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Castagnata, Ascona, Ticino

“La castagnata”.

Chestnut festivals: a much-loved tradition

Every autumn, chestnut festivals attract guests from all over the world to southern and central Switzerland, and to the canton of Valais. They form part of the ceremonial setting where thanks is given for an abundant chestnut crop.

“La castagnata” is celebrated in the cantons of Ticino and Graubünden, where a festival is dedicated to the chestnut. Once considered the “poor man’s bread”, nowadays chestnuts are used in pasta, honey, jams and more. Roasted chestnuts are especially popular. Black on the outside, golden on the inside, chestnuts are served hot and shelled directly at the table, or enjoyed as part of traditional dishes known as “brasché” or “maronatt”.

According to legend, the first chestnut trees in central Switzerland were planted in the mid 15th century, in the town of Kastanienbaum (LU). In Greppen, on Lake Lucerne, the “Cheschtene-Chilbi” is still held today, showcasing all of the chestnut products that Switzerland has to offer.

Brusio, in the Val Poschiavo, hosts a chestnut festival known as “La Sagra della Castagna” in October, with hot, sweet chestnuts, music and a market. Here, the chestnut is a symbol of a long culinary and agricultural tradition.

In Fully (VS), in the canton of Valais, people have a special attachment to roasted chestnuts. “La Brisolée” is a cosy get-together with family and friends that takes place at the height of the “Fête de la Châtaigne”.

A feast for the senses

During the Castagnata in Ascona, chestnuts are roasted on the main square. This festival features folk music, colourful activities, crafts made from chestnuts, even ice cream.

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Traditional or royal

“La Brisolée” in Fully takes place during the hunting season. Traditionally, chestnuts are roasted on a log fire. When enjoyed with sausage products, the dish is known as “royal”.

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Cuisine and culture

Hundreds of people flock to the chestnut festival in Brusio to celebrate the chestnut crop that used to feed the population all winter long in the olden days.

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