



Culinary Tours: Gourmet Travel

Whether you are an aspiring chef or simply an epicure, culinary travel promises the opportunity to truly savor your vacation. This growing trend of experiencing authentic cooking and dining around the world allows you to broaden your education and your palate at the same time. What a decadent way to travel!

The genre of culinary travel includes trips that focus on learning to create local dishes, those that emphasize tasting and wine pairing, and everything in between. As you can see, there are many options available. Let this TRO report assist in your planning, as it will provide you with the basic recipe for culinary travel. With it, you and your travel consultant are sure to cook up the perfect culinary adventure!



The most important consideration in planning your culinary vacation is whether you want to learn traditional recipes and cooking techniques, or if you're more interested in enjoying the end result. Those wanting a strictly educational experience might enjoy cooking alongside famous chefs in renowned cooking schools. If dining inspires you, perhaps you would prefer the company of a learned chef as your guide. Or maybe you would like just a taste of culinary arts in your trip, as you explore other cultural aspects of your destination. The more consideration given to these issues before contacting a tour operator, the more efficient the planning process will be and the quicker you'll be on your way.



If cooking is your passion, think about attending a cooking school, many of which boast award-winning chefs as instructors. If you go, you will have to consider your level of expertise to ensure pairing with courses that suit your abilities. The less experienced might learn more through hands-on instruction, while advanced students may feel confident in attending cooking demonstrations. You can even choose to learn a particular specialty such as pastry making. Wine schools are also a popular choice, offering classes on wine making, history, appreciation and pairing with foods.

For those interested in learning to cook according a country's customs but want to spend a little less time in the kitchen, a cooking tour may be the best bet. Along with culinary classes, these tours are peppered with visits to wineries, vineyards, superior restaurants, and local markets and food producers. With some tours, you

will travel to different cooking schools to take classes. Others offer the more intimate experience of attending the kitchens of various celebrated chefs.

Culinary tour guides, many of whom have backgrounds in history and/or cultural anthropology, will tell you the history of indigenous dishes, offer guidance while dining with you, and even provide cooking instruction. Your tour may be guided by an actual chef, or may enlist the services of two guides: one culinary and one cultural. Your guide should be bilingual, even if those providing the cooking demonstrations are not. And of course, if you would like to design your own culinary dream vacation, chef guides and cultural guides can be hired on an individual basis - the possibilities are endless!



Most cooking tours will accommodate travelers with every level of experience. However, general kitchen knowledge is expected. Before you go, ask your travel consultant if class participation is mandatory, or if you may merely observe. You will also want to inquire about attire. Cooking classes are generally casual, but more sophisticated dress may be necessary when dining out. You may also want to find out whether recipes will be provided after the demonstration.

Your tour operator should be able to accommodate any dietary needs regarding meals. However, the meals prepared during cooking classes, unless the class is designed and taken on an individual basis, are usually determined by the instructor and cannot be changed upon request. There are tours designed for vegetarians, which usually take place in Asian countries. Thailand, for example, boasts an annual vegetarian festival.

If you are more of a gastronome, you will want to take or design a tour that focuses on the pleasures of dining. Many culinary travelers maintain that there is no better way to learn about a culture than by sampling its traditional dishes. Such tours often include the excursions mentioned above, as well as more standard tourist attractions such as museums and art galleries. Certain tours allow more time for exploring the towns in which you stay. There are also more active tours, which incorporate such activities as hiking, painting and language instruction. These tours also provide a good option for those wanting to dine independently.



Not surprisingly, the most popular destinations for gourmet vacationing are Italy and France. Tasting tapas in Spain is also en vogue. When visiting these popular regions, the earlier you make your reservation, the better. But Europe isn't your only option. You may enjoy a culinary cruise to the Caribbean, or take a chef-guided tour of Mexico. For the more adventurous, culinary tours are offered in such exotic locales as Morocco, India and Vietnam. For those looking for an experience closer to home, consider becoming a barbecue connoisseur in West Virginia or cook up some Creole in Louisiana.

Travelers may also take a culinary vacation by means of a food festival. The Netherlands boasts an international food-

tasting festival every August, and Georgia is home to the annual Vidalia Festival. If you appreciate good beer as much as good food, Oktoberfest is certain to leave you hoppy.

The cost of a culinary vacation varies widely. The biggest factor in determining the price of your trip is whether you opt for a package tour, which generally means sharing your travel experience with other culinary enthusiasts. Most culinary tours are packaged at a fixed price that includes daily classes, meals, excursions, accommodations and ground transportation. You will be responsible for making your own travel arrangements to the school or destination, a task with which your travel consultant can greatly assist. The cost of your trip is further determined by the country visited, the extent of teaching provided, the quality of restaurants enjoyed, and the number and nature of excursions taken.

Accommodation is also a factor. Luxury and high-end hotels are a more expensive option. Staying in a countryside villa may not be as posh an experience, but the relaxation granted by fresh air and lush landscapes could prove to be priceless. Work through the options with your travel consultant. The more clearly you state your own preferences, the better your travel consultant can work with the tour operator to properly accommodate you and your traveling companions.

When pricing your stay, remember to take into consideration any Value Added Tax (VAT) levied by many countries in Europe and elsewhere. Because VAT is often as high as 20% of the cost of an accommodation or good purchased, the amount is often not insignificant! Many travelers assume that VAT is refundable. However, this is typically not the case for services such as transportation, accommodation, food, gas or any other goods or services consumed within the country itself. Ensure that the price you are quoted includes all taxes and other fees.

Sound too good to be true? It's all for real and with a little planning a culinary vacation can be an absolutely wonderful way to garnish your next trip away from home.

