

From Puglia
to Venice,
recipes from
Italy's Adriatic
Coast

Paola
Bacchia





If there is one dish that you will find along the entire Adriatic coast, it is 'brodetto' (which translates to the slightly less romantic-sounding 'fish stew'). The recipe varies from town to town, using different types of seafood and accompaniments. This recipe is loosely based on one from a tavern (osteria) in the town of Ancona, where they would add the squid or cuttlefish at the same time as the onion, so that, rather than remaining obstinately rubbery, the squid would become wonderfully tender after the longer cooking time.

Use a combination of seafood for this dish; whatever looks fresh. If in doubt, ask your fishmonger for their recommendation to make a brothy fish stew. Larger fish should be purchased already filleted, and remember that if you are including clams they'll need to be purged in cold water for 3 hours.

OSTERIA FISH STEW

**BRODETTO DI PESCE
DI OSTERIA**

SERVES 6

1 kg (2 lb 3 oz) of your favourite seafood, such as squid, mussels, clams, prawns (shrimp), sea bass, monkfish or stargazer

3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

1 brown onion, diced

1 garlic clove, finely chopped

1 teaspoon chilli flakes (or to taste)

3 tablespoons white wine vinegar

400 g (14 oz) tin good-quality peeled whole tomatoes

3 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves

large pinch of saffron threads dissolved in 1 tablespoon water

sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

crusty bread, to serve

As a general rule, aim to have all the seafood in bite-sized pieces, although I would recommend leaving the prawns whole and still in their shells.

Heat the olive oil in a large frying pan with a lid over medium-low heat. Add the onion, garlic, chilli and any cephalods (squid, octopus, cuttlefish). Cook for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the onion is translucent. Increase the heat to medium-high and add the vinegar. Cook for a few minutes, then add the tomatoes, including the juice in the tin, breaking up the tomatoes with a wooden spoon. Bring to a simmer, then cover, reduce the heat to medium-low and cook for about 15 minutes.

Once the tomato sauce has thickened, add half the parsley and then start adding the fish, larger pieces first (sea bass, monkfish or stargazer), then the cleaned mussels or other large bivalves. Prawns and small bivalves, such as clams, should be added last.

Once you have added all the fish, add the saffron threads dissolved in water and stir well. Cook for 10–15 minutes, until the fish is cooked through, the bivalve shells have opened (discard any closed ones) and the crustaceans have changed colour. Taste the sauce and add salt and pepper if needed. The dish should be quite soupy but if there is too much liquid in the pan increase the heat briefly and simmer, uncovered, to allow the excess to evaporate. Scatter with the remaining parsley before serving.

Serve directly from the pan with plenty of crusty bread to mop up the juices. You could also serve with soft polenta.