

Italy abroad is not just nostalgia or folklore: it is a living experience, shared culture, and real business. This is clearly shown by the growing success of the Little Italy Festival, which since 2019 has brought the best of Italian tradition to Finland during the summer months.

What started almost as a bet has become the largest Italian festival in Northern Europe, drawing over 55,000 visitors in Helsinki alone and now expanding in 2025 to also reach Turku and Tampere, Finland's other major cities.

"The idea was simple: bring Italy where it wasn't. Not just a market, but an atmosphere. Not only products, but emotions," says Patrik Vespignani, creator and producer of the festival, an Italian who has lived in Finland for over ten years.

A journey to Italy... without a plane ticket

For four days each summer, the streets and parks of Finnish cities turn into slices of Tuscany, Sicily, and Emilia. Espresso is served properly, Roman-style pizza is hand-made, fresh pasta is rolled on the spot, Parmigiano is shaved in generous flakes, and ricotta-filled cannoli are a must. There's also Italian design, fashion, motors, live music, evening DJ sets, and plenty of spritz and prosecco.

A real, modern, elegant, and popular Italy. And most importantly, it's open to all: entry is free, and participation grows every year.

An opportunity for Italy's producers

While for Finnish audiences the festival is a celebration, for many Italian businesses it is also an extraordinary showcase. Small food producers, wineries, artisans, designers, fashion brands – the festival has created a platform where Italy presents itself and makes meaningful connections, even with local buyers and professionals.

"The festival has two souls: the popular one that touches people's hearts, and the economic one that builds relationships. Italy is powerful in creating desire. Here, that desire turns into opportunity," Vespignani explains.

2025 will be the biggest edition yet

This year, the Little Italy Festival will take place in three cities:

- Helsinki (July 23–26)
- Turku (July 30 – August 2)
- Tampere (August 6–9)

Each city will host four days of full immersion in Italian culture, including tastings, live shows, cooking demos, and connections. The goal? "To create a small piece of Italy that moves and gets loved," says the founder.

When asked whether Italians truly understand this success, Patrik smiles:

"In Italy we often underestimate the power of our image. Here, people get emotional even just for a properly made pasta dish. Italy doesn't need to shout – it just needs to show up, with quality and heart."

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