



The Delight of

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*Italian
White*

Truffles

Indulgence. Before you read very many more words, let's be clear about one thing: Italian White Truffles are an indulgence ... pure and simple. And this is a delightful thing for all who seek out these mysterious culinary gems that grow underground in the forests of Piemonte, Marche, Istria, Toscana, and other select areas of Italy.

And yes, Italian white truffles are a highly prized delicious fungus, and we are not describing the chocolate truffles that coincidentally have the same name. Instead we are celebrating something even better: the Tuber Magnatum Pico fungus that grows under the soil in a symbiotic relationship with the trees – they are the dream of chefs (and foodies) around the world.

Italian white truffles are an indulgence because they are enjoyed as a very special pleasure ... and due to how rare and precious they are, they are typically only enjoyed by the most dedicated of connoisseurs. We are talking about a delicacy that costs \$2,500 a pound on a typical year, and can go to \$3,500/pound on years when the harvests are low. The white truffle is something that has refused to be domesticated or cultivated, though attempts too numerous to mention have been happening for centuries. They are challenging to find, ripen for only a brief season that changes each year, and there are ever and ever fewer of them. The best growing season is a hot summer, followed by a few weeks of rain, and then cold weather.



Solare - White Truffles and Eggs

They have long been an indulgence because you do not pursue them for nutrition or even taste. Instead, for lovers of white truffles it is more of a sensuous craving; almost more a psychological and emotional need than virtually any other food will create. And the fragrance! When you unwrap a fresh white truffle even just the size of a marble, and place it in the farthest corner of a house, you will immediately know anywhere in the house that a white truffle is close by. And you will search for it!

Enter the Truffle Hunter. Since white truffles cannot be farmed, they are sought out by experienced truffle hunters (called a *trifolao* in Piemonte) with highly trained truffle dogs who can detect the scent of the white truffle even if it is far under the soil. And a trained animal with great digging skills is required as the white truffle can grow as much as three feet underground. In the early days, pigs were used to find the truffles due to their highly developed sense of smell, but the combination of pigs' love of eating truffles and the difficulty training pigs to not eat the truffles they found caused the shift to the modern world where dogs are the top choice of the truffle hunter. A great truffle dog is difficult to train and can cost \$4,500. And Italy only allows 2,600 licenses for Truffle Hunters across the country.

The best white truffles come from two main areas of Italy: Alba in the region of Piemonte to the north-west of Italy, and Acqualagna in the central-eastern region of Marche. Note that white truffles are not the only type of truffle: there are also several varieties of black truffles and "summer" truffles. While these varieties of truffles are also wonderful, they do pale in comparison in terms of fragrance and flavor and texture to the white truffle. Wonderful truffles can also be found outside of Italy in France (think the Périgord black truffle) and other areas of Europe – but the esteemed white truffle is found in Italy.

The white truffle season changes each year based on climate conditions, but it typically starts in the second half of September and goes till December or early January. The typical truffle is the size of a ping pong ball, but there have been white truffles that have been found as large as two pounds. And no surprise, there are "White Truffle Auctions", and during the 2013 season

an anonymous buyer from Hong Kong bought a pair of large white truffles for over \$115,000 which was three times the price of gold at the time. In Italy, the large priceless truffles are called "Jokers".

While black and other truffles can be cooked, the white truffle is eaten exclusively raw. It is shaved with a special device into thin slices and placed over a dish with delicate flavors which best highlight the white truffles intense and complex aromas. A typical portion on a dish is 6 to 10 grams and great examples of dishes perfect for white truffles are fried eggs (*uovo fritto*), *tagliolini burro al timo*, and also plain risotto.

Beware of "truffle flavored" products which commonly have no real truffles in them but instead are a derived from synthetic chemical flavorings.

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Solare - Fresh White Truffles

There are so many wonderful reasons to visit Italy, and attending a Truffle Fair can be top of the list. There are over 50 Truffle Fairs held each year, and two incredible ones are the International Alba Fair which is held from mid-October to mid-November ... and the Acqualagna Fair which is held each year in a small village of 4,500 residents in historic and beautiful area of Marche. You can also team up with a Truffle Hunter during the right season and see how it is done first hand!

Indulge in Italian white truffles. And when you do, you will be in good company with the members of the

Savoy royal dynasty and other noble families from the Renaissance and earlier that prized this special delicacy. And you will be in good company with the women and men who are the truffle hunters who use their special skills and knowledge to find these hidden diamonds in the soil. And when you find that special chef that knows just how to honor the Italian white truffle in their dish ... you will indeed be in good company.

Sneak Peek

Chef Suzette Gresham-Tognetti returns to the San Diego Bay Wine + Food Festival® to team up with Chef Accursio Lotó of Solare Ristorante for an unforgettable evening of truffles, paired with wines from the vaults of Antinori by the well-versed Giancarlo Paterlini.

Wednesday, November 18 | 6:00pm - 9:00pm | Solare Ristorante

For tickets or more information, visit: www.sandiegowineclassic.com.

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*All guests must be over 21 years of age, with valid photo ID to attend all Festival Events. All events are rain or shine.