

The New York Times

Eating and Drinking Your Way Through A Trip, and Learning Something in the Process

Culinary travel is on the rise, but it's not just food on the menu: Tours are offering deeper investigations into the cultural and geographic factors that surround what's on your plate.



A cooking class on a Tourissimo tour of the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy. Tourissimo

By Elaine Glusac

May 18, 2018

When it comes to consuming a culture, it's hard to beat digesting it in the literal sense, which may explain the explosion of food-related trips.

From Texas to Turkey, food is a point of differentiation for many destinations and, according to the United Nation's [World Tourism Organization](#), has helped drive tourism to rural regions, giving often needy areas new income to supplement agriculture.

Counting culinary travelers is nearly impossible; after all, everyone eats. But in a 2016 survey, the [World Food Travel Association](#), a nonprofit organization devoted to education and research in the culinary travel field, found that 59 percent of respondents believe food and drinks are more important when they travel than five years earlier.

In the decade or so since culinary travel began whetting the appetites of gastronomists, food-related travel has shifted from pure consumption — hitting that bucket list of Michelin-starred restaurants — to deeper investigations into where food comes from and the cultural and geographic factors that influence it.

“Food tourism is where walking tours were in the 1980s when there was confusion about walking versus trekking,” said Kathy Dragon, a veteran guide who now owns [Whole Journeys](#), which organizes active trips with a food focus. “I don’t use the term ‘culinary tours’ because it puts too much emphasis on food rather than culture.”

The latest in food trips, which follows, runs the gamut from addressing food waste to forging connections with those growing, raising and making the food (all rates quoted are per person).

EAT AND EXERCISE

In addition to burning off calories, active food trips can offer ground-level entree to food producers.

“Instead of just pulling up in a bus, you’re learning about the traditions of food in a way that’s approachable to the artisans and farmers,” said Ms. Dragon of [Whole Journeys](#).

The company’s newest itinerary follows the [Rota Vicentina](#) in southern Portugal, a long-distance hiking trail along the coast where fisherman cast from atop the cliffs. The next 12-day trip departs May 21 and will be repeated in the fall (from \$4,295).

Beppe Salerno, the co-founder of the bike tour company Tourissimo, combines his passion for biking with his training as a sommelier in food-focused itineraries. This year, the company plans trips with well-known American chefs to bridge the two cultures. Brooke Williamson, a “Top Chef” winner, will accompany a new trip to [Emilia-Romagna](#), the home of Parmigiano-Reggiano and prosciutto di Parma, June 4 to 10 (\$3,995).

Among active tours that revolve around restaurants comes a new cycling itinerary from [Trek Travel](#) that spends three nights at the new Sonoma Valley hot spot [SingleThread](#), which includes a restaurant, farm and inn, October 1 to 4 (from \$4,799).

Back in Italy, the Italian owners of [Discover Your Italy](#) have begun designing private hiking and skiing itineraries in the Dolomites around their favorite rifugi, or Alpine huts, a modest term for a growing network of rustic restaurants with refined food (six days from \$4,000).



On a Wild Frontiers tour of Georgia, snacks are served at a small winery in the Kakheti wine region.
Wild Frontiers

MULTICOURSE TOURS

Outfitters of trips that are one week or longer use food as a prism for exploring culture.

[Wild Frontiers](#) specializes in adventurous destinations, and with its first food tours this year will focus on off-the-beaten foodie path destinations, including Colombia and Georgia. The nine-day [Georgia trip](#), departing Sept. 26 and led by the food writer Carla Capalbo, will travel from Tbilisi to the wine-growing region of Kakheti and the Caucasus Mountains, where the itinerary includes a dinner and cooking demonstration in a local home (from 2,595 pounds, or about \$3,620).

Two years ago, Jim Kane, the founder and director of the tour company [Culture Xplorers](#), went to Chile to help make a series of videos on innovative chefs, foragers and food traditions. He put many of those experiences — including clamming with a local, cooking a feast in an earthen oven and eating in the home of a pair of chefs who source all of their food within a few miles — in the company's new 10-day [Chile: Fjords, Fields & Flavor](#) private tours (from \$6,995).

A specialist in South America, [Kuoda Travel](#) combines classic and contemporary food experiences in private tours of Peru. In addition to the Inca ruins in the Sacred Valley, for example, where ancient terraces are still used to grow indigenous grains, Kuoda has begun organizing itineraries around [Mil](#), the new restaurant and research center from the chef Virgilio Martinez, that includes working on its farm.

DAY TRIPS

New city outings highlight emerging neighborhoods and local storytelling.

In Portland, Me., [Maine Food for Thought Tours](#), launching in June, will progressively feast at popular restaurants such as [Union](#) and [Piccolo](#), where the chefs will discuss their use of local ingredients. The two-hour, five-stop itineraries aim to spotlight not just the dishes but food sustainability, from blueberries to lobster (\$72).

In Indianapolis, the new [Indy Cultural Trail Food Tours](#) string together some of the most acclaimed restaurants along the eight-mile urban bike trail that cuts through dining-centric districts like Fletcher Place. Three- to four-hour walking or bike tours (\$55 to \$70) visit acclaimed restaurants such as [Milktooth](#) and [Bluebeard](#), with samples at each of five to eight restaurants.

[Noshtrekker](#) connects travelers to locals for a meal at their homes. Operating in Singapore and New South Wales, Australia, the company has added new experiences to the Singapore program, including an evening in the home of an author and playwright who serves the food of modern-day northern Sri Lanka while discussing colonial history when both Ceylon and Singapore were under British rule.

LEARN TO COOK

The destination spa [Miraval Arizona](#) in Tucson recently introduced [Conscious Cooking](#) to its slate of activities, which range from hiking to horse grooming. Classes in the curriculum focus on reducing food waste while creating healthy, flavorful dishes from ingredients like vegetable peels, overripe fruit, stale cake and obscure chicken parts.

In Alaska, [Within the Wild](#) runs two lodges, Winterlake Lodge on the Iditarod Trail and Tutka Bay Lodge on the coast, that hold popular three-day culinary retreats. This year, each lodge has hired a forager with whom guests can explore the wilds in search of edible plants, fungi and berries. Tutka Bay Lodge will also prepare native dishes in a recently discovered 1,000-year-old hearth (three nights \$5,035, all inclusive).

GOING TO THE SOURCE

Many new foodie experiences strive to get diners closer to the ingredients. Few are as elemental as [Timber to Table](#) trips that specialize in elk hunts in Colorado. New women-only outings aim to initiate first-time hunters (five-day trips from \$2,500).

It's not often a luxury hotel wants guests to leave, but Manoir Hovey in southern Quebec offers a [Farm to Feast](#) package that sends travelers off to the nearby farm that raises goat calves. Guests tour the farm and spend the night at its bed-and-breakfast, then return to the luxury hotel for an overnight and a meal featuring farm-raised products (from 370 Canadian, or about \$290).