

Special Advertising Section

# Culinary Travel

## FOREIGN FLAVORS

*Culinary adventures  
add a little spice  
to a vacation*

By Barbara A. Noe

A national study conducted by the Travel Industry Association showed that a sizable proportion of American travelers make vacation decisions based on a desire for wine and culinary experiences. Fortunately, there are many from which to choose. From sailing wine tours of the Dalmatian Islands to lessons in Dutch oven cooking in the Pacific Northwest wilderness, we seek the opportunity to savor centuries-old cultures and immerse ourselves in the world’s intriguing, traditional cuisines. Here are some of the top culinary travel destinations and how best to experience them.

### PIEMONTE, ITALY

One of the top places to celebrate cuisine — and a glorious place to visit in its own right — is this hilly, vineyard-cloaked region in northwest Italy, where Carlo Petrini began the Slow Food movement in 1986. In this land of fresh pesto, homemade agnolotti and tagliolini, white truffles and hearty ragus (not to mention Barolos and Barbarescos), local products, sustainability and artisan production are revered. In October, the Salone del Gusto unfurls in the region’s capital of Turin, a biannual, farm-to-table extravaganza where all of the pleasures and people of the Italian traditional food movement converge. Farmers and artisan producers, academics and chefs, not to mention some 150,000 visitors, enjoy five days of demonstrations, tastings and dinners prepared by noted chefs at historic villas, castles and city bistros.

### PROVENCE, FRANCE

Nearly every town and village this region has a weekly market, with St.-Rémy-de-Provence possessing one of the best; here, every Wednesday, local farmers purvey their seasonal specialties — perhaps cherries, artichokes and bright red tomatoes, along with olive oil, dried sausage and goat cheese. Learn culinary secrets from chef Carol Peck, who offers intimate, week-long tours that combine cooking classes with wine-tasting, shopping and — *bien sûr* — eating at the region’s top restaurants. And you can’t forget the wine. Taste rich, jammy Côtes du Rhône on the village square in Gigondas, surrounded by the gray, lacy peaks of the Dentelles de Montmirail. Just southwest in Châteauneuf-du-Pape, sample full-bodied, majestic reds at *caveaux de dégustation* (wine tasting cellars) sprinkled throughout this magical hilltop village. In July, stop by the walled town of Vacqueyras for the Fête



des Vins (Festival of Wines), where bands play in the streets of the old town while visitors taste wines around every corner and in garages along the narrow streets.

### CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

For the Cape Malay cuisine of South Africa, it’s all about the spices. This melting pot of cultures, which originated in Cape Town’s Bo-Kaap quarter, dates back to Dutch colonial rule and the spices and culinary expertise of their Indonesian slaves. Specialties include bobotie, a delicately spiced, baked mincemeat dish in a rich egg custard; and breyani — curry-infused rice and meat dishes with lentils and masala. Savor some of the best Cape Malay fare at Biesmiellah, a restaurant run by two generations of the Osman family. Or go to the source at the family-run Atlas Trading, a remnant of the spice trade, where the piquant aroma of cinnamon, cardamom and cumin tantalizes the senses. And while you’re in the area, don’t miss the Franschhoek Valley, east of Cape Town, the heart of one of South Africa’s premier wine wards. Most wineries offer tastings and cellar tours: Cabrière Estate, Boekenhoutskloof and Boschendal among them. Base yourself in Franschhoek, a charming Dutch town with beautifully renovated cottages and rose-filled gardens and sample local wine and food here at the annual Bastille Festival on July 14.

### ISTANBUL, TURKEY

Perched at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Istanbul boasts a cuisine infused with flavors derived from the far reaches of the Ottoman Empire. Sadly, the guilds of Ottoman-era cooks kept their processes secret, so few recipes survive to this day. That’s why you must seek out Tugra at the Ciragan Palace. Here, amid sultanese décor and fabulous Bosphorus views, culinary genius Ugur Alparslan recreates recipes found in the Topkapi Palace libraries — the menu includes dolma (stuffed vegetable shells), lebeniye (sour lentil) soup and wild sea bass kulbasti, followed by an endless parade of sweet little pastries including Turkish delight, said to have been invented in the 19th century to please Sultan Abdul Hamid’s harem. To see how Turkish fare has evolved since Ottoman rule, embark on a tasting tour of Istanbul’s lively backstreets with Istanbul Eats; you’ll sample such delights as midye tava (fried stuffed mussels), chicken breast pudding and Kurdish pit-roasted lamb, all the while enjoying unique insights into the history and traditions of Turkish cuisine.

### GOA, INDIA

Sun-saturated, world-class beaches may be one reason to visit Goa, India’s smallest state, nuzzled along the Arabian Sea; its spicy cuisine, influenced by 400-plus years of Portuguese rule, is another. Seafood, coconut, milk, rice and chili-garlic paste are standard ingredients, with roasts coated in masalas and marinated in palm vinegar (aka vindaloo) being its trademark dish. Travel along the shimmering, silver-sand coastline to taste some of the region’s best — Xavier’s Beach Café at Anjuna Beach is famed for its Goan-style seafood catch of the day; Florentine in Saligao has excellent spicy chicken cafreal; and Zeebop by the Sea, a shack-style restaurant on Utorda Beach’s south side, serves up a blow-out seafood platter in the shade of coconut palms. Learn to cook your own with India on the Menu, which offers three hands-on cooking classes over the course of eight days — allowing for plenty of beach time.

### BANGKOK, THAILAND

Thailand’s cuisine, with its bombastic mix of sweet, sour, bitter and tangy, is internationally acclaimed for a reason, and there’s no better place to experience it than on the street. In Bangkok, where a recent survey stated that some 20,000 street vendors sell 213 different kinds of food, roadside carts purvey such delicacies as spice-doused curries, rice dishes, ice cream (with toppings including corn, bean and rice), and fried vermicelli noodles — which you can top with your choice of shrimp roe, ground cuttlefish, fried egg and/or mango slices. You’ll find stands nearly everywhere, but some of the best are located off Silom Road (especially along soi Convent) and Samset Road soi 2, the latter open all night. That said, there are plenty of Thai culinary schools, such as Bangkok’s Blue Elephant and the Thai Cooking School at the Oriental Hotel. Students pick among a mind-blowing array of bizarre and exotic fare at the local markets — banana leaves, mouse-dropping chilis (the infamous “kick” in Thai food), morning glory and Phuket lobster. With your goods, you’ll return to the school for preparations — chopping, grinding, mixing, stir-frying and stewing a feast fit for a Thai king.

Barbara A. Noe is a travel editor and writer whose stories have appeared in the Los Angeles Times, Boston Globe, London Telegraph and National Geographic Traveler.

## Lighten the Load

While culinary vacations are fun, flying there often is not. With stringent weight limits and additional luggage costs, knowing how to pack light is essential. Samsonite’s director of marketing Dawn Sicco (whose favorite culinary destination is Belgium) provides these tips:

- ✓ Start with a light bag. Look for luggage made from new fibers and fabrics, such as tricore polyester, which is 30 percent lighter than nylon. In hardside exteriors, materials like woven polypropylene offer high durability while being extremely lightweight. Take advantage of today’s lighter weight carry-ons, some weighing less than 7 pounds.
- ✓ Borrow a hair dryer and buy shampoo and conditioner upon your arrival.
- ✓ Bring an e-Reader or tablet in place of heavy books.
- ✓ To fit more in a small bag, pack along the handle tubes, placing socks and undergarments along the back of the case; this also helps flatten out the surface so other items of clothing don’t get wrinkled.
- ✓ Limit your number of shoes (if you can).



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