variety of lavender plants, along with unusual and ornamental plants are offered by the nursery. A Spring Festival in April and May features a “lavender handicrafts exhibition” and on four weekends in June and July, the [Lavender Festival](#) offers free walks in the park and natural gardens; the “sale of aromatic plants, lavender plants, salvias ... and lavender products;” and picnics in the lavender garden with live music.

West of Umbria, in the northern region of Lazio – about seventy-five miles northwest of Rome – a field of lavender borders the [Abbey of San Giusto](#) in [Tuscania](#). Established in the mid-twelfth century, the Abbey was abandoned two hundred years later, remaining empty and falling into disrepair until it was bought in 1990. The new owner “decided to return it to its medieval splendour, undertaking an arduous ... process of excavation, restoration, and reconstruction, which is now – after two decades – nearly complete.” Almost thirty acres of organic lavender are grown on the property. A steam distillation machine is used to extract essential oils from lavender and other herbs and flowers. The lavender festival is held in early summer: “the little town is immersed in lilac, perfume fills every corner and stalls overflow with a wide range of lavender products.”

Extending through the border of Calabria and Basilicata, [Pollino National Park](#) – at around 750 square miles – is “the largest of the Italian Parks preserves natural wonders ...” This section of the Apennines “can boast the highest peaks in southern Italy,” and in [Morano Calabro](#) – one of the ancient villages within the park – the climate provides perfect conditions for growing lavender. The variety of lavender, “Loricanda,” is native to the park and named after the [loricato pine](#), also native to the area. The [lavender fields](#) spread across the hillside and a shop “sells the natural oils and a variety of different products like candles, honey, jams, soaps and other wonderful items ...”

[The Most Beautiful Lavender Fields in Italy](#)

[A Walk Through the Villages with the Scent of Lavender](#)

[Lavender in Italy: Piedmont's little Provence](#)

[Comune di Casola Valsenio](#)

[Il Giardino delle Erbe](#) (In Italian)

[Il Lavandeto Di Assisi](#) (In Italian)

[A Special Journey Through the Lavender Fields in Tuscany](#)

[Experience Southern Italy's Incredible Lavender Fields inside the Parco Pollino in Calabria](#) (YouTube)

Italian American Press

The [Italian American Press](#) offers a great selection of books – culture, history, memoirs, art, family, food, the supernatural, the natural beauty of Italy, and more – for every interest. Help preserve Italian American heritage and history. Support authors of Italian heritage who write about Italian American and Italian culture and let them know you found their books on the Italian American Press.

Author News

When John Alessio was asked what inspired him to write [*With Tears and Laughter*](#), he replied, “ ... I wanted to write a book that portrays how difficult it was for diaspora Italian immigrants to come to the United States: the stressful voyage, the indentured servitude, the stereotypes, and discrimination -- for them and often times for their children as well. And of course, we see similar patterns occurring with immigrants from other countries still today. My intent was also to indirectly show that what is happening to immigrants today is part of a bigger continuous structural problem, a problem tied to control of human capital and creating wealth.”

Additionally, his intent was to have an Italian version published. He “wanted Italians to know what happened to us” – those who left Italy and the generations that followed. To publish in Italy, John “spent two plus weeks reviewing the missions and publishing practices of about 180 book publishers in Italy.” He “sent proposals to 5 of those companies,” and weighed his options among several offers.

When asked why he wanted *With Tears and Laughter* published in Italian, John replied: “When I first went to Calabria in 1994, I was struck by the belief, of my relatives there, that my father somehow became rich – that he had a big farm with lots of cows, and that made him rich. The more time I spent in Calabria, the more I realized that the struggles that many of us had in the United States were lost to them. Of course there were opportunities here ... but those opportunities didn’t come easy, and the first generation paid dearly for them. When I took a sabbatical there in 2004 I came to realize that it wasn’t just my relatives that felt that way, but most people with whom I interacted.

On the ‘American’ side, I wanted people to know what drove people like my parents to the United States. It wasn’t as much the ‘good life’ here as the ‘bad life’ there. It is important that people understand, today as much as then, that most people don’t want to leave the familiarity of their homeland and the comfort of a familiar welcoming culture. Diaspora is about desperation. It has also been my hope that my book would contribute to ‘Americans’ developing a greater appreciation for Italian culture – who we are as a people: integrity/honesty, courage, family focused, and wonderful food/dining customs. We are not the mafia, and should no longer allow ourselves to be controlled by those images.”

From the preface by Leon Panetta, Former Secretary of State:

“This book ‘With Tears and Laughter’ is the story of emigration to America. It is the life of a couple--Lorenzo and Mariella--from Calabria and the path they followed throughout their years together, but it follows the same path millions of emigrants have taken who left their homeland to find the American dream for themselves and their children. ... I love this book because it brought back so many memories of my family and of Calabria. But most of all because it is the story of emigration to America...a story we too often forget to remember.”

Italian version: [Tra lacrime e risate: La vita di un emigrato italiano](#)

The cover shows the San Guglielmo, the ship John’s father traveled on for his first visit to America; he went back to Italy and later returned with his wife, John’s mother. (The ship was sunk by a German submarine in 1918, at the end of World War I.)

Italian American Heritage Project

Keep your Italian heritage alive. An excellent source for learning about Italian American culture and heritage is a museum specifically established to focus on the Italian American experience. Many have virtual exhibits and tours available on their websites. [List of Italian American Museums](#).

Talk with your children (no matter what age), grandchildren, other family members, friends, and educators. Tell them about the significant contributions people of Italian heritage have made to America ... and the world. [List of more than 70 contributors on Thirty-One Days of Italians](#).

Learn about Columbus. It's difficult to correct over 30 years of misinformation, and the rapid spread through digital sources is disheartening. In 2018, the Italian American Heritage Project was established to provide educational resources about Italian American history, heritage, and culture. The website also addresses the Columbus Controversy by providing facts about Columbus, how the controversy started, and why it continues. Read [What is the Truth About Columbus?](#) To understand how Columbus became an important part of American history, read [Christopher Columbus: When Did the Hero Become a Villain?](#) (Some links are no longer active.)

[Lesson plans developed from the letters Columbus wrote after his first voyage.](#)

The groups opposing Columbus Day have an organized agenda to eliminate it from America. Although the statements of truth and facts posted on Italian American websites are filled with historical facts, they are not very effective in reaching and educating the intended audience. Columbus Day has lost much of its relevance in American history; but battles for his legacy in American history are being won. Even so, the war against Columbus and our Italian heritage continues. Indigenous People already have a designated day, and Native Americans have a day and a month to celebrate their culture.

Indigenous Peoples Day – August 9

Native American Month – November

Native American Heritage Day – Friday after Thanksgiving

Visit the [IAHP website](#) to read my articles, learn about the lesson plans, see the resources I've used, and support my work. Donate for a cause – preserving Italian heritage and Italian American history and culture through education. [All donations are tax-deductible.](#)

Italian American News

[Mafia Mamma: Mamma Mia!](#) (italic.org; April 25, 2023)

[You Say 'brew-shetta', I Say 'brew-sketta'](#) (italic.org; April 8, 2023)

[A Brief History of Italians in St. Louis](#) (americadomani.com; April 6, 2023)

[Italians in America – Our Immigrant Stories: The Profound Truth about the Town of Roseto, ...](#) (americadomani.com; March 23, 2023)

News about Italy

[Immersive Mafia Museum Will Open Its Doors in Palermo](#) (americadomani.com; May 2, 2023)

[Il 25 Aprile: the Day Democratic Italy was Born](#) (italoamericano.org; April 25, 2023)

[Italy's New Tourism Ambassador is Botticelli's Venus, Brought to Life by AI](#) (cnn.com; April 21, 2023)

[Italy to Allow ChatGPT to Return if OpenAI Takes "Useful Steps"](#) (usnews.com; April 18, 2023)

[Italy Captures Killer Bear amid Debate on Her Fate](#) (msn.com; April 8, 2023)

[Agrigento, Sicily is Crowned Italy's Capital of Culture for 2025](#) (americadomani.com; April 7, 2023)

[Marvelous Murals that Color the Streets of Italy](#) (americadomani.com; April 5, 2023)

Eataly: a Perfect Name for a Guarantor of Culinary Italianità (italoamericano.org;
March 31, 2023)

[They Bought a Ghost Village in Italy then Left It to Crumble](#) (cnn.com; March 20, 2023)

From the Past

[Un film su Francesca Cabrini: forza e valori della madre di tutti gli italiani d'America](#) [In Italian] A Film about Francesca Cabrini: Strength and Values of the Mother of all Italians in America (lavocedineويورك.com; October 24, 2021)

[A Movie about Mother Cabrini: the Nun Who is the Symbol for Immigration in NY](http://lavocedinewyork.com)
(lavocedinewyork.com; September 19, 2021)

[Behind the Scenes of 'Cabrini' Film, as it Wraps Shooting in Buffalo](https://www.wbfo.org/article/behind-the-scenes-of-cabrini-film-as-it-wraps-shooting-in-buffalo/2021-09-16) (wbfo.org; September 16, 2021)

[Mother Cabrini, the First American Saint of the Catholic Church](#) (Magazine of the National Endowment for the Humanities)

From Christine G: "... the movie is excellent! And with superb acting. The producer, Eustace Wolfington, said that they purposely did not make it too 'Catholic' so that it would appeal to a wider audience and therefore reach more people to spread its message of the astounding things Mother Cabrini did to help immigrants, despite such fierce resistance. It's definitely a film to make Italian-Americans proud of their people--especially of Italian women! Lastly, I heard from someone in the audience that they are planning to release it in 2024."

Thank you, Christine.

Buon anno, buon tutto, buona vita,
Janice

Janice Therese Mancuso
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 Director, [Italian American Press](#)
 Founder, [Italian American Heritage Project](#)
 Founder, [Thirty-One Days of Italians](#)
 Author of [Con Amore](#)
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