

# Perugia, City of Chocolate

by Mary Ann Esposito



It was worth the drive through demolition-derby traffic to get to Eurochocolate, that sensational, get-your-fix-of-chocolate convention that takes place each October in the city of Perugia, capital of the region of Umbria.

Eurochocolate is an international confectionery show bringing people from around the globe to delight in nibbles fashioned into shapes about which most of us can only fantasize. Would you dare crack into Perugia's famous fountain, the Fontana Maggiore, made completely of chocolate? The Leaning Tower of Pisa? The Coliseum? Every conceivable display form in milk, dark, and white chocolate is here, lining the expanse of the elegant Corso Vannucci, Perugia's main street, packed as tightly as a Tootsie Roll with people all eating their way down the *corso*.

Guests to the city do not just reserve a room in any hotel; they request an early booking at the Etruscan Chocohotel in Via Campo di Marte, where everything revolves around chocolate!



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There are fabulous shop window scenes of chocolate too like the one at Sandri's *pasticcera*, where an entire chocolate symphony orchestra gets "oohs" and "ahs" from passersby. And if Eurochocolate were not enough to convince people of the virtues of chocolate, there is also the

Compagnia del Cioccolato, a nonprofit group committed to seeing that chocolate is always manufactured according to rigid specifications, and that its quality is never sacrificed with the use of artificial additives such as palm oil.

Eating good quality chocolate is one

thing, but what about cooking with it? In my kitchen the same rules apply: use the best quality you can find and that means chocolate with a high ratio of cocoa butter.

Only one revered name is synonymous with chocolate in Umbria, and that is Perugina, with its major factory and chocolate museum located in San Sisto, not far from the city center. Perugina chocolate was started by the Buitoni family, a company that makes commercially prepared dried pasta. Eventually Nestle took over the business in order to satisfy a growing global craving for chocolate. Today, it oversees the production of many types of Perugina confections from fantastic, giant chocolate Easter eggs to caramels to the chewy nougat known as *torrone*. The most famous and most recognizable of their products, created in 1922, is *baci*, meaning "kisses"—those silver and blue foil-wrapped smooth morsels of creamy chocolate encasing a delicious hazelnut. They have become the edible logo of Perugina.

The Museo Storico Perugina adjacent to the factory showcases everything from the history of how cocoa beans arrived in Europe from the Americas to displays of antique candy-making apparatuses. Old candy molds and advertising posters tell the story of Perugina's history — early television commercials for Perugina chocolate even feature Frank Sinatra. There are letters and tributes from hundreds of famous people who succumbed to Perugina chocolate. Even Mussolini was impressed after a visit to Perugina in 1923 and proclaimed to then-owner Dottore Buitoni that "*...vi dico, e vi autorizzo a ripeterlo che il vostro cioccolato è veramente squisito,*" meaning, "I tell you, authorize, and repeat it that your chocolate is truly exquisite." And there is no arguing that in Perugia, the city of chocolate. ➤

## Chocolate Cake Torta al Cioccolato

MAKES ONE 9-INCH CAKE

This dense chocolate cake dotted with chopped hazelnuts is a good keeper...but it rarely lasts long. Cut it in small wedges and serve it with *espresso*. For best results, lightly spoon the flour into your measuring cup; do not pack it in. Use Perugina cocoa if possible.

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 1/2 cup hazelnuts
- 1 cup (2 sticks) plus 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 5 eggs, separated and at room temperature
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 1 1/2 cups unbleached, all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup baking cocoa (Perugina if possible)
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 3 tablespoons confectioner's sugar

Preheat the oven to 350° F.

Place the nuts on a cookie sheet and toast in the oven for about 5 minutes. Watch carefully so they do not burn. Cool the nuts, then coarsely chop them and set aside.

In a large bowl with an electric mixer, cream 1 cup butter with the sugar until lemon-colored. Add the egg yolks one at a time, beating each in completely. Add the vanilla and continue to beat a few seconds more.

Sift the flour, cocoa, and baking powder together. Using an electric mixer, gradually add the flour mixture to the egg mixture. Fold in the nuts and set aside.

In a separate bowl, beat the egg whites with the salt until very stiff. With a rubber spatula, fold the egg whites a little at a time into the egg mixture until no streaks of white remain.

With the remaining tablespoon of butter, grease a deep 9 1/2-inch springform pan, then dust the pan with flour, shaking out the excess. Spread the batter in the pan and bake for 50 to 60 minutes, or until a cake tester inserted in the middle comes out clean.

Let the cake cool in the pan for 20 minutes. Carefully release the sides of the pan, remove the bottom, and let cake cool on a rack.

When ready to serve, dust the cake with confectioner's sugar.

*Recipes courtesy of [www.ciaoitalia.com](http://www.ciaoitalia.com) and Mary Ann Esposito. More recipes available at [www.ciaoitalia.com](http://www.ciaoitalia.com) ▲*