

Zuppa alla santè

Holy soup

There are restaurants, and then there are restaurants that are deeply tied to a place. Thanks to Chef Stefania di Pasquo, Locanda Mammi in Agnone is one of the latter. Her extensive experience drives her desire to gift diners unforgettable dishes that blend tradition with innovation. In Molise, *zuppa alla santè* is traditionally eaten at Christmas. It is said to have been created at the end of the 14th century in Agnone, to honour the queen of the kingdom of Naples, Giovanna II. A complete dish with meat, fried cheese and croutons, it truly warms the heart.

SERVES 4

- 3 eggs
- 200 g (7 oz) stale rustic bread, cut into 5 mm (¼ in) thick slices
- 300 g (10½ oz) minced (ground) veal
- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 300 g (10½ oz) finely grated cheese (I use 100 g/3½ oz each of Pecorino, parmesan and caciotta)
- peanut oil, for deep-frying
- 120 g (4½ oz) aged caciocavallo, sliced into thin triangles
- 1 litre (4 cups) chicken stock, heated

Parsley powder

- 60 g (2 oz) flat-leaf parsley leaves

To make the parsley powder, preheat the oven to 60°C (140°F) fan-forced. Place the parsley in a single layer on a large baking tray and cook for 3 hours or until dry. Allow to cool, then blend in a small blender to a fine powder. Alternatively, use a pestle and mortar to crush the parsley to a fine powder. Set aside. (Any leftovers can be stored in an airtight container in the pantry for up to 6 months.)

Increase the oven temperature to 170°C (340°F) fan-forced.

Beat two of the eggs in a shallow bowl, then coat the bread slices in the egg. Place the bread on a baking tray and cook for about 15 minutes, until golden. Remove from the oven, allow to cool slightly, then cut into cubes.

Meanwhile, combine the veal with the olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Roll teaspoon amounts of the mince into balls (about 7–8 g/¼ oz each).

Combine the grated cheeses with the remaining egg and roll into small balls about the size of the meatballs.

Heat enough peanut oil for deep-frying in a large saucepan to 160°C (320°F). Working in 3–4 batches, deep-fry the meatballs for 2–3 minutes, until lightly browned. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the meatballs to paper towel to drain. Add the cheese balls to the oil and deep-fry for 2–3 minutes, until golden. Drain on paper towel.

Divide the bread among serving bowls. Roll the meatballs in the parsley powder and place atop the bread, then add the cheese balls and triangles of caciocavallo. Bring the stock to the boil, pour over each bowl, and serve.



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