

If you believe you're never too old to learn something new, we have a great education/vacation idea for you. And you can do it this springtime in sunny Italy. We haven't done it yet, but drool in anticipation of following a young close family member who recently returned from a cooking vacation in Tuscany. She said she loved every minute of the experience, but felt a bit isolated because all the other students were women (and one man) in their 60s and 70s. That fact alone gave her elderly relatives even more encouragement to sign up for an upcoming session later this year.



She attended the program at Casa Ombuto, a former Italian noble family's villa in Tuscany. Now in its 12th year as a cooking school, it's in the picturesque mountain region south of Florence. In addition to the culinary schedules throughout the one- to two-week courses, students visit local cultural sites, including historic Florence, where Michelangelo's art and sculpture originated.

There are also cruises to beautiful isles of Capri and Sorrento, where strolling among the outdoor cafes and sampling local dishes are part of the Italian cooking adventure. The student is completely immersed in regional customs, cooking history and skills. Although teaching is in Italian, translators are always present to help those who speak only English, French, Spanish and other languages.

When my family member returned, she said that by the second or third day, she was already speaking passable Italian. She also commented on lessons that taught students how to cook tasty, filling traditional Italian dishes that were healthy and low calorie. She was greatly impressed by the freshness of the ingredients that arrived daily from nearby Italian farms and vineyards.

Prices for a typical eight-day Tuscany cooking experience are around \$2,500 plus airfare per person. The program includes private room and bath, as well as 24 (fantastically delicious) meals. For more information, check www.italiancookingcourse.com or other similar internet European and Asian culinary vacation offerings.