

Eat your way around the world: 10 of the best cooking holidays

► From fresh pasta making in Tuscany to a family-friendly culinary adventure in New York City, here's a look at the best cooking holidays on the market



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As experiential tourism continues to grow as a trend, one activity that some might label a chore is being actively pursued by travellers in their down time. While many of us struggle to find the time to prepare home-cooked meals, foodie holidays and experiences are on the rise. Culinary retreats, workshops, crash courses and tours are popping up all over the world to introduce foodies and cooking novices alike to a destination through its gastronomic scene.

You only have to look up #FoodieTravel and #VacationFood on Instagram to see how highly regarded the element of food has become in the making of a memorable vacation. So here are ten cooking holidays to sample around the world.

Open Fire Cooking Workshop and Retreat, Istria, Croatia



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Istria

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Set in a beautiful stone farmhouse in the Croatian countryside, this five-day retreat is proof that the country has far more to offer than its aquamarine coastline. Taking place between Monday, September 30 and Friday, October 4, to coincide with truffle season, this workshop combines the thrill of the great outdoors with the joy of cooking, taking guests out to forage for truffles, and explore seaside villages and medieval towns, before heading back to cook hearty Croatian dishes over an open flame.

tournantpdx.com

A Day Cooking with the Duchess, Palermo, Sicily



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Nicoletta Polo Lanza Tomasi – daughter-in-law of Italy’s most famous author, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, and Duchess of Palma – is no ordinary aristocrat. She’s a cooking one. At her 16th-century palazzo, standing stately on Palermo’s promenade, the duchess welcomes guests to join her in a culinary masterclass that aims to unearth secrets about why Sicilian food is so very tasty.

Rubbing shoulders with shouty market sellers, the experience begins with a tour by Nicoletta of the - cacophonous Capo Market. “Unfortunately, a modern Duchess doesn’t have time to sit around painting her nails,” she tells us as she handpicks artichokes for the day’s class. Then on to the palace kitchen to cook the day’s lunch. The four-course menu changes seasonally, but street-food inspired chickpea panelle, swordfish rolls and almond and pistachio pesto ruvidelli are examples of the recipes you can attempt in the kitchen, in between herb foraging on the jasmine-laced terrazza. The day ends with lunch in the banqueting hall, in the company of the duke and duchess.

www.butera28.it

Gourmet Wild Food Weekend, Cornwall, UK



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Fat Hen - The Wild Cookery School

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As well as the fresh, crisp air of the British countryside, this weekend in Cornwall, on Saturday, September 28 and Sunday 29, hosted by the chefs at Fat Hen, the wild food foraging and cookery school, promises to offer gourmet food lovers an insight into where their favourite ingredients come from. From walks through rugged landscape and wild woods, identifying and picking herbs and - vegetables along the way, to cooking with these herbs and local produce such as wild rabbit, to create extravagant dishes, this weekend is all about reconnecting what arrives on our plates with the natural world around us. Plus, guests have their pick of a traditional British cottage to stay in during the retreat.

www.fathen.org/courses

Ergon House, Athens, Greece



An olive tree stands at the entrance of Ergon House. A symbol of Greek hospitality, it offers an indication as to what this central Athens hotel and eatery is all about: feeling at home, sharing great food and celebrating the best of the country's fresh produce.

Masterminded by founder Thomas Douzis, this spot claims to be the first foodie hotel in the world. Combining a hotel, deli and restaurant in one, Ergon offers cooking classes, so guests staying at the hotel can nip down to the deli and buy their groceries, then take it up to the hotel's dedicated communal kitchen spaces to cook.

Far from feeling like a hostel, though, the space has been expertly designed by the Urban Soul Project, combining the original with the new in this lofty neoclassical structure, injecting traditional Greek - design into elegant and contemporary rooms.

On Rue Tatin, Normandy, France



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Chef and food writer Susan Herrmann Loomis hosts a crash course in ingredient-led French cuisine in her dramatic home, a three-storey restored convent down an impossibly French-looking cobblestone street in the quaint town of Louviers. Dishes you can expect to prepare and enjoy include grilled lamb shoulder studded with rosemary and roasted guinea fowl. In between, pick herbs from the garden, head to town for a visit to the local market and visit artisan producers of the top-notch French variety.

onruetatin.com

Family-friendly Culinary Adventure, New York, US



One for the whole family, this three-day tour by Epitoulean dips into the gastronomic delights of New York City, complete with cooking classes designed specifically to involve and engage children. As well as getting hands-on in a culinary workshop, the tour offers accommodation in a boutique hotel, a New York pizza tasting tour and dinner aboard a cruise that ticks off landmarks such as the Statue of Liberty.

www.epitoulean.com

Ballymaloe Cookery School, Shanagarry, Ireland



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Ballymaloe Cookery School

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The Ballymaloe Cookery School in this wildly rugged part of Ireland is credited with being one of the best in the world, turning out hundreds of professional chefs each year. That's not to say novices can't visit. The school's founder, Darina Allen, welcomes food enthusiasts to stay for short courses, too, offering accommodation in pretty cottages and an insight into what real organic cooking looks like. Most notable about this retreat is that all produce you'll be cooking with – from meat and dairy to herbs and vegetables – comes straight from the farm.

cookingisfun.ie

Ayurvedic cooking holiday, Nilgiri Mountains, India



Learn Ayurvedic cooking at Responsible Travel's retreat in the Nilgiri Mountains. Getty

In what could be a life-changing trip, this 10-day retreat from Responsible Travel teaches the practice of Ayurvedic eating and cooking, as guests are guided through Jain philosophy with a local family on their organic farm. Pick plump mangos from the trees in the plantation near where you'll be staying and learn to make spiced chutneys and jam from them; take a tea tour before sampling a range of teas from the region; and visit local farmers to buy produce for each of the eight cooking classes you'll take part in on your full Indian foodie immersion.

www.responsibletravel.com

Gastronomic Trails of Vietnam



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From the street food of Hanoi (selected by a local food blogger) to cookery lessons in old Saigon and a home-prepared meal with a rural family, this 13-day tour of Vietnam by InsideAsia Tours offers lovers of zesty Vietnamese food a chance to sample it in its myriad forms. They navigate Ho Chi Minh City on the back of a Vespa to discover the best of its street food, not to mention its chaotic traffic jams.

www.insideasiatours.com

Fresh pasta making retreat, Tuscany, Italy



Partners Oli and Flo – both experienced pasta chefs and trained artisanal pasta makers – host guests for seven days of full pasta immersion at rustic Tuscan poolside apartments. Think terracotta tiling, wooden beams and an endless undulating landscape that features picturesque villages in the Maremma Valley. Not to mention the daily dose of pasta guests are invited to eat, as well as prepare.

Most days at the retreat begin with a visit to a local producer, from buffalo milk farmers for cheese tastings to beehives for organic honey making. Then it's back in the kitchen for daily pasta workshops, culminating with you dining on the fruits of your labour. Between all of this, the retreat allows time for exploration of the local area and trips to indulge in the region's gelato and expertly crafted pizzas.

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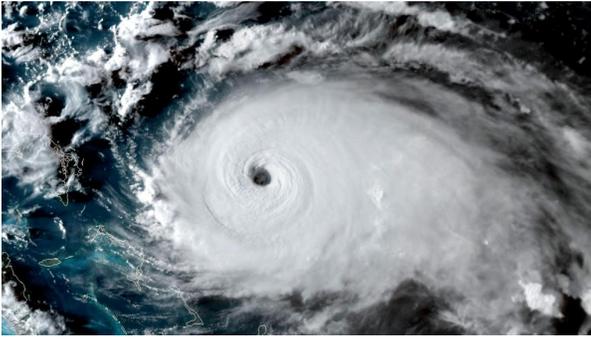


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