

# Pastrengo Gourd Festival

Veneto Region,  
Northern Italy,  
September 2012.



## XXI ZUCCA FOLK 2012

Pastrengo 6-7-8-9  
New location Piovezzano **Settembre**

**ESPOSIZIONE e CONCORSO "ZUCCA PIÙ..."**  
con sfida per la zucca ...+ grossa + bella  
+ originale + strana + lunga...

Folklore con  
musica piano bar

Risotto e tortelli  
di zucca

Piatti  
rustici

Pane e  
dolcetti  
alla zucca

Visite  
guidate per  
Ville e Forti

Banchetti  
artisti e hobbisti  
Club di Giulietta



Visite da Padova Repubblica

# FESTA DELLA ZUCCA

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[www.prolocopastrengo.it](http://www.prolocopastrengo.it)

Pastrengo is a small village of around 2,700 inhabitants situated about 11 miles north west of the city of Verona and close to the south eastern banks of Lake Garda.

Driving through the town on a sunny Sunday September morning I spotted this sign. Maybe it was a bit early for Halloween but knowing that 'zucca' is the Italian for gourd, squash or pumpkin I pulled up to pay a visit to a small festival taking place alongside the main road running through the village.



This quaint old mini-tractor, draped with strange shaped gourds, placed at the entrance to the festival, left little doubt that Pastrengo has a farming heritage with a somewhat whimsical sense of humour when displaying its favourite fruit, which by the way, gourds, squashes and pumpkins are, not vegetables as some might suppose!

The phrase 'gawdily decorated' springs to mind...







I arrived at the festival mid-morning, way too early for most Italians to be out and about, just as a small number of stalls were being set up to display various types of hand-crafted articles.



The handicrafts on display included jewelry, exquisitely modeled baked salt dough figures, wooden toys and games, paintings, knit-ware and basket-ware, plus a variety of items and foodstuffs made from gourds and pumpkins. Unfortunately most of the stands had notices asking that photos not be taken so, a little disappointed, I concentrated on photographing the various displays of gourds on show. I did, however, grab a snap of these large colourful paintings which, although somewhat crude and simplistic in style, caught my eye.



So, on to the gourds, which came in almost every colour, shape and size imaginable. The large fellah in this photo weighed in at a healthy 45 lbs



Pssss! - don't be fooled, the gourd at the bottom left corner of this sunshine collection is a cardboard cut-out!



Dry these green guys out and fill 'em with dried peas and they'd make great maracas for a Mexican salsa band!



I guess there is always one odd guy out in a crowd...



For those visitors with hung over 'wino' eyes these bluish green gourds were definitely easier to look at!



The small yellow wrinkly skin fellahs to the right reminded me a little of those Shar-pei dogs ....



but an inventive exhibitor obviously had sharper eyes than me and came up with this amusing little display.

This nice basket assortment pulled a prize in the 'best of show' competition, showing that its not always the size that counts.





Without doubt this was my favourite whimsical offering on show and despite been stared at by all passers by , this little fellow didn't give a hoot!



I next came across this display by the local gourd carving club showing the types of gourds, water melons, sugar melons, cucumbers, radishes, lychees etc: that they cut up as part of their craft - and mighty skillful they were too.

When it came to carving, these folk took their work seriously witnessed by this superb piece of artwork using a gourd of around 18" in diameter.

The next image shows detail of this piece.







This gourd around 12” in length and was one of several which had been carved during demonstrations given to the public by two of the club’s committee members.

A variation of the carving technique on this large watermelon showed a nice contrast of colours and was certainly eye catching as well as being mouth watering as the late morning temperature soared into the upper 80's.





These carver's were certainly talented folks and not without a sense of whimsical humour as I was soon to find out. The gourd on the right has some sort of 'Miss Kitty' design carved into it.

The club president giving demonstrations whilst chatting with the public.

I spent about 20 mins talking with this guy in my pigeon Italian and apart from giving me a lot of information about how he learnt to carve and the techniques he used he also passed over a copy of a list of recipes using pumpkins and squashes which had been handed down from his grandmother's days.

A really nice guy!





Whilst talking enthusiastically to folks like me, the same guy was keeping visiting children amused by rattling out Mickey Mouse style characters with a few deft cuts in a radish and adding a pair of cloves as eyes. Note the radish root makes a nice long mousey tail.

Talking to the second member of the club I found out that these two guys were often in demand by local hotels to carve fruit and vegetables for table centerpieces at buffets and special events.

When asked where he'd learnt to carve the simple reply was 'from my father and grandfather'.





After spending a really enjoyable time watching and talking with these two very sociable and talented guys I came away wanting to at least try my hand at fruit and vegetable carving - nothing like as complicated as the superb pieces they had on display but I think I could manage to produce something like these cute tortoises, and if my attempt failed, well I could always destroy the evidence by swallowing it!

After spending well over an hour walking around the stands it was coming up to midday and time to stroll over to the food and drink area which by now was starting to fill with visitors, mainly Italian families who seemed to be more interested in socializing over a meal and a drink than looking at gourds.

The set-up at all these festivals is very similar. You take your turn in a line at a pay booth ('la cassa') where you pay for whatever food selection and drink you prefer from a displayed menu. You receive a ticket for each food item you buy which you then take to specific food stands and exchange for your choice. A separate stand serves out liquid refreshment.

Armed with a tray holding your meal you then go find somewhere to eat, usually in a big marquee filled with benches and tables. This event also had tables laid out in the open air under the very welcome shade of some large trees. I headed in that direction because I know from experience that when a bunch of Italians gather together under a marquee or in a restaurant the noise is deafening. These folks don't know the meaning of a quiet conversation!



In the distance I spotted this little fella in the strong midday sun waiting patiently for the local ladies to serve out his food. Come on girls, get a move on!

My choice for the day;  
a serving of ravioli  
stuffed with  
pumpkin, served with  
a basil spiced rich  
tomato sauce and  
liberally sprinkled  
with grated parmesan  
cheese, accompanied  
by a small bottle of  
chilled local white  
wine.

It was delicious!





It turned out that these tables were laid out in an area in front of a local school. Hung on a fence forming part of the school yard I spotted a display of paintings so after finishing my meal I walked over to take a look.



Kids' paintings have their own universal language and these works of art by 7 – 10 yr olds might just have easily have been produced back home in Mexico or in my native UK. Aren't they just great?



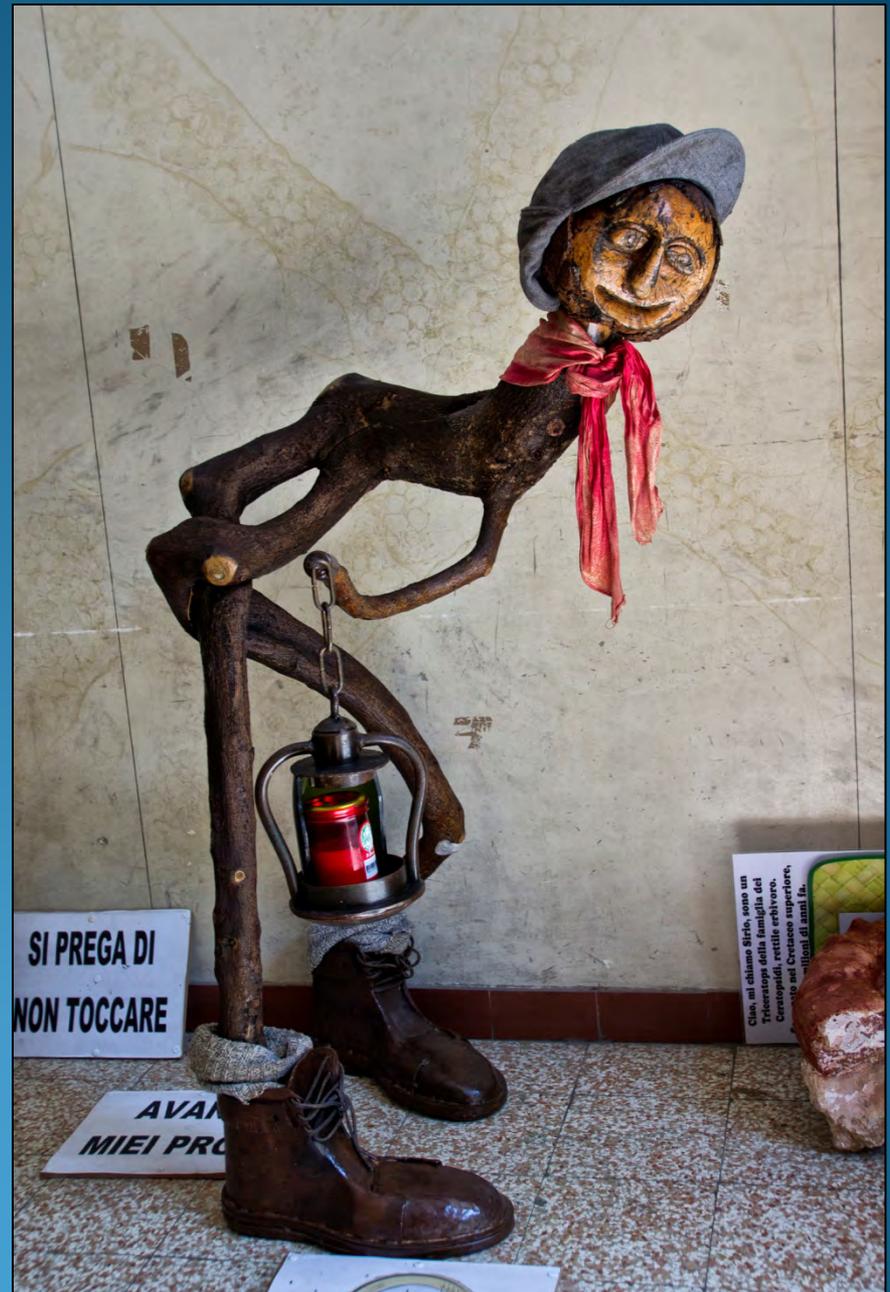
A group of kids were doing a really efficient job of cleaning up the tables after folks had had their fill – maybe a little too efficient judging by how they were hovering over this lady. It came to me that Pro Loco in Spanish could easily mean ‘professional crazies!’



So, what's a sculpture of a triceratops doing in a gourd festival? Well maybe these ancient herbivores had a taste for these fruits but since this one was parked outside the entrance to the school I thought I'd ask a lady who was standing just inside the school doorway.

Well, she didn't say to much. In fact she just stood there rooted to the spot!

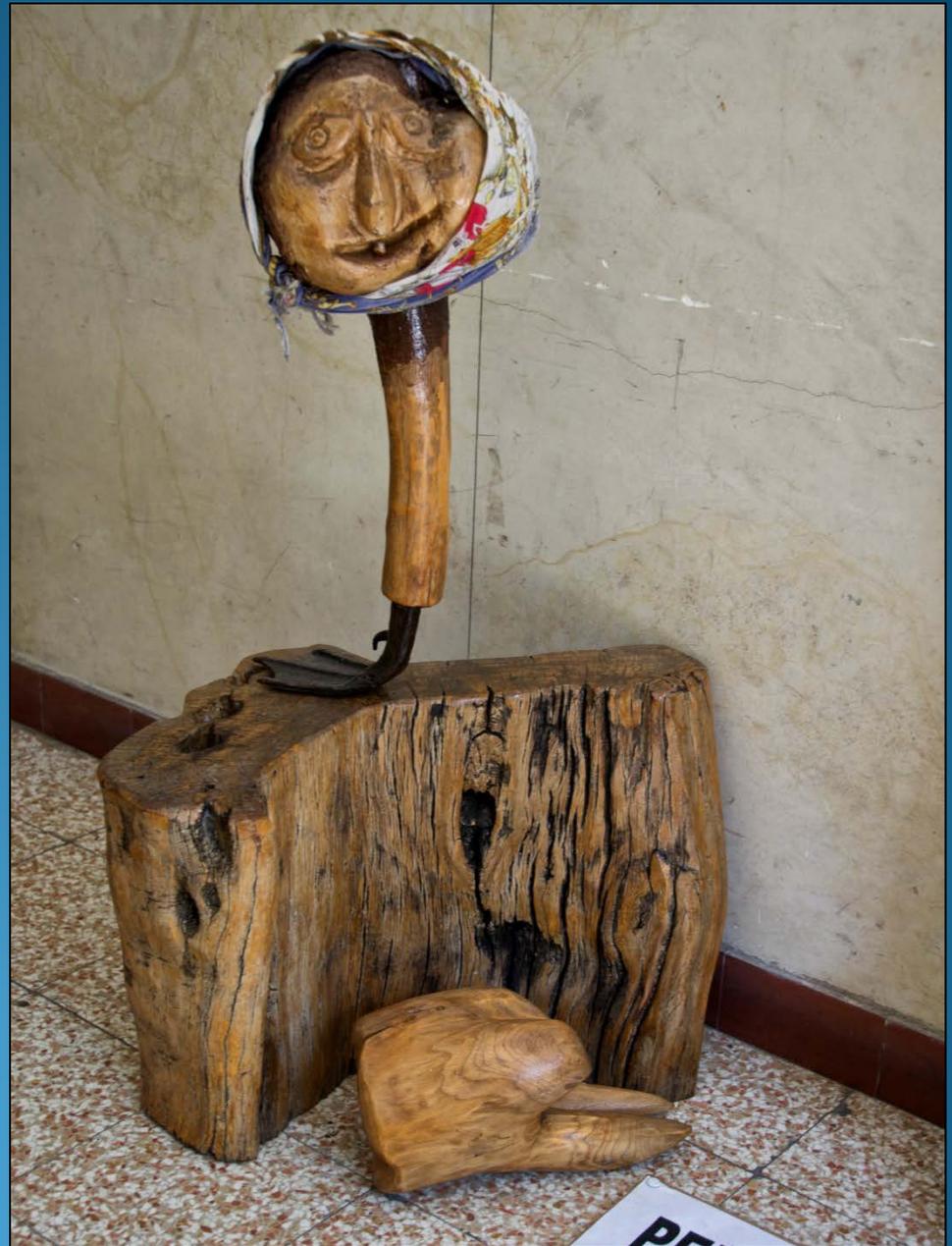
...sorry, I couldn't resist that awful play on words, but to my surprise, inside the entrance to the school, there was a small collection of sculptures made from tree roots with added pieces of mixed media.





A number of signs scattered on the floor referred to these sculptures as being modeled on the local pensioners.

Very amusing!



Standing about 4 ft high I kinda liked this piece. It reminded me of some kind of long beaked fantasy creature from a Hieronymous Bosch painting, although maybe it owes its form to a little help from Black & Decker!



So finally, the last image in this presentation and a subject matter which seems to pop up everywhere I travel around this part of northern Italy - the two 'mythical' lovers of Shakespearian fame.

It always amuses me to think that despite the commercialism the Italians attach to this highly popular couple they were after all the invention of an very imaginative and talented Brit!!



So, three hours after I dropped in at the Pastrengo Gourd Festival I'd seen just about all there was to see, filled my stomach and maybe a little my head with that very nice white wine. I had a great morning and midday at a small but very interesting and educational event and all this came from spotting somewhat by chance that sign by the side of the road.

This is what I like about Italy, if you move around and keep your eyes peeled you can usually find something interesting around the next bend.

I hope you enjoyed this collection of images as much as I did taking them and putting this presentation together.

Stay tuned for more adventures of an expat Brit let loose in Italy!

Ciao e saluti!