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I Tried All of Stanley Tucci's Favorite Pastas in Rome — Here's Which One Came Out on Top

PEOPLE contributor Joey Skladany reflects on his culinary journey through The Eternal City, inspired by Stanley Tucci's Emmy award-winning series, *Searching for Italy*

By **Joey Skladany** https://people.com/author/joey-skladany/
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It almost felt torturous to watch the premiere of Stanley Tucci's *Searching for Italy* in February this year. The CNN series debut came right on the heels of initial vaccine distribution — a time where normalcy, including the ability to travel overseas again, seemed so far away, yet also so close. You could almost *taste* it.

But still, I became enraptured with the show and, ultimately, my decision to make Italy the first international trip I'd take once I found the time, means and proper vacation mindset. It'd be an opportunity to not only celebrate the heritage I share with Tucci, but also to shove obscene amounts of pasta into my mouth in a gluttonous display of what I like to call "carb healing."

The allure of Tucci's Emmy-award winning series is that it's not just a travel show, but one rooted in education. Episode two: *Rome*, pays homage to the capital's four essential pasta dishes: cacio e pepe (cheese

and black pepper), amatriciana (tomato, cheese, pork and black pepper), carbonara (egg yolk, cheese, pork and black pepper) and gricia (cheese, pork and black pepper) — each with its own fascinating history, but connected through a united purpose to nourish in taste, effortless presentation and readily-available ingredients.

My mission, frankly, was to emulate Tucci and try them all — a journey to "heal" the palate of a food writer who had been deprived of authentic international cuisine for far too long. And it only made sense to start at the location of *Searching for Italy*'s promo shots: the rooftop of Hotel Eden, situated in central Rome and only a stone's throw away from the famous Spanish Steps.

The hotel lived up to every vertex of its five-star rating, offering a gold-adorned suite with fresh-cut flowers, black-paned windows opening to charming city streets and, perhaps most important of all, unrivaled Italian hospitality. No detail was too small and the staff made me feel like an A-list movie star, like Tucci, from check-in to check-out.

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After luxurious accommodations set the scene, it was time for the food; all the wonderful, glorious food — I could barely contain my anticipation.

The entire trip would be dictated by Tucci's Roman small screen adventure, with the aforementioned pasta as its unsurprising lead role.

Here are my thoughts on the familiar stops and the dishes prepared along the way (as well as some other menu recommendations, should anyone find themselves lucky enough to travel to the Eternal City in the near future):

CREDIT: JOEY SKLADANY

Cacio e Pepe at Bistrot64

Chef Kotaro Noda was met with skepticism by Roman traditionalists for his creative take on Italian cuisine, but his version of cacio e pepe

celebrates its simplicity with a pecorino and Parmigiano blend that effortlessly balances the dish's creaminess with its sharpness.

But don't limit yourself to the a la carte courses that are most recognizable. The restaurant relishes its inspired tasting menu, teeming with seasonal produce and proteins that are prepared using Japanese cooking methods. My favorite of the bunch was a squid ink tagliolini with cured egg yolk and lemon — a zesty and briny play on carbonara that had me craving seafood for the rest of my visit.

CREDIT: JOEY SKLADANY

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The space, as seen in the show, is truly a modern gem and more than deserving of its Michelin star. But don't leave without ordering the "green" dessert — a shortcrust pastry with ricotta cream stacked with various herbs. It was the perfect palate cleanser before a late-afternoon jaunt around town.

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Amatriciana at Armando al Pantheon

Perhaps Rome's most well-known and touristy establishment, Armando al Pantheon provides unobstructed views of the Pantheon and its massive granite columns. We waited over 30 minutes to snag the perfect table, a corner space on the patio, which proved to be entirely worth it.

The famous rigatoni all'amatriciana was undoubtedly divine — a robust tomato sauce (courtesy of the appropriately-titled Greatest Tomatoes from Europe) enhanced with the salt of pork cheeks and the crunch of freshly-cracked black pepper. Still, you'd be remiss to not order a bottle of white wine (perhaps a Fiano grape variety from the Campania region) and just people-watch on a summer afternoon.

Honestly, I enjoyed the ambiance just as much as the food, which is saying a lot.

CREDIT: JOEY SKLADANY

Carbonara

Unfortunately, the show's featured restaurant, Trattoria Pomidoro, is currently closed, so I ventured to trendy neighborhood Trastevere (also highlighted on the show) for a dinner at Antico Arco.

The gorgeous outdoor setup, nestled on a hill and adjacent to the Museum of the Roman Republic and Garibaldi Remembrance, was host to a wonderfully decadent truffle interpretation of the celebrated egg yolk dish. Its richness, set against the earthiness and musk of the sliced mushroom, made for a drool-worthy blend of flavors and textures that had me rubbing my tummy in satisfaction.

For another reliable, though traditional carbonara, you'll want to hit up Roscioli Salumeria con Cucina. It is arguably one of the best in the city.

CREDIT: JOEY SKLADANY

Gricia

This is the only pasta Tucci didn't sample on camera, so I had no other choice but to follow suit.

Instead, he made an effort to spotlight up-and-coming talent through Chef Sarah Cicolini, owner of Santo Palato in Southeastern Rome. Her signature oxtail meatball was sensational — tender, juicy tendrils cushioned by a deep-fried crust and paired with a peanut and lovage sauce that should be bottled and sold to the masses.

Since taping, Cicolini has emerged as somewhat of a local celebrity and rightfully so — her innovative, Abbruzzo-style approach to proteins that many unadventurous eaters shy away from (like tripe, liver and heart) is food artistry at its finest.

CREDIT: JOEY SKLADANY

A Surprise Ending

Despite meal after magnificent meal, I must admit that my favorite dish of the entire trip came from La Terrazza, Hotel Eden's rooftop restaurant where it all began.

Michelin-star Chef Fabio Ciervo presented a spaghetti that appeared so painfully simple, so delicate and refined, that it almost did a disservice to its complex preparation.

To achieve the bright red sauce, Ciervo and his team pluck only the ripest tomatoes and extract every bit of moisture and water to yield a deliciously sweet broth that was fresher than anything I've ever tasted. (It almost felt as if I was sipping concentrated fruit juice straight from the vine.)

Each dish on the tasting menu was just as fantastic as the next, paired only with the most playful of Italian wines, thanks to a fabulous program curated by sommelier Stefania Ruggeri.

CREDIT: JOEY SKLADANY

Eat, Reflect, Love

At the end of the trip, full on carbs and memories, it only seemed fitting to tour the romantic city by Vespa and take in the sights and sounds with our eyes and ears and not our appetites.

Annie Ojile, owner and operator of the adorably-named Scooteroma, treated us to Aperol spritzes as we digested the experience of a long weekend with Stanley Tucci as our guide. It was everything I could have asked for...everything I needed as not only I, but also the world around me, seemed to begin the healing process.

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I may have left my heart in Rome, as one does, but my stomach is still here with me, reminding me every day that I mustn't wait to plan my next excursion (or at least fall in love with another city from the hit docu-series).

And for me, knowing that I can now do this again after a challenging year of heartbreak, loneliness and uncertainty — well, that's amore.