Dear Readers,

Thank you for choosing *See You in the Piazza*. I hope it’s obvious that writing this book was a vibrant adventure. What a pleasure to travel spontaneously, searching for the village with the best bread, the highest waterfall, the prettiest rose window, the tallest golden dunes, the most sublime piazza, where, yes, you’re bound to meet people.

The travels brought up constant questions. Could I live here? What is that building *saying* to us? How does this place inform why the people are so open? What’s the special pasta? Dessert? What art do they cherish as their own? What are the artisan traditions? On and on. Meeting chefs was a complete joy, and I’m thrilled that many gave me recipes that are special to them. May I suggest, if you’re in a book group, that you try some of them for your meeting?

Every trip brought revelations and only served to remind me that a traveler will never be able to say *I’ve seen Italy*. There are still hundreds of new/old places yet to see and savor. *Andiamo!*

Frances Mayes

P.S. I’m sharing photos on [francesmayesbooks.com](http://francesmayesbooks.com).
1. In *See You in the Piazza*, it becomes apparent that Italy is a country where “heritage endures.” In comparison to other places, why do you think that history and culture have been so carefully and successfully preserved in Italy?

2. In the book, Frances and Ed Mayes are accompanied by their grandson William during their tour of Piemonte, and by many old friends at various other times in their travels. How can our experience of a place be transformed by the people with whom we are traveling? What makes an ideal travel partner?

3. *See You in the Piazza* is full of literary references and often details of how numerous famous authors retreated to Italian regions. D. H. Lawrence wrote *Sea and Sardinia*. Ernest Hemingway wrote *Across the River and into the Trees* in Torcello, Ezra Pound and Joseph Brodsky are buried in the cemetery island of San Michele, and Lord Byron traveled to San Lazzaro degli Armeni to study language under the island’s resident monks. Why do you think Italy attracts so many writers of the world?

4. This book celebrates the diversity between towns “a half hour and a world away” from each other. Did it challenge any presumptions you had about what is quintessentially “Italian”?

5. Frances Mayes frequently describes the things she has gathered during her travels in Italy, from books and gifts for family and friends to the recipes she includes at the end of each section in *See You in the Piazza*. Can you list some of your favorite things that you have collected along your own journeys? Answers do not have to be specific to Italy, and you may choose, for instance, how you discovered your love of a certain type of regional wine or cuisine.

6. Frances Mayes mentions the tradition of Sunday *pranzo*, a leisurely meal in Italy during which “no one is in a hurry” and which “speaks of our best instincts: to gather with those we love and break bread.” Why do you think Mayes considers expressions of companionship and hospitality through sharing and eating food together to be so revealing of humanity’s best features?

7. In a country as beautiful as Italy, it is easy to idealize the past and paint over some of history’s ugliest chapters. When Mayes describes the remnants of fascist art and architecture in this book, do you think she hints that we should complicate our views of many layers of history in Italy?

8. When describing her visit to Friuli, Mayes claims that “there is mystery at the heart of the places that seem to belong to you.” What do you think she means by this? Have you ever immediately felt a sense of belonging or homeliness in a foreign place? What intrigued you about its “mystery”?

(continued on next page)
9. Frances Mayes claims that she is “always drawn to people who are indelibly bonded with a place.” How does our locationality, or relationship with a certain place, shape us as people?

10. Writing about Genoa, Mayes comments that architecture “reveals how life is lived.” With reference to the buildings described across various regions in this book, how do you think that architecture reveals how life is lived in Italy?

11. Having read *See You in the Piazza*, how do you think life is paced differently in Italy than in other countries?

12. When revisiting Scarperia with Ed, Frances Mayes finds it remarkable that little had changed in the village after thirty years. She writes: “The house we rented only has a new coat of paint. The misty pastures are the same ones I walked in. Time warps, as it often does in Italy.” What do you think she means when she writes that “time warps in Italy”? Why is it that certain places can have an effect on our perception of time?

13. Frances Mayes offers the following piece of advice for traveling through Italy: “Put down a water glass on a map of Tuscany and draw a ring anywhere. Pick a hotel in the middle of your circle, check in for three or four days, and venture out from there. You will make your own discoveries. This throws the emphasis on spontaneity.” What other snippets of seasoned traveler’s wisdom did you find most insightful in *See You in the Piazza*?

14. In the Epilogue of *See You in the Piazza*, Mayes lists what she considers to be the “greatest gifts of travel”: “the steep learning curve,” “how your vision refreshes and you see with infant eyes,” and “memory. How the places seen will layer into life as time moves on.” What “gifts of travel” would you add to this list?

15. In the final passages of the book, Mayes discusses the pleasure of returning home to Cortona after a period of traveling. Do you think it’s important to periodically leave home to travel in order to become more appreciative of it?

16. Are there now places that you want to see that are new to you? What attracts you to them?
Recipes
Some Italian-inspired treats to take your taste buds along in your travels as you read.

Caponata
(Serves 6)

Sicilian soul food, as prepared by Giovanni Galesi, the chef at Nosco cooking school at the atmospheric Hotel Antico Convento. Use caponata with everything—fish, bread, meat, crackers, or just a dollop on its own. Cutting the vegetables into similar-size small cubes assures a balance of flavors. This southern version has no raisins or olives; the way it’s made in the north. I slip in two cloves of garlic. Giovanni says that in winter, spinach, pumpkin, or chicory is often added.

Instructions:
1. Add olive oil to a medium-size skillet and sauté the onion and pepper. Meanwhile, plunge the carrots and celery into boiling water for 3 to 4 minutes. Drain and mix with the onion and red pepper in the skillet.

2. Bring up the heat and add to the pan the vinegar, honey, capers, tomato sauce, salt, and pepper. Mix well. Set aside.

3. In another skillet, add more oil and on medium-high heat, fry the zucchini and then the eggplant until barely tender, about 2 minutes for the zucchini and 4 for the eggplant.

4. Turn off the heat, mix everything, and add the basil. Best after a few hours for the flavors to blend.

Nosco, Scuola Mediterranea di Enogastronomia, Hotel Antico Convento, Ragusa Ibla, Sicilia
Steak with Olives, Herbed Green Tomatoes, and Pickled Red Onions (Serves 4)

**Instructions:**

1. Preheat the oven to 175°F. Spread the olives on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Bake them for at least 4 hours or overnight, until they are dried out but not burned. Let cool, then transfer to a blender or food processor and pulse until coarsely ground.

2. Trim excess fat from around the steaks. Brush lightly with olive oil. Season the meat lightly with salt and generously with pepper. Press the ground olives onto both sides of the steak to coat completely. Wrap in waxed paper and refrigerate for 2 to 8 hours. Let stand at room temperature for 1 to 2 hours before cooking.

3. In a bowl, toss the green tomato wedges with ½ teaspoon salt and a generous grind of pepper, the garlic, herbs, and 2 tablespoons olive oil.

4. Preheat the oven to 450°F. Line a heavy skillet (preferably cast iron) with parchment paper. Pour in 3 tablespoons olive oil and set over medium-high heat until hot. Add the steaks and sauté for 1 ½ to 2 minutes on each side until nicely browned. Transfer to the oven. Roast for 5 to 8 minutes, until the meat is rare to medium-rare. Remove to a cutting board and let rest for 5 minutes. Do not tent.

5. While the steak roasts, heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a medium skillet. Add the green tomatoes, their juices, the garlic, and the herbs. Sauté over medium-high heat until they are softened but still hold their shape, 3 to 5 minutes.

6. To serve, cut the steak against the grain into thick slices. Arrange on plates with alternating layers of the sautéed green tomatoes and pickled red onions.
**Pickled Red Onions**

1/2 cup white wine vinegar  
2 tablespoons sugar  
2 teaspoons coarse salt  
1 teaspoon black peppercorns  
3 whole cloves  
1 bay leaf  
2 medium-size onions, thickly sliced

**Instructions:**

1. In a medium-size saucepan, combine 4 cups water with the vinegar, sugar, and salt. Bring to a boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar.

2. Add the peppercorns, cloves, and bay leaf. Reduce the heat and simmer for 5 minutes.

3. Add the red onion slices and simmer for about 3 minutes, until the onions are just softened but still hold their shape.

4. Transfer the onions to a glass container. Let the brine cool slightly, then pour over the onions.

5. Marinate for at least 30 minutes before using. If you have extra, let cool. Refrigerate for up to 5 days.