Over the centuries, every region, city, and even the smallest villages in Italy have created their own special sweets. What unifies all Italian sweets is the use of local ingredients such as Italy's famed honey, nuts, eggs, butter, and milk.

Amaretti

Amaretti, "little bitters," are small, round almond cookies. A speciality of northern Italy, amaretti are made of sugar, almonds, and egg white. Their invention is attributed to Francesco Moriondo, pastry chef at the court of Savoy in the mid-17th century.

Amaretti can be either hard (classici) or soft (morbidi), and can vary in size as well. Small amaretti are called amarettini. All amaretti, however, are made according to a regulated recipe which defines ingredients and baking process.

Baci di Dama

Baci di dama, "lady's kisses," are a specialty of Piedmont in northern Italy. Two little round hazelnut-almond shortbread cookies are sandwiched together with a dark chocolate filling.

Canestrelli

Canestrelli, "little baskets," are ring-shaped frilly edged shortbread or almond biscuits, topped with confectioner's sugar after baking. Canestrelli originated in the Monferrato area, which is between the regions Piedmont and Liguria.

Cantucci

Cantucci, also called "biscotti di Prato" are a crunchy almond cookie created in the Tuscan town of Prato centuries ago. Cantuccini are smaller sized cantucci.

Cavallucci

Cavallucci, "little horses" are soft cookies made with honey, nuts and anise and are eaten all year round in Siena, but mostly at Christmastime in the rest of Italy.

They are a typical Tuscan sweet created in Siena in the Middle Ages. The name probably comes from the fact that they were offered at the stables of area inns to travelers who stopped for a rest.

Confetti

Sugar coated almonds, confetti, are one of Italy's most prized sweet. Confetti can contain anise, coriander, cinnamon or clove for added flavor. Confetti are mainly produced in Campania and Abruzzo and are given to guests at weddings, baptisms,

and graduations.

Croccante

Croccante, "crunchy," are a crisp nutty sweet that is a cross between a cookie and a candy. They can be made with all sorts of nuts. Pistacchio croccante are a specialty of Sicily, which is renowned for its Bronte pistachios

Fave dei morti

"Dead man's beans" are bean shaped cookies made with almonds, pine nuts and egg whites. They are traditionally eaten on All Soul's Day and originate in the Umbria and Lombardy regions of Italy.

Two of the most famous gelato specialties are:

Tartufo: a ball of dark chocolate gelato with chopped chocolate and candied sour cherries in the center. Tartufo, which means "truffles" in Italian, is a dessert invented at Tre Scalini, a restaurant in Rome's Piazza Navona.

Cassata: a specialty cake of Sicily served especially during Easter. It is made of sponge cake, filled with ricotta, candied fruit, and chocolate; spiked with Marsala, rum or Strega liqueur; and coated with marzipan. The gelato version is made in the same shape as the traditional version, but is instead made with layers of chocolate, vanilla, pistachio and strawberry ice cream.

Krumiri

Cookies created in Casale Monferrato, a small town in Piedmont, as tribute to the first king of Italy, Vittorio Emanuele II, who died in 1878. Made of flour, butter, and honey, their shape is thought to be based on the king's handlebar mustache.

Liquirizia--licorice

Licorice candies are made from the extract of the licorice root. Licorice can be either plain or naturally flavored. Common flavors include mint, violet, and aniseed. Confetti di lizuirizia are sugar-coated pieces of licorice.

Italian licorice, especially from the regions of Calabria, Sicily and Abruzzo, is world-renowned for its high quality.

Licorice has been a popular flavoring and medicine since ancient times. Ancient Egyptians and ancient Greeks used it to soothe coughs and ease stomach aches. It's still prescribed in Chinese medicines as a tonic for heart and spleen, ulcer, colds and even bad skin.