San Francisco Bay Area Travel Writers

Taste of TRAVEL

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"The best education for a clever man can be found in travel."

—Goethe

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COVER PHOTO — STU WILSON

"There is no sincerer love than the love of food."

— George Bernard Shaw

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About BATW

Established in 1984, in San Francisco, California, Bay Area Travel Writers, Inc. is a not-for-profit, professional association of journalists with outstanding achievements in the field of travel. These professionals share their unique stories in newspapers, magazines, broadcasts, blogs, videos, books, internet publications and travel industry publications.

BATW members travel and report locally and all over the world. Some specialize in guidebooks; others in golf, outdoor adventure, cultural or historic excursions, or travel for singles, families or seniors. Others are photographers or photo-journalists. Each journalist seeks to present the world in ways that enrich, inform and fascinate, thereby exposing their readers to the people, culture, arts and natural splendors of each destination.

Monthly meetings, held since 1984, provide a lively exchange of information among our widely traveled colleagues. Speakers from tourist boards and destinations make presentations to inform members of travel trends and news; members' professionalism is enhanced by presentations that seek to strengthen social media skills, public speaking abilities and technological know-how. We also hold panel discussions on subjects such as marketing, publishing and photography.

Ultimately, BATW promotes high professional standards within the field of travel journalism.

President's Message

Food is intertwined with and essential to travel—not merely because we must eat to live if we hope to travel another day, but because the experience of each meal enhances and opens up the travel experience.

You might be shy at home, but on the road you'll meet and strike up conversations with locals and other travelers whenever you ask for restaurant recommendations, sip ale in a pub, or browse stalls in an open-air market.

You'll get to know a cuisine in the country that gave birth to it. No matter how much you think you know about Italian or Japanese or Indian food, on your first visit to those places—or any other—you'll discover a culinary depth, richness and history that you couldn't possibly have imagined.

All the new-to-you smells and tastes you encounter will awaken your senses and embolden your explorations. You might surprise yourself by ordering a dish that you wouldn't ordinarily consider. There's something about being footloose, shaken free of the familiar, that leads many of us to say "Why not?" and try a national specialty like haggis in Scotland, witchetty grubs in Australia, escargots in France or even the maggot cheese of Sardinia. Even if you don't like the grub, you return with a good story.

Perhaps best of all, your culinary adventures *en voyage* will send you home with the kind of memories that emerge, Proustian-like, from certain tastes. A bite of summer's first succulent peach, a sip of bitter espresso, the mouthfeel of cilantro and lime juice: For a few seconds you'll relive that picnic beside a Dordogne river, that hot summer day at a Florentine café, or those amazing noodles on the beach in Thailand.

Does all of this make you hungry and ready to explore? Then you're in for a treat. In the pages ahead you'll travel the highways, climb the peaks, and delve into hidden passages of the world's culinary scene with the professional and award-winning writers and photographers of San Francisco's Bay Area Travel Writers.

Happy Travels, and Bon Appétit!

—Suzie Rodriguez, BATW President

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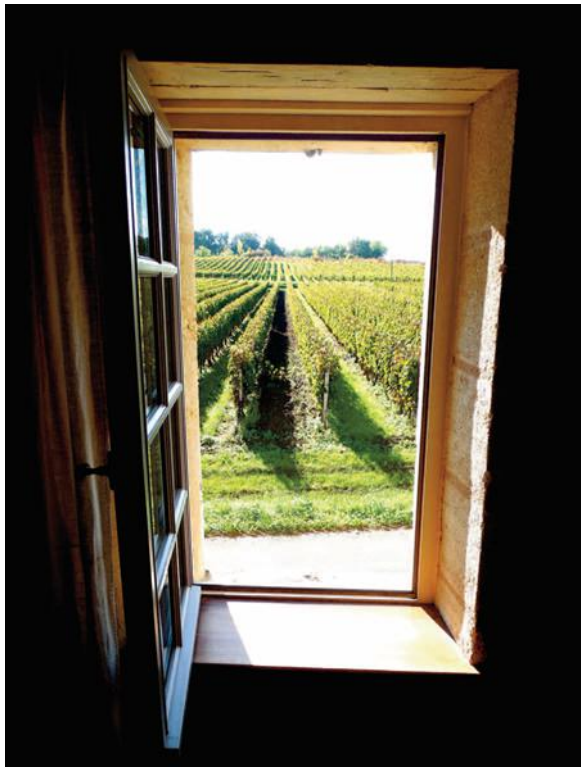
Bob Cooper

Boredom-Free Bordeaux: French vintners roll out the red (wine) carpet

This article is reprinted with permission from AAA *Arizona Highroads Magazine* and AAAhighroads.com, where it appeared in the March/April 2015 issue.

The old stereotype that the French are rude and don't speak English to visitors drained away like a bottle of smooth merlot during my week last fall in the Bordeaux region. The last sediments at the bottom emptied when I was pulled over by a City of Bordeaux cop. Had I violated a French traffic law in my cute Renault Clio? No, it's just that he saw me circling the same block twice (goofy GPS!) and wanted to assist. I told him where I was headed, and he offered in perfect English: "Just follow me, and I'll flash my lights when we reach the highway." A police escort befitting a visiting diplomat? *Oui! Oui!*



Vines to Wines

Fanning out for 40 miles north, south and east from Bordeaux in southwestern France are the region's 60 appellations (winegrowing sub-regions) and a mind-boggling 7,650 chateaus, the French equivalent of wine estates. But a winemaker's home and workplace also is called a chateau, typically a centuries-old, two-story limestone building with family bedrooms upstairs, the winemaker's living/dining area and barrel rooms below, and a bottle storage cellar. These chateaus (both the wineries and the buildings) range from small and simple to sprawling and sumptuous, from part-time winemakers with a few acres of table-wine grapes to Chateau Lafite-Rothschild, the world's most prestigious label. But nearly all share one feature: ownership by proud families who pass the land and the operation down through the generations.

It's out of fear that this tradition might be broken that Bordeaux winemakers are now plunging headlong into wine tourism. "I work hard so that my grandchildren can take over, just as my grandparents did for me," one winemaker told me.

This family tradition is especially strong in the Saint-Emilion, a 10-appellation portion of the Bordeaux where some of the world's most acclaimed wines are produced on estates that average just 17 acres. Winemaking dates to the Roman era there, but only in recent years have most of the old wine families flung open their doors to visitors, at least on weekends or by appointment. There are no big Saint-Emilion hotels yet, but 5,000 guest rooms are scattered about, mostly in cozy B&B chateaus. (Wine tourism is more established in the Medoc, the Bordeaux's other best-known wine region, where the estates are larger.)

I spent most of my time visiting chateaus near the historic village of Saint-Emilion, but you may prefer to concentrate on the Medoc for its cabs or visit chateaus in the lesser-known Graves-Sauternes or Entre-Deux-Mers regions, which produce both reds and whites. The Bordeaux region is as complex as its wines.

Tasting Time

The tour-and-tasting experience in the Bordeaux wine country is only slightly more challenging for U.S. visitors than in California's wine regions. The easy choice is to take full-day bus, van or riverboat chateau tours, which depart daily from central Bordeaux. More adventurous travelers can rent cars and find their way to smaller family chateaus. About half welcome visitors any time, and half are open for a visit and tasting only by appointment. Most charge no tasting

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fee, although it's expected you'll leave with a bottle or two that, surprisingly, sell for as little as $4.

By tradition, most wines from the Saint-Emilion/Pomerol/Fronsac region are blends—typically 80% merlot, 10% cabernet sauvignon and 10% cabernet franc. The winemakers insist this adds complexity, more aromas, more balance. Other distinct traditions: growers bottle wines that are exclusively from their own vineyards, and there's no irrigation, making each year's vintage highly dependent on the weather. Add rich limestone-clay soil, wet springs, warm summers, sunny autumns and cool nights, and you have the ingredients for some of the world's finest wines.

I learned all of this—and how to swish, sip and spit—in a classroom where Bordeaux wines are poured, appreciated and explained. Oenologist Sabine Silvestrini taught the two-hour wine-education workshop at Saint-Emilion's Bordeaux Wine School. In the same building, bottles from 250 chateaus are sold at chateau prices; you're allowed two in your luggage when you fly home.

Sabine's dad, Max, owns nearby Chateau Chereau but is handing off winemaking duties to his son and marketing duties to Sabine. He revealed later in the week over dinner another quality that sets Bordeaux winemakers apart: "Everywhere else in the world, they make wines for a certain market. Here we make wines *we* like to drink, and then we find a market." Apparently it works. As his close friend and fellow chateau owner Laurent Gerber remarked that night, "Here we have the best grapes, the best oenologists and the best barrel makers. If anything new in winemaking is tried, it's tried here, because we're small guys with a few acres who can afford to experiment."

Wondrous Wineries

On to the chateaus! Of the 16 I visited in a whirlwind of tasting, touring and talking to winemakers, these

were my favorites, just a sampling of what you can expect:

Chateau la Dominique: Next to Dominique's 18th-century classical chateau is a new building, designed by a Pritzker Prize-winning architect, with a stainless-steel exterior and a 30- by 100-foot rooftop "pool" of smooth, polished-glass oval "pebbles" that evoke a swimming pool of oversized grapes, which you can walk on. It's all done in a shiny Bordeaux-grape red, and the rooftop restaurant overlooks the vineyards. There are daily, one-hour guided tours in English.

Chateau de la Riviere: This Charlemagne-era fairytale castle on a hilltop above the Dordogne River features Roman statues, natural-springs bath ruins and forest trails. Daily, 90-minute tours-and-tastings in English take you into a 500,000-bottle underground tunnel, a chapel, a heraldry room and a handsome tearoom. (Gourmet tea tastings are offered by appointment.)

Chateau Villemaurine: This chateau's bat-inhabited cave beneath the Old City of Saint-Emilion is a fascinating glimpse into the town's 125-mile network of underground caves, once used for limestone mining and still used to store wine barrels and bottles. Daily, 75-minute cave tours in English conclude with a tasting.

Chateau de Sales: This family estate is intriguing both for the architecture of the 17th-century "closed-courtyard charterhouse" chateau and the pastoral grounds, with paths through 100 acres of oaks, poplars and maples surrounded by 120 acres of vineyards. There are daily, one-hour guided tours-and-tastings in English.

The Cities that Grapes Built

The Old City in the heart of downtown Bordeaux is a UNESCO Heritage Site, and like the reds that have made it *the* center of wine trade in Europe for

centuries, the city is robust, yet approachable. The French call Bordeaux the Sleeping Beauty—France's fifth-largest city is no Paris, but it compensates for any nightlife shortcomings in the daytime. Shoppers crowd the narrow streets, many converted to pedestrian-only use, and the Garonne River quay (waterfront) is always packed with walkers, runners and cyclists.

The city's newest major addition is on the quay. The massive "water mirror," a one-inch-deep pool you can walk through without getting your ankles wet, reflects the city's 17-arch Stone Bridge (ordered built by Napoleon) and needle-like Saint-Michel bell tower (built in 1492). New to the skyline in 2016, in the shape of a round decanter, is the world's largest wine museum, The Center for Wine and Civilization.

A Bordeaux CityPass for one to three days provides free entry to 20 museums and Heritage Site

monuments, unlimited use of public transit, and guided walking and bus sightseeing tours. Most tours leave from the Tourism Office or elsewhere in the city center.

Like Bordeaux, the medieval Old City of Saint-Emilion is a UNESCO Heritage Site, but it's much smaller. Forty minutes from Bordeaux, it has a winemaking tradition that dates to the Romans in about 50 B.C. You can learn about this tiny Old City and see its sights in any of three daily, guided tours in English, which start from the Tourism Office in the center of town.

Besides strolling Saint-Emilion's steep cobblestone streets (called "tertres"), you can climb 196 steps to the top of the bell tower for a grand view of the town's Romanesque and Gothic buildings. You also can tiptoe through the monastery courtyard; admire Western Europe's largest underground church (built in the 12th century to honor Saint Emilion, who spent his last 17 years with disciples in the city's caves); and watch macaroons being made at the "macaron" factory, using a recipe of egg whites, almond paste and melted sugar handed down from local nuns in 1620.

A Dazzling Soirée at the White House: President Obama Hosts State Dinner for President Xi

This article appeared in the Russian-American newspaper, *Kstati.*

Democrats? Republicans? The differences in political views fade away when you receive an invitation from President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama to attend a lavish state dinner in the nation's capital. More than 200 guests, including the titans of the innovation nation in technology at Apple, Microsoft, Oracle and Facebook, as well as distinguished representatives of the diplomacy and entertainment industries, joined the formal festivities in welcoming China's President Xi Jinping and First Lady Madame Peng Liyuan to the White House.

With all eyes on Michelle (I apologize, President Obama), exquisitely attired in a custom, off-the-shoulder, black-silk-crepe mermaid gown by Chinese-American designer Vera Wang, the First Lady led the parade of beautifully dressed luminaries, which included the wife of guest of honor China's President Xi. His wife, also a couture-savvy first lady, selected a sparkling silk gown in aquamarine for this special occasion.

Making the A-list lineup were, among others, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and his wife Priscilla Chen; Oracle CEO Larry Ellison and actress Nikita Kahn; Apple CEO Tim Cook; seasoned diplomat Henry Kissinger and his wife Nancy; Hollywood producer Lee Daniels; Disney CEO Bob Iger; DreamWorks Animation CEO Jeffrey Katzenberg; former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright; and prima ballerina Misty Copeland. Donning tuxes (oh my, what ever happened to Mark Zuckerberg's gray hoodie?) and gorgeous evening gowns, the VIP guests strolled joyfully to the opulent East Room. What would follow was a unique gourmet journey, expertly prepared by the White House culinary team—executive chef Cris Comerford and executive pastry chef Susie Morrison—who created and carefully selected a menu of delicacies inspired by Chinese and American culinary traditions.

In my communications with Deesha Dyer, the Obama administration's White House social secretary, I learned that award-winning guest chef Anita Lo, the owner of Annisa Restaurant in New York, would join the White House chefs for this special dinner. Known for her inventive contemporary American cuisine, which reflects her passion for multicultural flavors and classic French training, chef Lo, a first-generation Chinese-American from Birmingham, Michigan, earned a degree in French at Columbia University before

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studying at Ecole Ritz-Esscoffier culinary institution.

This was definitely not your aunt's chicken chow mein supper. Guests dined on wild mushroom soup, poached Maine lobster, grilled cannon of Colorado lamb, and poppyseed bread-and-butter pudding. Asian influences were everywhere in the dinner plan, down to the Meyer lemons in the curd lychee sorbet. (The citrus fruit is thought to have originated in China and was introduced in the U.S. in the early 1900s.) The "A Stroll Through the Garden" dessert display was a tribute to the beauty of the garden. Desiree Rogers, a former social secretary for President Obama who planned more than 300 events, mentioned, "The goal of each state dinner is to really have them be over the moon." I wonder if that's why moon cakes were on the dessert table.

The "farm to table" dinner took inspiration—and vegetables—from Mrs. Obama's White House garden. Herbs and vegetables in season were incorporated into two or three courses featured in the dinner. Among the plants growing there at the time were basil, rosemary, thyme, chives, sage, parsley, figs, pumpkin, squash, tomatoes, eggplants, artichokes, sweet potatoes and zucchinis. No wonder President Obama gave Pope Francis a gift of veggies and spice seeds from the First Lady's garden during his 2015 visit.

Ever wonder if Michelle Obama gets an opportunity to cook now that she lives at the White House? With the enormously hectic schedule of the White House social calendar this week, with the President and First Lady hosting Pope Francis and President Xi, and with a few upcoming VIP events the next week, who has time to cook?

Social secretary Dyer informed me that state dinners are the most formal events hosted at the White House. "This marks the tenth State Visit of the Obama administration," she said. "This visit reciprocates President Obama's State Visit to China in November 2014." Previous visits were from heads of state from India in November 2009, Mexico in May 2010, China in January 2011, Germany in June 2011, Korea in October 2011, the United Kingdom in March 2012, France in February 2014, Japan in April 2015 and the Holy See in September 2015.

As the "wow" glitzy gala dinner came to a grand finale amid the stunning decorum, which included a 16-foot silk scroll depicting two roses that the White House said were meant to symbolize "a complete meeting of the minds," I assumed the invited guests had a chance to read their fortune cookies, each with the message "Have Fun and Hope." President Xi's visit presented an opportunity to expand U.S.-China cooperation on a range of global, regional and bilateral issues of mutual interest, while also enabling President Obama and President Xi to constructively address areas of disagreement. Well, we all hope.

Dinner Menu
Wild Mushroom Soup with Black Truffle
Shaoxing Wine
Butter-Poached Maine Lobster with Spinach, Shiitake and Leek Rice Noodle Rolls
Penner-Ash Viognier "Oregon" 2014
Grilled Cannon of Colorado Lamb with Garlic Fried Milk and Baby Broccoli
Pride Mountain Merlot "Vintner Select" 2012
Poppyseed Bread-and-Butter Pudding with Meyer Lemon Curd Lychee Sorbet
Schramsberg Cremant Demi-Sec 2011

Photos courtesy of the White House

Rhonda Gutenberg

Cooking in Koh Samui

Island Organics Thai Cooking School in Koh Samui

Lat, Co-owner and chef extraordinaire/teacher giving a class

Rhonda is a travel photographer, in addition to her day job as a management consultant in Shanghai. Formerly a Marin County resident, she will return to the Bay Area in 2017. In the meantime, she takes full advantage of travel and photo opportunities in Asia. She is represented by Getty Images. rhondagutenberg@gmail.com

Food for the Pacific Crest Trail Hiker

In general, backpacking is not conducive to gourmet meals. When car camping, yes, when out for a weekend, possibly—but when long-distance hiking, forget it!

When backpacking on a trail such as the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) for weeks or months, one quickly realizes that food is fuel. When you are burning 4,000 to 6,000 calories a day, taste is still important, but it becomes of lesser concern than taking in enough calories, and perhaps nutrition, the weight of the food and the ease of preparation. That said, long-distance hikers usually develop strong opinions about what they want in their food supply.

The PCT is a 2,650-mile trail from the Mexican border—traveling through California, Oregon and Washington—to Manning Park in British Columbia. It runs through the arid lands of southern California, the Sierra Nevada with its 13,000- and 14,000-foot peaks (mostly in conjunction with the John Muir Trail), the forests of Northern California and Oregon, and along the high ridges of Washington's Cascades. It goes through many wilderness areas and is far from major cities.

Backpackers can carry enough food to last them for a week to 10 days, but if they intend to be on the trail longer, they need to have a plan for obtaining additional supplies. There are three primary ways to replenish: buy supplies along the way, get food delivered and mail supplies to yourself.

Backpackers who buy needed food along the way stop at towns or resorts within a reasonable distance of the trail. However, most towns along the PCT are small and the selection of lightweight and nutritious foods is limited. Other hikers arrange for someone to bring food to them—perhaps a friend or spouse drives a van to a place where highway and trail intersect. In a few places, for example in the Sierras, hikers can arrange for pack animals to bring food to them.

My husband Ralph and I, like most PCT long-distance hikers, mail boxes of food from home ahead of time. We address the boxes to ourselves and then pick them up at post offices, rustic resorts or "trail angels'" homes along the route (or within hitchhiking distance). As celebrated hiker Marcia Powers wrote, "I don't like to use town time to shop except for fresh food. Packing ahead is easier." She explained that sometimes she wanted just a couple of teabags rather than a whole box, or maybe she didn't need a whole bottle of olive oil.

When Ralph and I started hiking the PCT in 1989, it was a struggle for me to lift my 35-pound backpack and put it on. We had to carry all of the food we would need as well as our tent, sleeping bags, clothes and toiletries.

Over the years, however, we have improved on a few things—for one, we no longer carry such ridiculously heavy packs. We have also studied the lists of what foods others bring when they're on extended trips; some were truly awful. One fellow's plan was simple: peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

As our meals have evolved, so have some rituals that we enjoy. Ralph gets out of his warm sleeping bag at daybreak and puts a pan of water to boil on our tiny backpacker's stove. When the water is ready, he unzips the tent and sets my cup of brewing tea in the middle of my bandanna, which I have set out on the tent floor as a placemat.

When I have finished my tea, and Ralph his instant coffee, he takes back my cup and fills it with two packets of dry instant oatmeal, powdered milk and a bit of hot water. Meanwhile I press my wet, warm teabag against my eyelids—try it sometime! When I get the cup of cereal, I add mixed nuts, raisins and a couple of M&Ms to make the otherwise too-boring and too-gooey cereal more palatable.

Lunch varies. One of our favorites is a flour tortilla rolled up around a cheese stick. We also carry cereal, granola or protein bars; prepacked crackers with cheese or peanut butter; jerky; and dried fruit. At break time, we snack on a combination of nuts, carob, raisins, seeds and M&Ms. Snickers bars are a very popular hiker's item.

Dinners are a highlight of the day. How do meals such as beef stroganoff, chicken and dumplings, turkey tetrazzini and beef stew sound? Of course, for hikers these will be freeze-dried. Few would argue that freeze-dried meals are as good as fresh, but some of them are quite tasty—especially after a long hiking day. Our nightly selection is determined by weight; we eat the heaviest first.

Love those trail towns!

Most backpackers salivate as they approach towns along the trail, where they can get a good restaurant meal. Favorites of long-distance backpackers dot the map from border to border. The first is Julian's Pie Shop on Main Street in Julian, California. The

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reputation of their pies is so good that hikers will hitchhike ten miles off the trail to make their way to this tiny restaurant in the tiny town.

The next stop north, for those willing to go far off the trail to Lone Pine, is the Alabama Hills Cafe for breakfast. Another off-trail stop is Whoa Nellie Deli at the Mobile gas station on the corner of Hwy 395 and Tioga Pass Road. Those venturing off the trail to Lake Tahoe look forward to the big buffet at Harrah's Tahoe and the "all you can eat" sushi at Sushi Barge.

When it's open, and space is available, the Drakesbad Guest Ranch in Lassen Volcanic National Park serves up a delicious lunchtime buffet as well as other meals (by reservation). Hikers can also enjoy a relaxing soak in the hot springs-fed swimming pool.

A unique opportunity awaits hikers in Seiad Valley. There, just 15 miles south of the California/Oregon border, is the Seiad Café, home of the "Seiad Café Pancake Challenge." This challenge has captured the imagination of thru-hikers. Those coming from the south have at this point covered more than 1,600 miles, lost many pounds of weight and developed ravenous appetites.

Contestants place an order for the pancakes and receive five large ones, each using 12 ounces of pancake batter and ending up around 13 inches in diameter and 1 ¼ inches thick. The eight-inch-tall stack comes in at four to five pounds. Contestants have two hours to eat. Winners don't have to pay the $15.95 tab and get their photos posted on the wall.

Barely into Oregon, we reach Ashland—known to many people for its Oregon Shakespeare Festival, but known to many hikers for the Morning Glory restaurant. The small, cottage restaurant with only two tables inside earns 4.6 stars on TripAdvisor and no rating below three. It's so popular that many are willing to endure long wait times on the large, pleasant patio. Hikers like the huge portions at reasonable prices, but dozens of reviewers also extoll the delights of good coffee, fresh orange juice, home-baked blueberry muffins, hash browns, apple- gouda-chicken sausage omelets, Moroccan oatmeal, and waffles with lemon and fresh strawberries.

As you approach Mt. Hood, 60 miles east of Portland, you find the historic Timberline Lodge. Its Cascade Restaurant serves what many remember as the most outstanding buffet along the trail. The "Taste of Oregon" lunch buffet includes breads and waffles, cheeses, fruits, fresh salads, meats, desserts and more. At $19.95, it is expensive by thru-hiker standards, but worth it.

Finally, after another 600-plus trail miles and well into the Northern Cascades, one reaches the Stehekin Pastry Company on the edge of Lake Chelan in Stehekin, Washington. Here one hopes to find a good supply of the decadent cinnamon rolls, sticky buns and calzone the remote outpost is known for.

Even with the many tasty and hearty meals along the way, it is a rare thru-hiker who has not lost 10, 20, 30 pounds or more on the PCT 150-day diet plan. That almost guarantees that the first meal after completing the trail will be much anticipated and long remembered.

Rules: the Most English of Restaurant Institutions

A version of this article appeared in *Romantic Traveling.*

It used to be that just the mention of British cuisine was enough to make visitors roll their eyes and give an involuntary shudder.

Not now. These days, food in the U.K. is as good as anywhere, and London is awash with trendy restaurants and celebrity chefs.

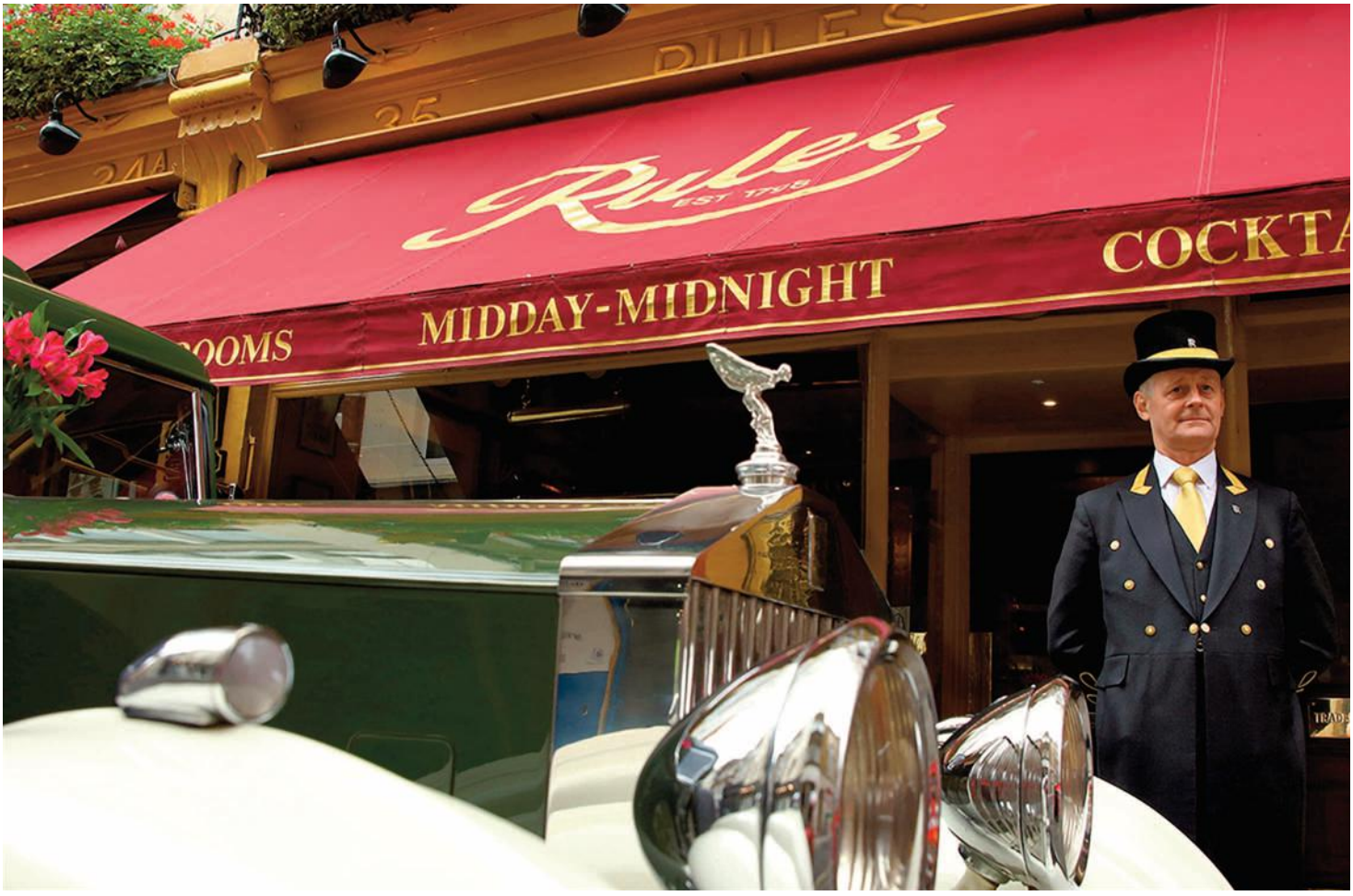
There is one restaurant, however, that has always served excellent British food. It's also London's oldest. Rules opened its doors in 1798 and has been doing a brisk business ever since. It all started when Thomas Rule opened an oyster bar on Maiden Lane in Covent Garden.

Before long, people were singing the praises of Rule and his "porter, pies and oysters." That was just the beginning. For more than 200 years, spanning the reigns of nine monarchs, Rules has been feeding the hungry. Today, Rules seats around 90 people and employs 90 staff.

But Rules is not large and impersonal. On the contrary, it's warm, welcoming and very elegant. Crisp table linens, gleaming silverware, sparkling crystal and glowing lamps grace the main dining room, the walls of which are covered with hundreds of paintings, drawings and cartoons documenting Rules' star-studded past.

Artists, lawyers and some of the great literary talents—Dickens, Galsworthy, Thackeray and Wells—have all supped here. So, too, have stars of the London stage, from Henry Irving to Laurence Olivier, and those of the silver screen including Clark Gable, Charlie Chaplin and Charles Laughton. Rules has also appeared in novels by Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene and John le Carré, among others.

As well as serving the very best of traditional



Monica Conrady is a freelance travel and feature writer based in San Francisco. Originally from London, she has traveled extensively and has rarely been to a country she didn't like. Monica has fond memories of Antarctica and other remote destinations, but London still pulls her back.

English food, Rules is also known for its game, which comes from its own estate, Lartington Hall Park, in the High Pennines. Rules is the place to try partridge, jugged hare or grouse in season.

Upstairs are two private dining rooms, each named after a famous person, one being the poet laureate Sir John Betjeman, the other the novelist Graham Greene. Although he lived most of his life in the south of France, Graham Greene always celebrated his birthday at Rules.

Also upstairs is the Cocktail Bar, a former private room where Edward VII wined and dined the beautiful actress Lillie Langtry. Their signed portraits still hang on the wall. You climb the stairs to find yourself in a cozy and inviting room, richly carpeted, with paneled walls and plush red upholstery. A table by the fire is the place to be when the weather is chilly, or choose a seat at the bar to watch classic cocktails being mixed. The bar is the perfect spot to enjoy a drink before dining downstairs or to while away a rainy afternoon in London town.

Rules Restaurant, 35 Maiden Lane, Covent Garden, London, 020-7379 0258, www.rules.co.uk.

Duck

Guinea Fowl

Hare

Partridge

Steak Kidney Pie

Steak Kidney Pudding

Kayaks, Castles and Kielbasas: Poland

This story originally appeared in the book
Exotic Life: Travel Tales of an Adventurous Woman
(Dancing Words Press)

One hour into the kayak rally I noticed a distinct cultural and apparel difference between the Poles and the Americans. When it began to rain heavily, we gringos wrestled into waterproof neon Gore-Tex as a bathtub raft filled with Poles wearing only faded swim trunks paddled past us. They waved merrily, munching on savory cheese pierogi and throwing back vodka shots as golf ball-size raindrops pinged off the water. Around our necks hung expensive sunglasses dangling from Croakies; around theirs were shot glasses tied with string.

Four other journalists and I, all of us well-known in the American river rafting community, were invited to Poland to attend the 54th Annual International Kayak Rally on the Dunajec River that borders Slovakia. This tradition is a friendly competition among canoers and kayakers from all over Eastern Europe. About 700 professionals and tourists of all ages and abilities descend on the river in a frenzy of activity, to the delight of residents and visitors. It is basically a three-day party fueled by vodka and sumptuous Polish food over 57 miles of river.

Our host and guide for this fete was Yurek Majcherczyk, a world-famous expedition kayak leader. I had read in *Outside* magazine about his derring-do first descent down the Colca River Canyon in Peru. At 14,339 feet deep, that gorge has been recognized as the deepest canyon on earth by both the *Guinness Book of World Records* and *National Geographic*. Who

Niedzica Castle on the Dunajec River
By the Free Software Foundation.

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could say no to traveling with him? My nickname for Yurek became "Never-A-Dull-Moment-Man."

Our group had flown from New York to Warsaw on Lot Polish Airlines. The French champagne flowed freely, accompanied by our first taste of Polish delights—*pierniki*—soft gingerbread cookies filled with marmalade and covered with chocolate.

We were whisked by train to Krakow in southern Poland, then by bus to the town where the race would start the next morning. At the opening ceremonies and banquet that evening, we were plied with vodka and traditional dishes including *zurek starowiejski* ("old village")—a hearty casserole of kielbasa, egg, potatoes and mushrooms topped with sour cream. In between bites we were regaled with speeches and toasts.

We toasted each others' countries, the rally, the mayor, the color of the drapes (Communist bordello red velvet), and on and on it went. At one point in the toasting and feasting, one of the American journalists fell backwards in his chair off the dais. As he rose, unscathed, to give yet another toast about rivers, brotherhood and sisterhood, little of which was coherent, the Poles grinned good-naturedly at the tipsy Amerikanis, and raised their glasses yet again.

Jib Ellison, fellow journalist and founder of Project Raft, whispered to us that we needed to nominate a designated drinker—*not* the guy who had fallen off the stage already! Jib had spent two years in Russia and said it was the only way we would survive because the Eastern Blockers could drink us under the table (or off the stage). He volunteered for the position and also showed us a neat trick—surreptitiously filling the shot glass with water when no one was looking. We drank a lot of water further into the night unbeknownst to the Poles, who thought we were matching them shot for shot.

Kayaking the Dunajec By the Free Software Foundation.

The banquet also included many savory dishes, including *pieczen cieleca*—roast veal, marinated in aromatic spices, and *zrazy zawijane*—beef rolls stuffed with bacon, gherkin and onion.

That morning, we organized our gear (and tried to stuff ourselves into our paddle jackets). Yurek provided us with kayaks, paddles and lifejackets. I had never been in a hard-shell kayak before and felt some trepidation. The river turned out to be a very easy Class II with few rapids. As Robert, one of my paddling compatriots, pointed out, "The only reason you'd capsize would be from gawking too much at the Dracula-like landscape," which included looming shadowy castles and Carpathian mountain gorges. Or from spooning up too much *barszcz biały*—sour rye and pork broth with cubed boiled pork, kielbasa, ham, hardboiled egg and pumpernickel croutons that was served for our breakfast. Polish food is not light on calories!

It was instantly evident that the point of the race was to have fun. Participants were launching in wooden canoes, racing kayaks and even kiddie rubber rafts. Once we put our competitive egos (after all, it had been promoted as an international race) aside, we had a blast.

Toward the end of the first day, the terrain of pastoral fields dotted with haystacks changed and craggy mountains reached up

from the riverbank to rocky heights. We pulled out between two castles on granite outcrops.

A traveling soup kitchen had been set up on the shore for the boaters. This delightful contraption had four containers filled with various steaming savory soups and stews. *Grochówka*—lentil and caramelized onion—was rib-sticking good, as was *bigo*—a chunky dish of cabbage and meat—and *kwasnica*—a sauerkraut soup eaten in the south of Poland. We washed this down with frothy *Zywiec* beer and took in the surreal vista of the castles looming above the dark opal-hued waters of the Dunajec.

Satiated and lazy, we were ready to peel off our sticky Gore-Tex layers and wash away the river silt. After taking a bone-warming sauna at the local inn, we rejoined our fellow paddlers at the kayak rally's huge campsite. Yurek searched out a group of old college chums he hadn't seen for 20 years. Yurek and his friends had conquered rivers all over Eastern Europe in their university days. As they turned a leg of lamb on a spit over the fire, they reminisced about cutting classes to drive to Yugoslavia in a rattletrap VW bug and run rivers no one had descended before.

We sat around the campfire for hours, telling stories and singing as a drizzly, damp fog enveloped us. Yurek's friends insisted we sing a song for them in English. Our team of five Americans, not one with a lyric in us, dug about for a tune to sing together to the persistent Poles, who had already regaled us with half a dozen musical tidbits. They not only sang but also accompanied each song with the guitar. Oh, a sad day for us red-white-and-blue, out-of-key gringos!

We survived the night's chill around the campfire drinking "highlander's tea"—an herbal concoction dosed with *nalewka*—a homemade, vodka-based liqueur that Yurek's choral buddies insisted we drink copious amounts of, referring to it as a "folk remedy." They also gave us many powerful and celebratory comradic slaps on the back fueled by their tonic. One of them even did the *zbojnicki*—the Cossack-style dance in which they bounce up and down like kangaroos, kicking their legs out from a squatting position with their arms crossed over their chest (knee surgeons love this dance).

The next day, before the kayak rally commenced, we toured the ominously somber granite castle of Nidzica. Our guide, over 80 years old and hefting a huge clanking key ring, delivered the castle's history in

Hearty bowl of Zurek with kielbasa
By Dobromila — Own work, GFDL

a chanting oratory. The torture chamber with its hooks and racks got our attention, as did the haunted room.

We then reunited with our rally mates at the riverbank to continue the race. We were heading for the dramatic Dunajec Gorge—five miles of winding emerald river between jutting cliffs more than 90 feet high.

Just before entering the gorge, a brief but torrential thunderstorm chased us to shore, where a farmer had set up a Kielbasa stand in his cow pasture. We crowded together under the tent canopy, helped the ruddy-cheeked proprietor turn the sizzling sausages on the grill and washed them down with beer. Singing all the while, of course.

Smoked Cheese
By Reytan — Own work, Public Domain

That night at the campground, highlanders (men from the Tatra Mountains) performed the *zbojnicki* dance again. One of the dancers was a veritable pogo stick. When the taped disco music came blasting from their boom box, he pulled me to my feet as he hopped up and down; it was very hard to keep up with him! Especially during the Bee Gees' "Stayin' Alive." He even looked a little bit like John Travolta in leder-hosen. The dance troupe also did an impressive ax-swinging, thigh-slapping pushups dance called *thojnkki*, punctuated with loud yells and frenzied violin music. Afterwards, we ate more succulent barbecued lamb and sang songs around a sky-licking bonfire.

By the last day of the rally, we recognized people we had kayaked, feasted, danced, sung and conversed with. That night, the Polish Canoe Federation presented the awards and we stood on the platform and delivered speeches with an American flag waving behind us on the stage. This is the closest I've ever come to feeling like an astronaut after a successful journey into outer space, or an Olympic gold-medal winner. We were the first Americans ever to partici-pate in the rally and they treated us like royalty, even letting us use the prize kayaks during the rally until they were given to the winners. We found this a tad embarrassing as we didn't know we had been crashing about in the trophy kayaks for the last three days until we saw them lined up on stage and Jib pointed and exclaimed in surprise, "That's my purple kayak!"

This time nobody fell off the stage, but we continued to fatten ourselves up on *kopytka*—hoof-shaped potato dumplings, *sałatka burakowa*—finely chopped warm beetroot salad, and *kurczak pieczony po wiejsku*—Polish village-style roasted chicken with onion, garlic and smoked bacon.

The next day, bereft of the prize kayaks, Yurek took us sightseeing by bus and swept us off to the alpine town of Zakopane. The landscape was reminiscent of a pastoral oil painting of broad ultra-green valleys hemmed in by snow-capped peaks. The winding country roads were car-less, but around many curves we encountered horse-drawn carts driven by costumed peasants. Poland's Old World culture is still intact.

I spied a shepherd's hut in a meadow and we stopped to pay a visit. The shepherd sat on his porch in the sun, drinking *zentyca*—a popular drink made of raw sheep's milk whey—from a stiff leather cup. He invited us to join him on the rough-hewn bench. Immense Tatra Mountain sheepdogs sat at his feet as he described how they chase off the mountain wolves. Then, he lifted the rustic cup high and offered us a wordy toast in Polish that, translated by Yurek, included "…my honored first foreign visitors, crazy Americans who fly far to drink with me." After splashing the pungent, sour warm milk to our lips and passing around the cup, we all agreed that vodka wasn't so bad after all.

Wendy VanHatten

Ride of the 5 Senses

This story was published in 2016 in
Siouxland Magazine.

When staying in the Languedoc Roussillon area of France, we readily agreed when our host suggested we might like a "wine walk through a village." What foodie and wine lover wouldn't like the opportunity to taste some of the 30 or 40 local wines, sample gourmet food prepared by excellent chefs, visit with wine makers and growers, and experience a beautiful natural park near the village?

Sign us up…

Situated between scrubland, ponds and hills, the village of Peyriac de Mer sits on soils that include limestone, chalk and gravel. Combine those soils with the many microclimates found here and you have the perfect combination for enhancing the character of different grapes and producing exceptional wines.

Beginning of the wine walk

So far, sounds amazing…

Ready for our wine tasting and gastronomic walk, we bundled up and headed off to meet our host. Because a pesky cold front was hanging around, we wore layers. I do mean layers. As we headed out onto a dock along the edge of the lake, the wind whipped up white caps and threatened to knock us into the choppy, gray water.

Quickly we realized we were not walking through the delightful village, but up and around the lake, past an old working salt flat, across a high ridge where the views of the Mediterranean were fantastic and through the Nature Park. Walking shoes would have been appropriate for the six-plus-kilometer journey that took us more than 300 meters up from where we started. Back in the village, that's where we ended.

What did we get into?

Another reason the wines here are special is the wind. It contributes to soil ventilation, thus improving their quality. All well and good, unless you're trying to walk along the top of the ridge as the wind threatens to blow you into one of the lakes below. I'm quite sure it could have blown me into the Mediterranean had I not been hanging on to my husband.

So, what did we think once we finished our "walk" and headed into the village for coffee and sunshine?

Wines–they were fantastic. All of them. What's not to like about a glass of Montfin Blanc from Chateau Montfin, a glass of Grenache Blanc from Chateau Fabre-Cordon or a glass of Rose from Abbaye Sainte Eugenie? Visiting with the winemakers and growers, often the same person, made those glasses even more special. I almost hated to leave one stop and hike to the next one. Until I tasted the next group of wines, that is.

Food—also fantastic. Who wouldn't want a piece of fresh, crusty bread with perfectly sliced beef carpaccio, copeaux or shavings of semi-soft goat cheese, and rosemary sprigs to pair with your glass of Carignena? Next stop, salmon gravlax, sprinkled with petite peas and a dollop of lemon cream, and our choice of Grenache Blanc or Vent Marin Blanc. Of course the *epaule* or shoulder of lamb with sprigs of thyme, olive oil and petardon peas was perfect with my glass of Mire la Mer. When we made it to the dessert stop, we were ready to be on flat ground again as we ate crème caramel with candied oranges, *beurre sale* and almonds. Paired with either a sweeter Musc'ito or a Banyuls Ame de pierre, a blend of grenache, grenache blanc and grenache gris made us smile as we headed to the village. We were in heaven, and full.

The walk—incredible views, friendly people, knowledgeable winegrowers and even some hunters who offered homemade salami and *saucisse*. Yummy, beautiful and nothing like we had ever done before.

Asked by our host if we would do this again, even with the weather, terrain and wind as challenges, we said, absolutely. Why would we complain about being in the wonderful French countryside, eating delicious food and drinking amazing wines?

After all, this was not any ordinary "wine walk." It was so much better.

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Cantina Menu

Terroir and Grapevines

Cantina and Rick

Your Crocodile has Arrived

In the beginning, Bunjil provided us with all our needs. Bunjil left signs by the animals to lead us to waterholes. He taught us how to build fish traps out of reeds to catch eels and freshwater fish. Bunjil gave us spears from saplings so that we could hunt game. At the end of his time on earth, Bunjil rose into the sky and became a star; he continues to watch over us to ensure that we look after the land and its resources.

This reminder that humans are tasked with looking after the Earth is printed at the very top of the menu at Australia's most unusual restaurant, Gugidjela. It's the first—and so far, the only—restaurant that serves a distinctively Koori menu. Fortunately, the traditional foods of the Koori aboriginal people have been adapted here with sufficient *gugidja* (European) elements to appeal to tourists. Or at least, that's the plan.

The menu is daunting. My husband, Jim, and I consider the entrees. "How about *bidjin*?" he asks.

"No, that's fresh mussels in garlic butter," I say, reading translations from the menu. "It sounds too much like something I could get at home. Same for the *djilga*—shrimp cocktail. I'm looking for something different."

"What about the *burinj bunjad*—smoked eel with horseradish cream?" Jim suggests.

"No, I don't like eel at home, and I'm not going to like it here." I am quickly eliminating most of the menu options. The only entrees left to consider are *gauwir budjug* (emu liver pâté), which I am not sure I can stomach, and *gauwir budjug bunya bunya* (emu liver pâté with puree of bunya nuts), which doesn't sound much better.

Surely I can find something I'll like. Kooris have a varied and healthy diet; they eat mammals, shellfish, and about 60 varieties of bush fruits and vegetables.

We move on to the main courses. I consider the duckling roasted with wild red currant sauce; the fresh rainbow trout with pine nuts and wild rice; and the grilled whole baby baramundi. All are too similar to what I can get at home.

What about indigenous game? The kangaroo fillets have been crossed off the menu. This is apparently the most popular item and Gugidjela has run out of the delicacy. The emu fillets, which I can see at the next table, look dark and unappetizing.

But appetite appeal is not the first thing Kooris consider in their daily meals. They live in one of the harshest areas of the world and have been feeding themselves off the land—sustainably—for a very long time. "We're dealing here with one of the oldest cuisines in the world," says Chef Sam Fairs, a London expat who developed the menu. "The Kooris were eating frog's legs 20,000 years before the French."

I settle on *ginga darwinnia citrodor*, pan-fried crocodile tail in citrus leaf sauce. I've heard that crocodile tastes like chicken and I'm pretty sure I'll like it.

While we wait for our meals, we discuss one of our favorite Australian stories, the instructive tale of adventurers Robert Burke and William Wills. The two men set off in 1860, aiming to be the first explorers to travel all the way across Australia from south to north. Well provisioned, they hoped to achieve fame and fortune by scouting the best route for an overland telegraph line.

But Burke and Wills had neglected to hire an experienced bushman, and after a series of incidents involving poor planning, hasty decisions, bad weather, ill health, quarrels, missed connections, starvation and exhaustion—the tragic expedition ended. Burke and Wills survived for several weeks on nardoo seedcakes given to them by friendly aborigines, but Burke disliked depending on "inferiors" for his food and rudely refused a gift of fish, damaging the relationship.

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Crocodile on the barbie

The two men died of starvation soon after.

"It's too bad they never learned to eat witchetty grubs," Jim says, referring to the plump, finger-sized, high-protein caterpillars that have been a staple in aboriginal diets for tens of thousands of years. They're said to taste like almonds or peanut butter when eaten raw, and the skin becomes crispy, like roast chicken, when they're cooked, but the very idea of eating a caterpillar makes me queasy.

"I'd die of starvation if witchetty grubs were a staple of my diet," I reply. "But I could eat pretty much anything else."

"That's good, because your crocodile tail has arrived," Jim observes.

The waiter sets it in front of me. Plainly plated with a light sauce and some kind of green for garnish, it taunts me. Can I eat a crocodile tail? Could I survive in the outback with the help of friendly aboriginals? Or would my squeamish stomach doom me?

I'm about to find out.

Effin Older

Effin Older is a country girl, city wife, mother, grandmother, writer, editor, photographer, TV host, snow rider, rodeo lover, app maker, Pete Seeger fan.

Jim Shubin

Food of Bali

As appeared in
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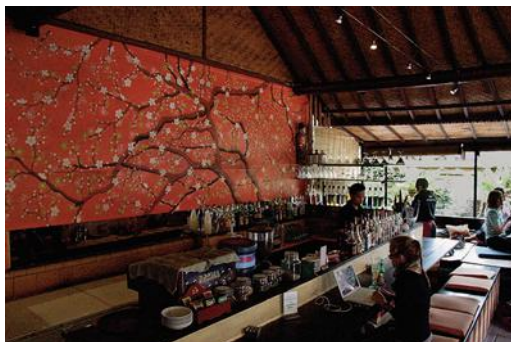

Jim's favorite
place in Ubud

Jim's other favorite
place in Ubud

Jim Shubin is an award-winning graphic designer and photographer. He designs and publishes books for Destination Insights, Wanderland Writers and the Book Alchemist. His travel photography has been published in print and on the Web. He lives in northern California, but is always ready to go somewhere new.
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Salt Making in Amed, Bali

Traditional salt makers work in "downtown" Amed. Workers carry about 130 gallons of sea water to the wood and bamboo funnels (left). The funnels are filled with clean mud, and both men and women stomp barefoot on the mixture of mud and seawater, filtering the saltwater through.

The saltwater then goes into a series of carved out palm tree trunks, split in half and hollowed out, called *palungan*. There it sits until the water evaorates leaving a clean, but cloudy, grey-colored salt.

Salt making only happens during the dry season, when the water evaorates relatively quickly. This salt making process results in a low yield, but produces tasty, high-quality salt that can be found in gourmet markets worldwide.

Madeleine Adkins

The Kouign Amann: A buttery dessert from heaven by way of Brittany

I cut the cake into slices and hand them out to my friends, watching their faces as they take their first bites. Barbara, Christina and Jo break out into beatific smiles. Carolyn sighs. "Oh, wow, this is amazing," Linda says, breaking the silence. Carolyn has a pen and paper in hand: "Kou-ging what? Can you write down the name so I can remember it? This is so yummy!"

"Kouign amann," I say, and then spell it out for her. "Just say 'coo-een uh-mon' and don't pronounce the 'g' at all. 'Kouign' is Breton for cake, and 'amann' is Breton for butter."

It's true, there's butter in it. And sugar, for that matter. In fact, there's more butter and sugar in a kouign amann than there is flour. And while kouign amann is made of very basic ingredients, the way they are combined makes for a dense, exceptional taste. Sweet and almost gooey rich, with a caramelly exterior and a hint of salt, the kouign amann exudes flavor when you bite into it. That is why this dessert of humble origins has been elevated in recent years to the status of international star. Nowadays, kouign amann can be found on the menus of posh French bakeries in places such as New York, Kyoto and San Francisco. One or two bakeries cheat, trying to pass off rounded croissants as kouign amann. But in general, the versions available in the U.S. are actually pretty authentic.

The high ratio of butter and sugar to wheat is not an accident. Kouign amann was invented in the city of Douarnenez, a hilly port town on the western-most coast of Brittany, in about 1860. At that time, a flour shortage was going on in Brittany, but butter was plentiful, so bakers had to invent new recipes. A husband and wife baking team, Yves-René and Marie Anne Scordia, created the masterful layering of risen dough (egg, flour, salt, water, sugar, yeast and salted butter), rolled out and slathered with butter and sugar, layer after layer, and baked just enough to keep the insides moist and the outside crispy and caramelized.

If I find myself craving kouign amann, I pick up some minis from the folks at Starter Bakery at my neighborhood farmers' market in Oakland. Their kouign amann are good, and I've certainly shared them with friends before. On this particular occasion, however, the kouign amann I share with my friends is of a different provenance: it's straight from Brittany, the crusty cake's birthplace. Kouign amann in Brittany, like this one I've just brought home, are richer and moister than any I've found on this side of the Atlantic. I cannot help wanting to share with my friends the real deal, fresh out of my suitcase.

On my first trip to Brittany in 2004, I went for dinner at a Breton friend's house and was introduced to the kouign amann. I'll make a confession: I loved all of the Breton cakes, cookies and custards I discovered on that first trip. Each had an amazing richness and sweetness, a sweetness made more complex by the salt that is in traditional Breton butter. But there was something about the moist density encircled in caramelized crispiness that made the kouign amann the most seductive of all

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the desserts I had on that trip. I was so enamored of it, in fact, that when I found a large kouign amann for sale at the Sunday farmers' market, I immediately bought it, took it back to my hotel and ate it, slice by delicious slice, over the course of the next week.

When I got home from that trip, I found myself missing kouign amann, so I decided to make some myself. I found a recipe online and enlisted a friend to make it with me. We bought the best butter and other ingredients we could find and carefully followed the recipe, step by step. Neither of us had worked with rising dough before, but we followed the recipe as carefully as we could.

After letting the dough rise, we rolled it out, layering it with butter and sugar. Another round of rising and we rolled it out again, slathering on the butter and sugar once more. Finally, we formed the layers of dough into 10 small units and carefully placed them—spaced a few inches apart—onto a greased cake pan, the better to catch any butter that might drip from the little cakes.

I put the cake pan into the pre-heated oven, and we waited. Thirty minutes later, the scent of kouign amann goodness had filled the air. We looked through the oven window and spied a perfect golden patina covering the top. Eagerly opening the oven door, I pulled out the cake pan and placed it on the counter to cool. It was then that we noticed: The 10 distinct, standing kouign amann mini cakes had somehow morphed into a semi-liquid mass of goo. In retrospect, something must have gone wrong with the rising.

We were disappointed and frustrated, but also hungry. My friend and I locked eyes, grabbed spoons and dove into the goo. The cakes may have dissolved into a gooey mass, but what a wonderful gooey mass it was! We gobbled it up and enjoyed every bite. It was a quick ending to my kouign amann baking career, but luckily for me and my friends who have become fans of this pastry marvel, we can always get our kouign amann at the farmers' market. And when I'm back at the farmers' market in Brittany, kouign amann will be at the top of my shopping list.

The Deeper Meaning Behind Ordering a Meal in China

I have devoured croissants in Paris, savored tagine in Marrakesh and held my breath approaching the foul-smelling durian fruit in Singapore. But it was at a golf club in China where I realized how eating can reflect the mindset of an entire country.

I was on assignment at Mission Hills Shenzhen, the world's largest golf complex with 12 championship courses. Shenzhen is located about a one-hour drive from the Hong Kong border. The courses are designed by golf legends from around the world. There's the Norman Course, the Annika Course, the Faldo course and more. So many choices! Three luxurious clubhouses service the golf operation, the largest of which is more than 600,000 square feet.

One morning I played the Olazabal course with several individuals from the golf staff. It's a long, challenging course with deep bunkers and fairways bordered by dense jungle. Each player was assigned a caddie. Mission Hills has close to 3,000 caddies, all female, with varying degrees of English-language proficiency and golf skills. They can club you—"Six iron? No, for you, five."—find lost balls, rake bunkers and supply tees, sunscreen or divot mix from their multiple pockets.

After the round, my companions had to go back to work, and I found myself alone for lunch. I looked around the dining room and, of course, it was 99 percent male. The only other female I saw was the woman I had noticed earlier on the practice range. Judging from her warm-up routine, she was an avid smoker. Cigarette in one hand, she went through a series of lunges—forward, puff, back, puff, forward, puff, back, puff, and so on. Also I noticed she was bundled up from head to toe, even though it was a typically tropical day of high heat and high humidity—long sleeves, long pants and a wide brim hat complete with neck flap. Further travel in China revealed that Chinese women loathe the sun and go to great lengths to preserve lily-white skin. Pharmacies and supermarkets feature large displays of whitening products—not for teeth, as we are accustomed to seeing in the U.S., but for skin.

Even though I was alone, in a male-dominated environment, in China of all places I felt completely comfortable. Why? The atmosphere in a golf clubhouse is the same all over the world, as I have learned after many overseas assignments. I watched and listened to the conversations, all in Chinese of course. But it didn't matter. I saw golfers poring over scorecards, discussing shots, laughing and pointing at each other. Money changed hands for bets won and lost.

A pleasant waiter who spoke minimal English arrived and it was time for me to order. That's when it started. I knew to avoid salads and went to a list of cooked chicken dishes. Menu items were listed in both Chinese and English, with only brief descriptions. So I asked, "Is this white meat or dark meat?" The waiter frowned, "It is chicken." Then I remembered that an American golf pro based at Mission Hills had told me that the ubiquitous "skinless, boneless chicken breast" we are so used to is difficult to attain, and even to describe, in China. Just forget it.

Undaunted, I continued, "What is the sauce on the chicken?" Again the little frown. "May I have the sauce on the side?" Clearly "on the side" is a foreign concept, as I discovered later with salad dressings. I ordered the darn thing just the way it was listed on the menu. The dish arrived, with a lovely presentation, but it was, well, practically inedible. A gelatinous mass of sauce covered what I assume was chicken, and its slimy texture did me in. But the rice was great.

As the week went on, I gamely tried to personalize my meals. All I got was the kind little frown, and I realized they really wanted to please but had no authority to make any changes. It became screamingly obvious that individual food preferences were not important. Food allergies? You're on your own. It wasn't a language barrier, it was a cultural barrier.

It didn't take long before I realized my food experiences were symptomatic of a larger mindset that permeated the culture. My expectations were unrealistic. Even in the luxurious surroundings of an international golf resort where there was a clear

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desire to please, it was still China, where history shows that individual rights are not highly valued. My nephew, who has a surfboard factory in Shenzhen, told me that because there are so many people in China, everyone knows if you stumble. There's always someone right behind you, ready to step in and take your job.

In hindsight, I should have known better than to be so inquisitive, just from living in San Francisco. We are fortunate to have numerous Chinese restaurants and I love the food. One time at a favorite restaurant, I ordered a delectable dish of mixed vegetables that came with a crunchy topping. "What is the topping?" I asked. The answer was, "Beaks and claws."

As a journalist, my schedule was set for the week, and everyone seemed to know it. A young woman I had never met greeted me in the lobby and asked if I had enjoyed my golf game with the head instructor. At lunch one day, the waiter reminded me that I had a 2 p.m. meeting with the general manager. How did he know? I was walking around and exploring the resort, getting the feel of it, when a young man popped out from behind a bush and asked me if I was lost and could he escort me back to the lobby—because, he explained, I might otherwise be late for my spa appointment. How did he know? The message came through loud and clear: Do not deviate from the schedule. Do not go off on your own. Order from the menu exactly as it is presented.

My hosts were extremely hospitable and I was truly impressed with the place, especially when I was introduced to Sir Nick Faldo, a golf legend and one of my heroes. He runs a junior golf program that draws youth from all over Asia. The ultimate compliment for special guests like Sir Nick is to be treated to a meal where there is no menu. The host has pre-ordered and selected the best for you. It's much easier that way.

Chinese Caddies and Me

Suzie Rodriguez

My Dinners with Louis XIV and the Lost Generation

This story is adapted from a chapter on the Les Halles Market in Suzie's book, *Found Meals of the Lost Generation.*

Every once in a while I ponder who I would dine with if I could get my hands on a time machine. Over the years I've mentally touched down in many centuries and locations, but invariably I return to my two favorites: Paris in the 1920s, when it was home to the wild, war-weary Lost Generation, and Versailles in 1682, soon after Louis XIV and the royal court took up permanent residence.

My aim with each: to experience the quintessential dining experience of time and place. With the Lost Gens, that's pre-dawn onion soup in the Les Halles markets; in Versailles, a banquet enhanced by the golden aura of the Sun King.

I'll start my travels with a dusk-to-dawn Paris visit, circa 1925. My time machine provides period clothing, so after landing in a little-visited part of the Montparnasse cemetery, I emerge in a short dress with a dropped waist, a long rope of pearls knotted at my breasts and surprisingly comfortable T-strap shoes. If I'm not back in 12 hours, my transport departs without me. The tiny numerals on my early-model wristwatch indicate that it's 6 p.m., so I've got about nine hours to nibble on expat life before making the Les Halles scene.

First stop: Les Deux Magots for a Pernod. As I savor the drink's sharp anise taste I look around, hoping for a glimpse of Hemingway, Djuna Barnes, Isadora Duncan or Scott and Zelda. No such luck. So I wander over to Shakespeare & Company, where I'm thrilled to see James Joyce and Sylvia Beach chatting—he's standing, twirling a cane and wearing white sneakers; she's leaning against a table piled high with books.

Then it's off to 27 rue de Fleurus, home of the "Mama of Dada," Gertrude Stein. Outside the gated entry I encounter some friendly Americans who snagged an invite to Stein's weekly salon, and next thing I know I'm inside, gazing at those legendary walls lined floor to ceiling with works by Matisse, Picasso, Renoir, Cézanne, Delacroix and all the rest. Stein, deep in conversation with Ezra Pound, has no interest in me, but her companion Alice offers me a thimble-sized glass of blackberry wine and a Visitandine glazed with apricot jam and topped with kirsch icing.

I meet a young man named Cody, an expat and writer who attends the salon every now and then. "The food is good," he says, "but Alice is stingy with the booze." He thinks Gertrude is a big phony. I point out that only someone of character would collect works considered ridiculous or brilliant, depending on your viewpoint.

"Let's leave," he says, offering to take me to the latest trendy watering hole in town, the Jockey, tended by a popular ex-flyweight boxer from Liverpool known as Jimmy the Bartender. Over the Jockey's French 75

cocktails—composed of gin, brandy and champagne, and named for a British WWI 75mm field gun—we learn that Jimmy now works at the Dingo. So we head over there with a few of Cody's pals, and Jimmy mixes up one of his famous libations just for me.

By now I'm part of a merry group of Genners debating where to go next. I suggest Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, where the new American sensation Josephine Baker is drawing record crowds. But they all want to go dancing, so we move to Jean Cocteau's new place, *Le Boeuf sur le Toit* (The Ox on the Roof), and join the French avant garde cavorting about the dance floor.

Then it's on to legendary Bricktop's, which always has the hottest American jazz records and stellar musicians. Cole Porter drops by to tinkle the ivories and hang with Bricktop, and the young Prince of

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Wales pulls off an acceptable Charleston on the dance floor. I search in vain for a glimpse of future poetry great Langston Hughes, who worked at Bricktop's in the mid-1920s as a waiter. That place is still going strong at 3 a.m. when we set out for my last stop and the main goal of my visit: Les Halles.

Onion soup at dawn in Les Halles was an essential 1920s Lost Generation experience. The gigantic wholesale produce, seafood and meat market sprawled in the center of Paris for more than 800 years until being torn down in the early 1960s. Mostly young, about the same age as the century, these expats had a comfortable life in Paris, thanks to an extremely lopsided postwar exchange rate. They partied hard, stayed out late and, as their memoirs reveal, loved topping off the night or greeting the dawn with a simmering, fragrant, revitalizing bowl of onion soup.

Most of Paris was asleep in the onion soup hours, but in the crowded and noisy Halles the arc lights burned bright as day. Through the market's sheds and stalls and narrow passageways came big-muscled men hauling massive crates on their backs, horse-drawn carts loaded with local produce, honking Renault trucks crammed with shellfish from Brittany or cheeses from the Auvergne. As dawn neared, shoppers joined the throng: restaurant and hotel chefs, the owners of small food shops, frugal housewives and anyone else in search of the best goods at the lowest price.

There was certainly nothing like this back in Kansas City or Trenton or even San Francisco back in the conformist America of Sinclair Lewis's *Babbit* that the young, rebellious expat crowd had escaped by coming to live in the capital of Modernism. As they wove through buyers and butchers, fish hawkers and cabbage purveyors, pimps and patricians, they headed to one of many inexpensive dives that catered to market workers and served piping-hot bowls of onion soup. Once happily ensconced, they sobered up or spun tales or both.

Lost Generation writings are rich with references to this experience.

Scott Fitzgerald wrote about the bejeweled women and blood-covered butchers who frequented the market's bars and cafés, and he and Zelda once slummed there with

expat power couple Gerald and Sara Murphy in tow. The poet e.e. cummings placed Act III of his play, "Him," in the market's Au Père Tranquille restaurant, where he often souped with friends in wee hours. Before the 1926 publication of *The Sun Also Rises* made him internationally famous, Hemingway once worked as a laborer in the markets, earning money to buy Joan Miro's painting, "The Farm." Long after midnight, when newspapers were finally put to bed, young Paris Herald reporters William Shirer and James Thurber joined colleagues from other foreign newspapers at Le Chien Qui Fume (The Smoking Dog) for a good stiff drink and a bowl of onion soup.

Little Review publisher Margaret Anderson and many others—including Fernand Léger, Man Ray, William Carlos Williams and Kay Boyle—were frequently taken to the market by sculptor Constantin Brancusi after a night of revels in his stark-white Les Halles studio. "By seven o'clock in the morning," Anderson wrote in *My Thirty Years' War,* "he suggests taking a boat down the Seine to Rouen. Everyone refuses this. So he takes you instead to the Halles for onion soup."

The English artist Nina Hamnett was often spotted over onion soup at Les Halles. A free spirit, she sometimes wandered the streets dressed like a male gangster, attended an endless list of parties given by princes and countesses, spent many nights (most of them, in fact) dancing at *Le Boeuf sur le Toit,* and once introduced two unlikely friends: Rudolph Valentino and James Joyce. Hamnett's autobiography is crammed to

F. Scott Fitzgerald

the end-papers with reports of returning home from the market post-dawn. “We then went to Les Halles,” reads one such entry, “and had supper or breakfast or both, and some white wine, and returned to Montparnasse about 8 a.m.”

American writer Robert McAlmon recalled being at Bricktop’s with Hamnett, Man Ray and Kiki of Montparnasse on the night pianist Leon Crutcher was shot to death by his French girlfriend. Horrified, McAlmon drank more than usual and ended up in Les Halles, where, staggering through the market’s early-morning bustle, he and a friend met two prostitutes and “agreed to buy them coffee and croissants, while we had *soupe à l’oignon.*”

The markets even supported romance. Langston Hughes wrote sweetly of Les Halles in his love poem, "The Bells Toll Fondly,” and in the groundbreaking *USA Trilogy*, John Dos Passos’s aviator uses an unusual pickup line on a French woman by offering to take her “to Les Halles to eat *soupe à l’oignon*…and then I shall take you on a little *tour en avion.*”

And Harry Crosby, founder of the legendary Black Sun Press, made frequent reference to Les Halles in his diaries, as in this 1925 entry: "Champagne orangeades at the Ritz and afterwards to dance in the Bois and to dance in the Montmartre and finally at dawn to Les Halles where we were the only two dancers. Seven o’clock and the end of the last bottle of champagne and a crazy bargain with a sturdy peasant to haul us to the Ritz in his vegetable cart and thus we reclined Geraldine in her silverness I in my blackness, upon the heaped-up carrots and cabbages while our poor man strained in the harness." Soon after, he shocked his friends and wife Caresse by carrying out a murder/suicide pact with a beautiful young woman.

In the end, Les Halles came to symbolize what it meant to be young in Paris in the Twenties: dancing and drinking ‘til dawn, followed by onion soup at Pied de Mouton, Pharamond or one of many others, and then home at last to bed, usually to start the same thing all over again the next night. When the twenties passed, so did the heyday of the markets as a social mecca.

But on my 1925 visit, the markets were at their height. When we arrived at Les Halles, I slipped away from the Genners, who were now quite drunk and rowdy—“I’m blotto!” Cody confided—and headed to Le Chien Qui Fume. I spotted Isadora, Ernest, Bryher and Virgil, but I was talked out and needed nourishment. I nabbed a corner table, ordered, and then, at long last, tucked with abandon into a fragrant, gorgeous bowl of classic *soupe à l’oignon.* It still bubbled from the oven, with a thick browned crust of Gruyere atop and a garlic-infused crouton barely visible beneath the rich meaty broth. If I could have dived headlong into that soup and swum around, I would have.

Gloriously sated, I wandered the narrow passageways jammed with crowds, past stalls piled high with meat, fish and produce, trying to memorize all the sights and sounds and smells. I was sad to leave, but

the Sun King awaited.

I've been fascinated by Louis XIV since I was a kid. The young Louis, of course: he of the brilliant political mind, the magnificent visage, the noble physique. Louis the Grand. Louis the Warrior, Louis the Brave, Louis the Patron and Protector of the Arts. Louis the Rake.

And definitely Louis the Epicurean. Louis XIV loved to eat. He did so frequently, hugely and with gusto, and is credited by scholars with planting seeds that ultimately led to the unquestioned triumph of French cuisine. Before the Sun King's time, food in France was simple and plain: grilled or boiled meats, few vegetables, lots of legumes and cereals.

But according to historian Melissa M. Wittmeier: "During the reign of Louis XIV, all of that changed. The king's preference for certain delicacies, his love for his garden, and for the fruits and vegetables that it produced, set the stage for the culinary revolution that would bring French cuisine to the pinnacle of the culinary realm internationally."

The king's kitchen kept a 500-person staff busy preparing food. Louis was also fond of spirits, and particularly loved wines produced by the original Dom Pierre Pérignon, a winemaking Benedictine monk.

Alas, Louis's love of food came at a price. You can't dine regularly on two dozen dishes a night and remain lithe—not to mention healthy. As he aged, the king became obese. He suffered from gout, periostitis, dizziness, chronic headaches and many other ailments, including gangrene (the hypothesis today is that he probably also had diabetes). When Louis died in 1715, his autopsy revealed that he possessed a stomach three times larger than that of an average man.

Yes, extravagance characterized every aspect of the Sun King's life, including his culinary life. I expected to see opulence at dinner, and I did.

Louis dined late that night, as usual, around 10 p.m., in an antechamber of the lavish royal apartments. He, his wife and his children sat at a long table, with the ladies and gentlemen of his court arranged and seated at the sides. Musicians played throughout from a raised platform. Louis ate from plates made of gold, while his family dined on silver. Conversation, which distracted the king from his meal, was not allowed when he dined.

Although forks had come into use, Louis preferred to eat with his hands, wiping them on a cloth presented to him between courses. By the time he headed for bed, the king had sampled or eaten 21 dishes; no wonder he lost that youthful figure!

On the night I dined with Louis XIV, dishes included royal ballotine of pheasant, petit pâté en croûte à la bourgeoise, lobster aspic chaud-froid, beef madrilène with gold leaf spangles, pureed chestnut soup with truffles, bisque of shellfish with a boletus infusion, scallops with oyster liquor, wild duck cromesquis à la Villeroy, hare stew, green and fresh herb salad in gold leaf, rice salad à la royale, and fruit.

Loved the cromesquis, a sort of croquette containing minced wild duck and a fabulous sauce. The bisque was stunning and remarkably 21st century, the pheasant disappointingly bland. I had a triple serving of the salad (gold leaf has no taste, but it's fun) and really got into the Dom. I missed conversation but enjoyed listening to the chamber music, watching Louis wipe his hands and studying the queen's elaborate clothing.

I had no way to tell the time, so after the royals retired I strolled through the Hall of Mirrors and the Salon of Venus, and then returned to the machine, hidden in a garden labyrinth. I was early, according to the digital clock inside, but that was okay. I'd traveled far, seen much and was ready to go.

Suddenly my own era seemed exciting, even magical, a place where I could breakfast on fresh fruit and yogurt, eat half a dozen tomatoes from my garden for lunch and luxuriate with a nice grilled filet of salmon at dinner.

Simplicité, c'est moi! I was happy to head home.

Carole Terwilliger Meyers

Art Tea at the Merrion in Dublin

A version of this article appeared on Carole's "Travels With Carole" blog in 2014.

Dublin's luxurious five-star Merrion Hotel was created in 1997 from a row of four meticulously restored 1760s Georgian townhouses. A contemporary-style Garden Wing was added. Situated across the street from government offices and just a five-minute walk to Grafton Street, the hotel has two lovely period gardens and holds one of Ireland's largest collections of private art, 90 percent by Irish artists. In addition to sumptuous bedding and furnishings, my spacious room had a luxurious grey-and-white-marble bathroom with a deep tub/shower, and I adored the fragrant Asprey Purple Water amenities. But this wasn't my main motivation for staying here.

It was the hotel's famous Art Tea. Served in elegant period drawing rooms, it is a don't-miss attraction. Adding to the cozy ambiance, fires in these lounges burn fragrant local peat bricks neatly pressed into log-size rectangles.

An indulgent experience, the tea lasts about two hours with an option to include Champagne (I recommend that it does). Hot tea is poured into pale, green-rimmed Wedgewood china cups. Among the choices are black teas that include the Merrion Blend, Earl Grey and Smoked China; green teas that include mild Jasmine Pearls and delicately fruity Morgentau; fruit infusions that include Granny's Garden, with notes of rhubarb and Bourbon vanilla; herbal infusions—think Moroccan Mint and Honeybush Orange; and a peachy white tea. Because I am caffeine

Ciara Ryan explains tea tray

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sensitive late in the day, I opted for an herbal blend.

First up is a three-tiered tea tray bearing little sandwiches—oak-smoked Irish salmon on brown soda bread, cucumber with cream cheese and chives on tomato bread—along with plain and fruit scones with clotted cream and lemon curd. And did I mention the striking, brightly colored slices of Battenberg cake with almond icing?

Later, the *pièce de résistance* arrives: a plate bearing exquisite pastry interpretations of three pieces of art chosen from the large collection displayed throughout the hotel. We feasted on a raspberry and passionfruit tart, "*Futile Defense, Fabricated Evidence*" (1998, John Boyd); a vanilla biscuit with orange curd, "Frying Pan, Funnel, Eggs & Lemons" (1950, William Scott); and a rosewater and orange mousse on a white chocolate feuilletine, "Roses and Temple" (Patrick Hennessy). They were divine.

The Art Tea catalogue, which depicts the hotel's art collection, is part of the experience and is a gift to take with you. I keep mine on my coffee table as a reminder of this very special tea time.

www.merrionhotel.com/drawingrooms_tea.php

Tea-day's selection

Ciara Ryan holds peat brick

Venerable Vineyards: Discovering Liquid Gold with Mother Lode Roots

A version of this article appeared in *RV Journa*l magazine.

Standing outside the tasting room, we were admiring the view over the vineyards when Dick Cooper ambled up, wearing jeans, suspenders and a cowboy hat. "It's barbera," he said. "The rows in front of you and halfway down the slope are barbera." It's like that in California's original wine region. You never know when you'll bump into a grower, owner or winemaker here in this rolling, oak-studded, central Sierra Foothills region, where small, family-owned and operated wineries remain the rule, not the exception.

Substantial Gold Country wine production in the mid-19th century slaked nearby miners' notorious thirst. However, 45 years ago only a single winery and a scattered handful of vineyards remained. A rebirth of wine production since then has generated the appearance of well over 30 wineries in Amador County, while another dozen or so lie just across the Consumes River's South Fork in the Fair Play region of El Dorado County. A unique combination of soil, climate, landscape, colorful history and a tradition of families putting down roots make this area stand out from California's more famous wine regions.

Grower and winery owner Dick Cooper explains his techniques for growing award-winning Barbera at Cooper Ranch.

Here are some of the wineries we particularly enjoyed over several visits:

Sobon Estate. Twelve years after founding nearby **Shenandoah Vineyards**, Leon and Shirley Sobon, pioneers in the renaissance of the foothill wine region, purchased the historic D'Agostini Winery in 1989 as a 30th anniversary present to one another. An old winery with historic significance, it's the only one here that survived Prohibition and is the third oldest winery in California. The D'Agostini family owned the winery from the early 20th century to the Sobon's time, making value-priced jug wines, mostly zinfandel.

A small museum exhibits 500-gallon oak casks, hand-crafted by local cooper and rancher John J. Davis around 1869. These exquisite relics complete a collection of artifacts relating to the winery's and region's history.

It seems appropriate that Sobon Estate should feature zinfandel, the principal grape of this wine region in the 19th century and the variety that sparked the area's late-20th-century revival. Award-winning, single-vineyard zins have a loyal following, but we bought a Reserve Primitivo and Reserve Tannat. The primitivo is an Italian (or perhaps Croatian) zinfandel clone, while the latter variety originated in southwestern France.

Dillian Wines. Tom Dillian, a fourth generation farmer in the area, planted his first wine grapes in 1972 (zinfandel, of course) with his two brothers. In 2003, he started the winery with help from his son Thomas. Tom learned vine cultivation and vineyard management as a boy from his stepdad, Mike D'Agostini. Tom and Thomas share winemaking responsibilities at this small family winery.

Chatting with Thomas on the tasting room's front porch, we learned that neither he nor his dad received formal training in enology. Nevertheless, they acquired the skills necessary to consistently turn out sought-after, bin-fermented reds. They strive for wines with complexity and intensity of flavors but with the edges

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rounded, or as Thomas put it, "in a velvet glove."

Inside the small, simple tasting room modeled after the old farmhouse it replaced, we took special pleasure in the Tre Fratelli (three brothers) Zinfandel from that 1972 vineyard.

Scott Harvey Wines. Located in the well-preserved Gold Rush-era town of Sutter Creek, this is a tasting room, not a winery, strictly speaking. There we tasted some truly memorable wines poured by the enthusiastic and engaging Kelsey, who speculated that her philosophy major might have been good preparation for her job.

Winemaker and proprietor Scott Harvey, a native of the region, makes a line of Amador reds. We tasted several in the Victorian-era building, appreciating the wine's craftsmanship as we viewed the impossibly quaint Main Street through large windows. Each wine gave vivid expression to what the French call "terroir" or what Scott calls the "taste of Amador."

We ended up splurging on the most expensive wine on the list, the Vineyard 1869 Zinfandel. We loved the subtle finesse of this classic zin, but its history also spoke to us. It's from the oldest documented zinfandel vineyard in America. It was here when John Davis crafted those 500-gallon oak casks we admired in the museum.

Vino Noceto. This winery's story goes back 30 years, when Jim Gullett, a successful technology-savvy banker, and his wife Suzy acquired property in the Shenandoah Valley with the dream of establishing their own vineyard and winery and raising their family. After careful research and with what Jim calls "an inclination to be different," they planted sangiovese vines.

Jim and Suzy may be California's premier producers of the grape variety that defines Chianti Classico from Italy's Tuscany region. They have found that growing conditions here are similar to inland Tuscany's Chianti region, although their wines offer a surprising range of flavors.

"We stress education in the tasting room," Jim said. The knowledgeable manager, Tracy, guides tasters through an impressive range of sangiovese. She uses words like "rugged," "charismatic" and "voluptuous" to describe the select vineyard sangiovese wines and compares each to a movie star–Clint Eastwood, Paul Newman, Mae West. Here also is the chance to snag a bottle of Suzy Gullett's favorite, frivolo, a naturally effervescent Muscato bianco, refreshing on a picnic or patio when chilled.

Cooper Vineyards. As our conversation with Dick Cooper continued, he pointed out that "below the barbera, where the trellises are, those are primitivo. Then, beyond that is the zinfandel. You know, zinfandel is easy to grow around here, almost too easy. I prefer the challenge of the barbera; it requires just the right location and a lot of attention to do well."

A third-generation Shenandoah Valley farmer, Cooper raises sheep and walnuts in addition to his 80-acre vineyard. He says he's a landscape designer at heart. Unquestionably a first-rate vigneron, Cooper opened his winery in 2007 after decades of grape growing. When we asked him why, he said he was the father of four daughters and didn't think any of them foresaw a career driving a tractor, so the winery is his way of passing on a family legacy.

His daughter Jeri and the other tasting room staff welcome visitors like family. Jeri calls her dad "The Godfather of Barbera" and enthusiastically talks about the wines that winemaker Mike Roser crafts from his grapes. Roser says he does very little blending. He says his job is to "keep the grape in front." In other words, to bottle what Dick Cooper grows.

We could go on with wineries like **Domain de la Terre Rouge**, renowned for premium Rhone varietals, and **C. G. DiArie** and **Runquist**, two wineries that have earned accolades and respect. Several in the Fair Play area merit a visit too, including homey, family-run, 35-year-old **Latcham Vineyards** and a relatively new addition right in the village of Fair Play called **Winery by the Creek**.

This latter winery, owned by Charles Mitchell, who for years has made wine at nearby Charles B. Mitchell Vineyards, boasts a manmade "cave," a barrel tasting opportunity and, by appointment, a Saturday afternoon winery tour with Mitchell himself. A special bottling called Elizabeth Mitchell embodies the down-to-earth character of the region. Packaged in a one-liter jug with screw cap and handle, reminiscent of those jug wines the D'Agostinis used to make, it comes with the promise of a discounted refill when you return with the empty jug. Now there's a case of "what's old is new again," rather like the wine region itself.

Winery Websites:
Cooper Vineyards: www.cooperwines.com
Dillian Wines: www.dillianwines.com
Scott Harvey Wines: www.scottharveywines.com
Sobon Estate: www.sobonwine.com
Vino Noceto: www.noceto.com
Winery by the Creek: www.winerybythecreek.com

Festival of Food: Gilroy, California's Garlic Capital

A version of this article appeared in *RV Journal* magazine.

As we climbed out of the car amidst a bumper crop of vehicles sprouting from a vast farm field, the aroma immediately struck us. Had we any doubt about where we were, the smell would have erased it. Parking attendants efficiently guided our stream of vehicles into orderly rows like, well, a crop of garlic. Once parked, we walked to the entrance, arriving at the end of a line several hundred people long. It was Friday at 9:57 a.m. and the gates wouldn't open for three minutes.

We were at the Gilroy Garlic Festival, one of the most popular food festivals in the country, drawing about 100,000 visitors annually. Held the final weekend of July in Gilroy's Christmas Hill Park, the festival is just one of several, mostly gustatory reasons we came to visit the area.

The best garlic fries are found at Gilroy's Garlic Festival.

Within a few minutes of our arrival, the line was through the gate. We headed first to the Rapazzini Garlic Shop for free tastes of mustard, olives, salsa, pasta sauce and jelly, all flavored with garlic. We passed up the garlic chocolate. At other booths we purchased pot stickers, tomato bruschetta, marinated mushrooms, steamed crawdads and fried potatoes, all redolent of the aromatic bulb. Although tempted by the garlic ice cream, we decided the line was too long. In the center of a large grassy field surrounded by an astounding array of garlic-smelling vendors, we found a shady spot to savor these delectables.

At the southernmost fringe of the San Francisco Bay Area on U.S. Highway 101, Gilroy and its northern neighbor, Morgan Hill, retain strong links with their agricultural roots, the Garlic Festival only the most obvious. Although little garlic grows around Gilroy nowadays, the bulb affectionately known as the "stinking rose" is still processed there, and the area remains dotted with small wineries, fruit orchards and truck farms supplying local and Bay Area markets.

Andy's Orchard in Morgan Hill demonstrates how one dedicated farmer has adapted to suburban growth. Andy Mariana specializes in tree-ripened fruit, growing 250 varieties of cherries, peaches, nectarines, apricots and plums on his 55 acres. He markets most of his crop directly, through his farmstand or by mail order.

As we sampled one of Andy's tree-ripened, just-picked O'Henry peaches, our friend Ginger asked Andy if he'd added sugar. The answer was no. We had just discovered how good a fresh peach can taste. Andy also dries and ships some of the apricots and peaches he harvests five or more times a season to ensure every peach, plum or cherry is tree-ripened. He says, "It's all about the flavor." We could not agree more.

About halfway between Morgan Hill and Gilroy, LJB Farms is owned by the fourth generation of a Croatian-American family that now grows mostly row crops. They, too, concentrate on farmstand and mail-order sales. And if Andy had the best peach we've ever tasted, LJB farms had the sweetest corn. After biting into a fresh, raw ear of a white-and-red corn called Scarlet, we thought we were eating candy. Proprietor Judy Bonnino said, "You don't really need to cook it, just heat it up if you prefer."

LJB grows and sells peppers, onions, garlic, tomatoes, beans and squash. In season, they also sell strawberries and melons. Judy's son demonstrated the chili roaster designed and built by another son, a gas-fired rotary contraption that roasted about 20 pounds of green pasilla chilies in just a few minutes. We left with a bag of fresh corn, squash and freshly roasted pasillas.

George, Gene and Gary, grandsons of early-20th century Italian immigrant Emile Guglielmo, run the Guglielmo (pronounced gool-yell-mo) Winery in Morgan Hill. Several historic California wineries recount family stories about staying in business through the Prohibition era by making sacramental wine. Guglielmo actually originated during Prohibition. It seems that Emile began making wine during the 1920s to supply the Italian and French immigrant customers on his grocery delivery route in San Francisco. By 1925, he had purchased 15 acres near Morgan Hill, where the winery is now located.

We recently toted a case of clean, empty wine bottles to a "cork equity" event at the winery. Several times each year, Guglielmo stages cork equity to honor the winery's origins and sell a little wine. It's a bottle-your-own production and a good excuse for a party. Grilled sausages, various cheeses and glasses of the blended red table wine kept visitors occupied while they waited their turn. Produced exclusively for this bottling, the blend was siphoned directly out of the barrels into attendees' bottles that were then corked one at a time by either Gene or George. They trust no one else to operate the almost antique corking machine. We pasted labels on the bottles and stuffed them into the box, taking away an enjoyable, rustic red table wine at a very reasonable price.

Guglielmo Winery's welcoming tasting room

Heading out Hecker Pass Road west of Gilroy, we came to Gilroy Gardens Family Theme Park (formerly Bonfante Gardens), a unique combination garden and theme park. Established by Michael Bonfante, the garden's focus on horticulture and education distinguishes it from other theme parks. It's not oriented to thrill-seeking teenagers, instead attracting families with younger children and grandparents.

For us, the highlight may have been the circus trees, trained to grow in fantastic shapes. Swedish immigrant Axel Erlandson began creating the shapes in the late 1920s employing techniques such as grafting and pleaching, though he sometimes claimed he caused the trees to grow into their bizarre shapes by talking to them. Bonfante acquired the trees in the 1980s and transplanted those that survived in his new theme park.

We stumbled across one area attraction that has no discernable connection to agriculture or food–the Wings of History Museum in nearby San Martin. Its collection includes some unusual aircraft and fascinating in-progress restoration projects, the only place we've ever seen wooden propeller restoration and fabrication.

Gilroy's historic main street remains largely intact, with a turn-of-the-20th-century ambience. Toward the central district's southern end, the historic train depot serves as the terminus for Caltrain, a commuter rail service that reaches north to San Francisco. The train makes special weekend runs during the Garlic Festival.

One probably doesn't need to be a garlic lover to enjoy the Garlic Festival, but it sure helps. Even though we are garlic lovers, we'd had our fill by the end of an afternoon. We will, however, return for another festival. And if we're in the area at any other time, we can satisfy our garlic cravings at Mama Mia's, a local restaurant with branches in Gilroy and Morgan Hill that features Garlic Festival contest-winning recipes on the menu.

We have no trouble finding excuses to visit this region: for some of the best tree-ripened fresh fruit anywhere; for the sweetest corn and fresh fire-roasted chilies; and certainly to bottle a little more wine in a setting that feels like a big family reunion. We'll return mostly because we feel welcome.

More Information: Gilroy Visitors Bureau, www.gilroyvisitor.org; Morgan Hill Chamber of Commerce, www.morganhill.org.

Jacqueline Harmon Butler

Progressive Supper

This story, "Travel and Food" silver-medalist in the 2015 Travelers' Tales Solas Awards, appears at FoodFlirtOnline.wordpress.com.

Ernest Hemingway called Paris a "moveable feast" and I have always agreed with him. Once, on my last night in Paris before returning home, I decided to have my own movable feast—a progressive supper, with each course in a different restaurant. I wanted the restaurants to be within walking distance of one another, the last one near my hotel in the sixth arrondissement. I was feeling a bit lonely and disappointed that I hadn't fallen in love with anyone this trip. I had already told my friends back home that this time I would meet that "special someone" while in Paris. Now, here I was, my last night in town, and still alone.

It was a perfect late summer evening. The sun set with an explosion of orange, pink and violet as I sat sipping my Kir Royale at the Café de Flore. I took a leisurely stroll through the old neighborhood, pausing now and then to window-shop. I wandered across the Pont des Beaux-Arts and over to Les Halles and the restaurant Au Pied de Cochon.

As the maitre d' escorted me to a choice table on the terrace, I stole furtive glances around the room, hoping there would be a single man within easy flirting range. Alas, there seemed to be only couples or groups of women nearby. My waiter, though cute, was far too young. I sighed and decided a little Champagne and oysters would cheer me up considerably. Nor could I resist a bowl of delicious onion soup, washed down with a cool glass of Provençal Rosé. *Yes,* I thought, *I'm feeling much better.*

I meandered a few blocks to L'Escargot Montorgueil for a few escargots. They were plump little darlings, swimming in garlic and butter and dusted all over with chopped parsley. I chose a wonderful old Burgundy red to accessorize the dish. *Yummm,* I thought, *what a splendid idea.* Suddenly, over the rim of my wine glass, I noticed an attractive Frenchman looking my way. *Ooh la la,* I thought. *Things are looking up.* Then he smiled at me and I felt I would faint. When he got up from his table, I was certain he was coming over to meet me but he walked right by. With a sinking heart, I watched as he embraced a glamorous blonde. My beautiful escargots, so delicious a moment ago, seemed to coagulate on the plate. I paid my bill and left the restaurant without even looking at the handsome Frenchman and his friend chatting cozily in a corner of the bar.

My mood was somewhat dejected as I crossed the Pont Marie to the Ile St. Louis. Gliding along the Seine below was a grand sightseeing boat, a Bateaux Mouche, its lights blazing against the old buildings. The decks were filled with happy couples laughing and pointing out the sights to each other. Romantic music

came floating up to me and I could see couples dancing on the upper deck. Looking down along the quay I saw pairs and pairs of lovers strolling hand in hand. Others were sitting close together along the water's edge, locked in tight and feverish embraces.

Somehow I didn't feel hungry anymore. My plans to go to L'Orangerie for a leg of lamb and a rich Bordeaux no longer seemed interesting. By now I was feeling absolutely wretched and sorry for myself, so I decided to wander back toward the hotel.

The Pont Neuf looked beautiful with lights reflecting off the stone facade. I had photographed the bridge earlier in the day and decided to capture a few night images. Working took my mind off my loneliness and the lighting was perfect. I photographed the bridge

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from one side to the other and then from the top and from the bottom. Wanting to get some long shots, I walked over to the Pont des Beaux-Arts. Looking through the viewfinder I caught my breath. The wide-angle lens had captured the entire bridge shining golden in the night light, with the sparkling Seine below.

Ah Paris, I sighed, *how could any city be more lovely than you?* I stood there, body tingling and heart swelling. Tears came to my eyes and I forgot all about my loneliness and depression. Then, as if on cue, a deep sensuous voice said, *"Bon soir, Mademoiselle."* I turned around to gaze into a gorgeous pair of laughing, chocolate-brown eyes.

Fini

John Montgomery

Villa Mauresque Resort's Moorish architecture makes it the only one of its kind on the upscale French Riviera.

Photographer John Montgomery is an award-winning commercial and travel photographer, television and film producer/director and studio owner for more than 40 years. Based in San Francisco, his work appears in photography shows and in a variety of newspapers, magazines, and on the Web. Former BOD BATW. ASMP. NAAP. www.montgomeryphotographic.com

Barge Cruising on France's Canal du Midi

A version of this article appeared in *Vacation Agent* magazine and a longer one on Examiner.com.

Floating by barge through France's canal-laced countryside underscores the pleasures of dining on meals prepared from fresh, locally sourced ingredients.

Our first lunch aboard the eight-passenger Anjodi made this abundantly clear. The buffet was no less than a delectable culinary map of the surrounding Languedoc region in the south of France, featuring a beautiful *salade niçoise* (from Nice) with red mullet; *tielle*—an octopus pie from the neighboring seaport of Sète; *brandade de morue*—a salt cod and olive oil paste; a warm rocket, potato and mussel salad; a green salad; and a *pissaladière*—a provençal pizza made with anchovies, olives and onions.

Star billing went to the oysters, served au naturel gleaming in their briny shells and grilled as Oysters Kilpatrick. Both dishes recalled our short sunset spin the night before through the oyster beds of the Étang de Thau, a vast saltwater lake off Marseillan, where we first boarded the Anjodi.

It was a fine beginning to a trip based on culinary magic, as performed by our brilliant young British chef, Lauren Clare Scott. The wines were a revelation as well, all the more as we came to understand the terroir, or characteristics of the land, from which they originated.

As we returned to the barge from our first morning excursion to Pézenas, a charming flower-draped town of narrow cobblestone streets and the remains of an ancient Jewish ghetto, the road was lined with vineyards of Picpoul grapes. Giant red poppies sprouted up among the vines on this cool April day as our guide and wine expert, Julian Allsop, described for us the very typical French regional varietal planted here to go with the oysters from the surrounding beds.

He thus readied our palates for the 2010 Duc de Morny Picpoul de Pinet we would soon be sipping at lunch, a crisp chilled white he promised would pair beautifully with the oysters.

The sense of total well-being, perhaps heightened by our first glass, came well before the selection of cheeses and desserts that were to accompany each gourmet lunch and dinner during our six-night cruise.

Was the trip about more than fine food and wine? Absolutely. Barge cruising is slow travel at its best, a

The eight-passenger Anjodi sails on the Canal du Midi through southern France — credit European Waterways

Carol Canter's award-winning travel articles have made the offbeat and exotic accessible to readers for decades, on topics like Jazz Clubs in Tokyo, Barging in Burgundy, Nursing in Cuba and Biking the Canadian Rockies.

chance to settle into the rhythms and textures of life along a French waterway from your very own floating boutique hotel. Best of all, a crackerjack crew of four—captain, tour guide/deckhand, gourmet chef and hostess—ensures that everything works smoothly as they share their expertise about the history, politics and culture, not to mention the food and wine, of the region.

With a ratio of one crewmember to two passengers, the service is beyond personalized. Your every need is anticipated. While our captain was plotting on a map a bicycle route for my husband and me that would take us high into hillside villages overlooking farms and vineyards, Julian arranged for a couple from Wales to meet with a local artist in the tiny village of Somail.

Whenever we returned to the barge, the sundeck was the favored spot for a late afternoon aperitif and hors d'oeuvres, a chance to raise a glass to locals walking the towpath or waving from an overhead bridge. With glass, binoculars and cameras in hand, we savored vignettes of the French countryside as it floated by.

Chef Lauren Clare Scott serves dinner to one of the Anjodi passengers

Cheeses and pears, a heavenly pairing.

Photos this page by Carol Canter

Our onboard hostess presents a beautiful array of cheeses, explaining the provenance of each.

Peru Beyond Cuy and Potatoes: Food as a Tool for Social Change

A longer version of this article appeared in *Vacations and Travel.*

With influences from Quechua/Inca, Amazon, Spanish, African, Japanese and Chinese cultures, Peru has developed a compelling food culture, with Lima becoming a leader in Latin fusion cuisine. During three weeks of travel there, I discovered some of Peru's best foodie experiences, and how food is being used as a tool for social change.

Sophisticated Altitude Dining

The soft green-and-white disk served on a slab of stone at Central, one of Lima's most innovative restaurants, looked like a chunk of blue cheese sprinkled with Parmesan and parsley. I took a bite, only to discover it was a sweet dessert made of a white-flesh Andean fruit called cherimoya, a Peruvian mint named *muña*, coffee, coca leaves (yes, *those* coca leaves) and chaco clay, all edible ingredients found around 1,750 meters (5,740 feet) in elevation.

Central's owner and executive chef, Virgilio Martinez, uses the elevation theme to discover diverse natural ingredients. His team of anthropologists, linguists and nutritionists travels the country to learn about biodiversity and bring back foods known to locals. In the process, he gives people in poor, remote areas another way to make a living by collecting and selling those ingredients.

Martinez's Altura Extrema (Extreme Altitude) dish from 4,200 meters includes potatoes plus cushuro, a tasteless but amino acid-rich, current-sized, blue-green algae that absorbs other flavors. The Expedición Paita (Paita Expedition) features frogfish and deep-water algae from 25 meters under the sea.

Organic and Delicious

Claiming to be the only certified organic restaurant in Peru, AlmaZen (meaning "Zen Soul") creates complex vegetarian cuisine with subtle flavors. The "Queen Avocado" stuffed with steamed vegetables in a cashew-and-dill sauce and the Napoleon lasagne with thin layers of mushrooms, asparagus, squash and grilled zucchini with cashew and tree-tomato (tomatillo) sauces were delectable.

AlmaZen's owners, Enrique Vera "Henry" DuBois and his wife, helped start Lima's weekly organic farmers market, Bioferia de Miraflores. Vendors sell local honey, bee pollen, tomatoes, broccoli, asparagus, Roman broccoli, lettuce, celery, onions, radishes, kohlrabi, eggplant, varieties of squash, cacao (chocolate) pods, quinoa, kiwicha, kañiwa, sweet-tart aguaymanto berries, and a selection from Peru's 3,000 varieties of potatoes.

Chefs-in-training

Gastón Acurio, the international star of Peruvian cuisine and a master chef who trains young chefs at his Instituto Culinario Pachacútec, located this culinary arts institute in Pachacútec, an extremely poor neighborhood near Lima. His goal was to use food as a social tool by enrolling disadvantaged youth in a two-year culinary program. After graduating, many work in his 35 restaurants around the world; others go to Michelin-starred restaurants in Europe.

Student-chef Jesus Beliot made a traditional Inca dish called causa. He flattened mashed yellow potatoes into a four-inch square, then covered it with cooked tuna, onions, avocado and yellow chiles, rolled it into a cylinder and sliced it. The sweet-spicy interior contrasted with the soft flavorful potato wrapping for a scrumptious mix.

While student-chef Nora Paucar layered a vegetarian lasagne with wild black mushrooms, garlic, basil, cheese, spinach, carrots, and both tomato and white wine and bechamel sauces, Maria Louisa Tohalino explained why she entered the program. "I like to cook for my family and see the smiles on their faces when they taste my food," she said. "It's like heaven for me." The causa, artistically-arranged salad, lasagne and traditional chicken-and-cilantro-rice dish were like heaven to those of us on a food tour with Culture Xplorers, the only travel company bringing visitors to the institute.

Actual Altitude Adjustment

The city of Cusco, a 90-minute flight east from Lima to the Andes, lies at an elevation of 3,450 meters (11,318 feet) and is the gateway to the Valle Sagrado or Sacred Valley of the Incas–and to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of 500-year-old Inca ruins at Machu Picchu. The upscale restaurant Inti Raymi (meaning "Festival of the Sun" in Quechua) is across

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the street from Qorikancha, the most important Inca temple to the sun god, and in the Palacio del Inka hotel. Inti Raymi emphasizes organic ingredients grown locally. The extensive menu included potato soup, local trout ceviche, quinoa-coated chicken and herb-crusted alpaca with local Maras salt. I was intrigued by the "Chocolate Round" dessert, featuring chocolate mousse over cold cheese and pisco sour foam, and a "hot doughnut filled with pisco-scented chocolate, port wine, fruits-of-the-forest sauce and tomato jelly."

2,000-Year-Old Andean 'Luau'

Along the shore of Lake Piuray, about 20 miles northwest of Cusco on the way to the Sacred Valley, chef Pio Vasquez created a traditional pachamanca, or Andean-style "luau," for our Culture Xplorers group at his El Huacatay restaurant in Urubamba. His staff dug a yard-wide pit, put softball-size stones in it, built a fire on top, added a metal grate over that and placed more stones on the grate. A couple of hours later, they removed the hot rocks from the grate and filled the pit with potatoes, sweet potatoes, shallots, large beans in pods, a pineapple, chicken in a tomato sauce, trout in a cilantro sauce and bundles of fresh herbs. They covered it all in more hot rocks, completely sealed the earthen oven with wet towels, added dirt for insulation, covered that in grasses, and placed a bouquet offering of red gladiolas, yellow marigolds and white calla lilies on top. A Quechua shaman blessed the pachamanca. A couple of hours later, Chef Pio opened the oven and spread out a buffet feast. Flavors from the smoky herbs and sauces permeated the food, creating a delicious and traditional meal.

Eating Well & Doing Good

Traveling farther north into the Sacred Valley– "sacred" because its rich soil is rare in the steep, 4,200-meter ridges–I stopped for an inexpensive lunch at Panza Verde or "Green Belly," in the village of Calca. Specials included chicken brochettes with rice and two sauces and chaufa, a Chinese-fusion rice with red bell peppers, carrots, tomatoes, cilantro, sesame seeds and a savory sauce. But there's more to this café than great prices on excellent food. The café is an outgrowth of Por Eso! (Because!), a foundation that helps poor, subsistence-farming families growing only potatoes and grains at high altitudes. By earning materials to build simple greenhouses, these Quechuans not only learn to grow vegetables like tomatoes, peppers, chard, broccoli, cabbage, squash, spinach, soybeans, kale, celery, onions and cilantro to improve their families' nutrition, but they also sell the extra vegetables to Panza Verde to make some money.

Many Courses to Taste

"Hawa" means "heaven" in Quechua, and it's the name of the restaurant at the Tambo del Inka resort in Urubamba in the Sacred Valley. The tasting menu emphasized Sacred Valley ingredients, especially local meats and vegetables from the hotel's three-quarter-hectare (1.4-acre) garden. The amuse-bouche was almost too pretty to eat: three colors of quinoa, heart of palm, local smoked trout, apple, passionfruit sauce and an edible purple flower. The grilled trout course included purple mactillo potatoes, chard from the resort's garden and sauce made from local molle peppers. My favorite course was dessert: purple-corn panna cotta, quinoa cheesecake and pink cactus fruit sorbet decorated with small purple and yellow flowers from the garden. What a lovely way to end a foodie tour in the truly Sacred Valley of Peru.

Laure Latham

In Search of Fish: Nirvana in Iceland

Food is not exactly the first thing that comes to mind when planning a trip to Iceland, but you should be worried, as Iceland's most famous dish is fermented shark. How then can fish nirvana be attained without sacrificing your taste buds?

Well, Iceland is an island, after all, and islands are surrounded by the sea, and therefore fish. How bad could it be? We decided to be open-minded.

After landing in Keflavik, we drove six hours to reach the northwest peninsula, called WestFjords. The WestFjords is where the outdoor apparel brand 66 North originated in 1926, making protective clothing for Icelandic fishermen braving the harsh weather of the North Atlantic. Here, fishing is still the main industry, and extreme weather can still be a matter of life or death.

Driving on mountain passes between fjords in whiteout conditions, we quickly learned to use road.is, a live road-conditions website that told us what was ahead. As the blizzard relented, we spotted dozens of fish-drying huts, harbingers of savory snacks to come in Ísafjörður. The largest town of the WestFjords blends colorful 19th-century houses covered with sheets of corrugated tin and concrete bars. During the Easter weekend, it hosts a renowned free rock festival, which was the reason for our trip. Fortunately, the concert warehouse was steps away from Tjöruhúsið, the most famous fish restaurant on the peninsula.

Housed in a charming old fishing house with exposed wooden beams, the restaurant offered no menu. As we shook the snow off our shoes, the hostess greeted us with a smile and led us to a communal table. She then explained that they cook a fish buffet with a dozen dishes that change daily, starting with a fish soup. We got in line with the other patrons and found cod cheeks in brown butter with raisins, potted trout with dark rye bread, monkfish in curry, poached smoked haddock. All of it was crazy good, and we kept coming back, our stomachs slowly expanding. Even my daughters, not usually fish fans, found two or three dishes they enjoyed repeatedly. It was so amazing we returned the following night.

Geothermal lagoons at Lake Myvatn, Iceland.

A French native, Laure grew up in the South Pacific and in Thailand before coming to San Francisco in 2012. She now lives in London with her family and loves being an eternal tourist, exploring countries and writing about her outdoor and travel experiences on her FrogMom blog, www.frogmom.com.

A few days later, we hit the road for Akureyri, capital of the north, and its geothermal star neighbor, Lake Mývatn. While other lakes were entirely frozen over, making it difficult to tell where the water started, Lake Mývatn benefits from constant volcanic activity and had lagoons of clear turquoise water with nonchalant ducks floating on them. Soon we were exploring geothermal caves, steam vents and boiling mud pots, which is how we tasted a rare fish by-product of geothermal activity—smoked trout (or Arctic char) on geyser bread.

Per ancestral traditions, this dark bread is slow-baked underground in holes warmed by Earth's interior heat. The resulting bread tastes like dark caramel and, slathered with salted butter and topped with smoked trout, makes a delicious light lunch. We ordered it at The Cowshed, a restaurant inside a barn where you dine while watching cows being milked, and at Gamli Bistro, a café that also serves killer soups. Enthused by this new taste combination, I bought two loaves of geyser bread and packages of smoked trout in Reykjahlið to take home. No visit to Lake Mývatn is complete without a soak at the Mývatn Nature Baths. We changed into our swimsuits and jumped in the water, watching the outside digital thermometer show air temperatures below -10C (14F) while we relaxed in steaming geothermal bliss.

The following day, we crossed miles of blinding white snow plateaus to reach the opposite end of the country, the EastFjords. Like its western counterpart, the EastFjords is off the beaten track and features spectacular fjords, mountains and local culture.

Before settling in Nekpaustadur, a city of herring fame, we spent a day at Skorrehestar, a horse farm where we rode Icelandic horses and my girls happily joined farm chores. Granted, three newborn lambs needed feeding, which didn't feel like a chore at all. That night, we dined at a local hotel where the fish of the day was salt cod and potatoes. When the fish of the day is salt cod, you know the chef has been busy elsewhere, but I ordered it anyway and was very thirsty as a result.

Nekpaustadur has an interesting history. Most people know about the Gold Rush in California and Alaska, but Nekpaustadur had a Herring Rush. In the mid-20th-century, anglers from all over Europe

Tjöruhúsiô restaurant in Ísafjörôur, Iceland.

converged on the village to remove thousands of tons of the "silver of the sea." At the Maritime Museum in Nekpaustadur, we saw old photographs showing women and girls slicing herrings with sharp knives and lining salt barrels with them. The village prospered, but overfishing got the best of the herring. Today, aluminium processing is the main industry, but we were able to get a taste of local fish at an old fishing house and, yes, fermented shark.

Tasting cubed fermented shark and dried fish in Eskifjordur, EastFjords, Iceland.

Eskifjordur's Randulf's Sea House is a must for anybody visiting the EastFjords. While the bottom level of this dark timber house looks like a quaint restaurant with wooden tables and black-and-white photographs, the real treasure is upstairs. My girls were allowed to climb the crude stairs first to discover the time capsule by themselves. The house belonged to two Norwegian brothers who kept to themselves and worked with other Norwegians as fishermen. One day, they locked the house with their belongings inside and never returned. For the next 75 years, the house remained vacant until the brothers died and the local historical society turned the house into a restaurant/museum. It was eerie to walk around the narrow bunk beds upstairs and spot a

Drying haddock hanging in a fish drying hut, WestFjords, Iceland.

weathered, saucy black-and-white postcard tucked in neatly by a bedpost. Downstairs, we were delighted to hear the story of the house and became somewhat worried when two small plates arrived on our table with shot glasses and gin. Fermented shark and dried fish, we meet at last.

The dried fish was delicious, crispy, slightly salty and light, and the girls liked it. On the other hand, the fermented shark was "special," for lack of a better word. While not revolting, it was chewy and left a bitter/sour aftertaste. My 10-year-old prudently refrained, while my adventurous 12-year-old dove right in with a toothpick and declared that it "wasn't bad." Fermented shark, check. The following morning at breakfast in Egilstadir, I decided to indulge in one last Icelandic fish delicacy, a shot of cod liver oil.

We concluded our trip around Iceland there, and I can safely say that we ate some delicious and inventive fish dishes, discovering how many ways fish could be enjoyed.

Iceland: fish nirvana. Who knew?

Fish drying hut, WestFjords, Iceland.

Smoked trout on Geyser bread at Lake Myvatn, Iceland.

Veggies—Not Vampires—In Rural Transylvania

This story originally appeared at Travelsmith.com/travelcenter.

On the streets of Sibiu, pedestrians stop to gaze into store windows filled with jewelry from Turkey, shoes from Italy or clothing from China. But just outside the fortified walls of the city is an outdoor marketplace waiting to be explored, where shoppers fill their bags with the treasures of rural Romania: luscious local fruits, vegetables, honey, eggs and cheese.

Anyone who's interested in the Slow Food Movement, or a devotee of farm-to-table dining, should have a trip to Romania on their culinary-travel radar. Although the influences at most Bucharest restaurants are clearly Eastern European, the abundance of fresh produce and recently harvested food products makes dining in the countryside an adventure unto itself.

The farmer's market on the outskirts of Sibiu, about a 10-minute walk from the city center, is made possible by the lush, verdant fields and hillsides that blanket the nearby countryside. Romania isn't exactly the "breadbasket of Europe"—that title's been assigned to Ukraine—but Romania can boast of very similar rich, fertile soil. With such a cache of terroir riches, it's no wonder that at the Sibiu farmer's market you'll find plump tomatoes the color of rubies, mounds of cabbage in translucent shades of green, golden local honey and ivory-toned cheeses.

Although most people are aware that truffle hunting exists in France and Italy, they'd likely be shocked to discover that Transylvania—with its large tracts of ancient woodland—is a producer of some of the world's best summer truffles. An option available to foodies is in the area near Biertan. Accommodations are provided in guesthouses restored to keep their traditional architecture intact but with the added conveniences of modern life. During the daytime you can head out for a truffle hunt with a guide and his (or her) trained dogs. The search for the "black diamonds" of the culinary world is thrilling in-and-of-itself, but following your foray into foraging you'll head back to the kitchen for a lesson in how to prepare a meal utilizing the highly prized fungus and, of course, a meal.

Anyone who's seen the menu of an upscale restaurant would agree that truffles are an expensive addition to a dish—an ingredient, you might say, fit for a king's pocketbook. So imagine for a moment while you're in Romania, dining on one of the world's most expensive food products, that you *are* royalty. Where would you stay? If you're a prince from Great Britain, and you happen to be named Charles, you'd stay in a traditional home painted the deep blue color of the Romanian sky.

From the outside, the Prince of Wales's house doesn't look like much, but pass through the gates and you enter an interior courtyard that reveals a garden, grapevine-draped walls and a covered, outdoor dining terrace. The house has three double bedrooms, two bathrooms and a kitchen, and is filled with simple-yet-comfortable furnishings.

There aren't too many places in the world where you can literally sleep in the same bed as a living monarch, but in Romania, you can. Most likely because Prince Charles (himself a staunch advocate of sustainable and organic farming) is only able to 'get away from it all' and stay at his farmhouse a few days out of every year, his property—located in the Transylvanian village of Viscri (a UNESCO World Heritage site)—is open to paying guests. Not only is the experience unique, but a portion of the rates you'll pay for staying overnight is given to a local orphanage.

Even though the prince (and sometimes his son

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Harry) is considered a town resident, life in the rural village is still much as it was hundreds of years ago: cows are milked, chickens are relieved of their eggs, rows of seedlings are planted and harvested, and gypsies arrive on a schedule all their own to make charcoal in the countryside.

A 15-minute drive from Viscri will take you to the spot where charcoal makers create the fuel for the fireplaces in the village. Fourth-generation charcoal makers construct huge cylindrical mounds of wood, cover them with a layer of hay, and finally top them off with ash and dirt. A fire is set inside the enormous woodpile and allowed to burn for days, turning the once-brown wood into pieces of dark-gray charcoal logs, whereupon the charcoal makers will bundle them up for sale.

In rural Transylvania, visions of an earlier world still exist, so save the window shopping and boutique-ing for the *other* Europe. In Romania, embrace the slow pace of life and enjoy the pleasures "the simple life" still provides.

London's Soho: From Bunnies and Brothels to International Cuisine and Jazz

Savory dumplings in former opium dens, chocolate delicacies, gourmet gin and gin-infused beef pies. These were just a few of the delights promised in an "Eating London Tours" brochure that arrived in my inbox as John and I were preparing to leave for a five-week trip to the British Isles. Soho is one of London's oldest, liveliest and most diverse areas. Combining food with history and tastes of the latest things happening in Happening Soho piqued our interest. So we signed up for the Twilight Soho Food Tour.

Late one afternoon we met Joe Richardson, an actor and our knowledgeable guide for the three-and-a-half-hour walking tour, during which we feasted and drank at six unique establishments. The first bit of information we learned from Joe was that the name "So Ho" was originally a hunting cry used when a rabbit was sighted back in the 1600s, when this area of SW London belonged to a few very wealthy landowners. In later years, the area was neglected and became known for brothels, drugs and alcohol. Not long after, bohemian writers, artists and musicians moved in, relishing the low rents and creative camaraderie. During our walking tour, we saw evidence of those days as we passed the former residences of Mozart, Dylan Thomas, Karl Marx, and W.B. Yeats. R.L. Stevenson set Dr. Jekyll's home in what he describes as "the dismal quarter of Soho with its muddy ways and slatternly passengers."

Why the rich diversity of restaurants there now? Joe described the vast pool of immigrants who moved into this area over the centuries from France, Italy, Greece and elsewhere, bringing with them their varied cuisines. Following them were, of course, curious and hungry visitors and tourists like us.

Stop #1. **La Bodega Negra** is disguised as a strip club and adult sex shop, reveling in Soho's notorious past. As we entered the storefront, we descended into what is billed as London's first authentic Mexican restaurant. Curiously enough, its owner is Winston Churchill's great grandson. Employees served us a variety of luscious tacos, including lamb with "drunken salsa," char-roasted mushroom, and prawn with spicy jicama, washed down with refreshing house margaritas.

Stop #2. **The London Gin Club**, a distillery and restaurant, presented us with the best gin and tonics we had ever tasted. The Club offers 270 types of gin, including some described as "botanical gin." Perhaps healthier? There's even a gin tasting class that uses terms such as "buttery," "creamy," or "orange peel essence," rivaling the lingo of Napa Valley wine aficionados. Accompanying our gin tastings were luscious meat pies consisting of gin-soaked, slow-braised beef served in butter-enriched pastry.

Stop #3. At **Enrique Tomas**, people were pressed against the front window watching an employee skillfully carve slices from an enormous pig leg. Famous in Spain, Enrique Tomas' family-run business has arrived in Soho, featuring a jamón tasting from pampered Iberian pigs that are raised on acorns and special diets. The meat is meticulously cured for 36 months. Some of it sells for 300 British pounds per kilo; an entire leg can cost 950 pounds.

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Stop #4. **Pix Bar** is inspired by the Basque Country pintxo bars of Barcelona and San Sebastian. As throughout our food tour, gracious hosts offered us copious and varied samples of their wares. At Pix, counters were laden with Basque snacks, consisting of miniature tapas on wooden sticks, which we enjoyed lubricated with their Txakoli wine.

Stop #5. We slipped just over the edge of Soho to Chinatown's one square mile of delectable dim sum and a multitude of Chinese teas. At **Opium**, we climbed the narrow staircases feeling as though we were entering an Oriental opium den. This was likely true, as in the 1800s this area was home to opium dens galore. Both cocktail bar and restaurant, Opium consists of a labyrinth of small rooms, each with its own mixologist and unique menu. Testifying to Soho's earlier incarnation as a theme park of brothels, Opium posts signs on its doors that say: "This is not a brothel. There are no prostitutes at this address."

Stop #6. Just when we all felt that we had no more room for food or drinks, our enthusiastic guide ushered us to our final tasting at **Said Chocolate**. An import from Rome, Said is said to be one of London's favorite dessert spots. We enjoyed the uniquely spiced hot chocolate, so thick it is best eaten with a spoon, and the amazing tiramisu.

Walking along Soho's narrow alleys, we also passed Trident Studios, where the Beatles, Elton John and David Bowie recorded. Nearby is **Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club**, which has been going strong since 1959. It has hosted Ella Fitzgerald, Prince and Wynton Marsalis, as well as Jimi Hendrix's last public performance in 1970. We promised ourselves to come back another night.

As we said good-bye to our small group and thanked Joe, our terrific guide, London felt like a very different city. We felt closer to the many immigrants who had made their homes here, and the many talented people who enriched our lives and palates.

For more information on Eating Europe Tours, which offers food tours in Rome, Amsterdam, Prague and London's East End and Soho, contact Wibke at www.eatingeuropetours.com.

Photos by Diane LeBow and John Montgomery

Definer Dishes: To Me it's Yum, To You it's Yuck

This story appears in Jules Older's ebook, *Death by Tartar Sauce: A Travel Writer Encounters Gargantuan Gators, Irksome Offspring, Murderous Mayonnaise & True Love.*

All over the world, different ethnic groups have one (and usually only one) food that acts as their definer. If you can eat it and ask for more, you're automatically defined as one of us. If you go all pale when it's put in front of you, you ain't.

Let's start with my own tribe, American Jews. Sit down at my grandmother's table. As she ladles a disquietingly strange-looking food product onto your plate, she'll say, "Hmm, have some of my delicious gefilte fish. It's a recipe I got from *my* grandmother. Try it, you'll…How are you feeling? Bubeleh, are you all right? You look a little pale…"

Gefilte fish is parts of fish—often trashy, bottom-feeding fish—that are thoroughly ground up, then reassembled as a pallid, gray, oblong blob, quivering in clear jelly and stuffed six to a jar. To Jews, it's just like Bubbe used to make. To everybody else on the planet (with the exception of Japanese, who are used to peculiar fish), it tastes exactly like it looks—a pallid, gray, oblong blob that smells like fish and feels like Play-Doh. Yum.

Or take another local ethnic group, African Americans. Sure, they gave collard greens and mouthwatering ribs to a salivating world. But they slipped in chitterlings, a dish nobody asked for, and I mean *nobody.* Chitterlings—always pronounced chitlins—are pig intestines. They look like pig intestines, they taste like pig intestines, and much worse, they *smell* like pig intestines. To make them marginally edible, you have to boil the cursed things for 24 hours. For my money, you could boil them for 24 years and that still wouldn't be enough. If you don't happen to grow up with them, chitlins are NBN. Nothing But Nasty.

Yet not so nasty (or at least so nasty sounding) as that favorite Maori dish, rotten corn. *Rotten corn.* Let it roll around on your tongue. Rotten corn. Yum! Could I please have another helping of that delicious *…rotten corn?*

Now, I eat just about everything. It's not for nothing that my family calls me the human garbage can. And when I'm at a New Zealand Maori gathering, I chow down on Maori bread and muttonbird (which my wife says looks like bat and smells like bear) with the best of 'em. But when they bring out the *rotten corn*—corn that's been soaked in a stream until it ferments—I draw the line. That's when folks around me nudge each other and whisper, "I told you he was from somewhere else."

The most famous definer dish comes from Scotland. Robbie Burns wrote an ode to it. It's served with great pageantry. It's even cut with a ceremonial dagger. Yet, when you get right down to it, haggis is nothing more nor less than a sheep's stomach filled with—oh joy—minced heart, lungs, liver and other gastronomic treats. I once brought some home from a fancy dinner, and my family moved me *and* the haggis out to the barn.

Texans and Jamaicans dine on peppers so hot that no one from anywhere else could even hope to survive swallowing one. Chinese have sea slugs, which they delicately call sea cucumbers. And Newfoundlanders proudly serve up seal flipper whenever a CFA (Come From Away) sits down at the table. "Seal flipper?" I murmur. "No, I couldn't. I had seal flipper for lunch."

But the grand prize for the ultimate definer dish goes to an otherwise demure group of islanders in the middle of the North Atlantic. Should you ever suffer from the delusion that you're an Icelander, try a little hakarl. Unless you're a far, far better garbage can than me, you'll never get past the fumes. Hakarl makes chitlins and rotten corn smell like roses. For hakarl, dear friends, which Icelanders bring out as a special treat at Christmas, is nothing more—and unfortunately nothing less—than putrefied shark.

Yum!

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Don't Talk Tripe: Porto, Portugal

A version of this article first appeared in South Africa in the *Sunday Tribune*.

Talking tripe, do you? Eat the blubbery stomach lining of a dead ruminant, I mean. In this case, the combination of the smooth and the honeycombed parts slow-cooked into a flavorful garlic-infused stew with delicious white beans and served over rice.

As the daughter of a Pole, I was brought up with offal—organ meat, if you prefer—as a delicacy. The chicken's choice bits, for example, started with the lungs, the stomach, the heart and the butt, aka, with apologies to Francis, the pope's nose. Then came the wings and those two juicy little oyster delicacies from the underside. The legs and drumsticks were okay so long as the skin was crisp. The rest was for "the English." Read: my mother.

I confess I would, however, have preferred to learn, before setting off for Porto on a recent trip to Portugal, that the defining delicacy was something more appealing to my sensibilities, given that my gung-ho, try-anything attitude to eating has been tempered by the passing years. (Was that really me who used to catch a fish, rip the hook out, give it a gruesome death blow, stick a knife in and gut it with a sense of bravado and achievement?)

But one can't rewrite history and traditions according to whims, and it turns out that since the 14th or 17th century, depending on which version you read, the citizens of Porto have been called *tripeiros* (tripe eaters), accounting for this being their signature dish. So, when in Porto...

I had two nights there. Sort of a two-night stand, as in better than a one-night stand, but not enough time to uncover many of the nuances and subtleties, or make more than a tentative commitment.

I got there on a bus from Portugal's Silver Coast and within 15 minutes had found an inexpensive en-suite room half a block from Rua Santa Catarina, the prime upscale shopping area, and around the corner from the historic Café Majestic, full of carved oak, art nouveau detail and tourists.

Having dropped my bags and made sure the Internet was working, I set off on foot to wander randomly: the best way in a new city to get delightfully lost, have adventures and be surprised.

Finally, driven by hunger and thirst, I stopped in at Via Garrett, a restaurant that looked local, and asked for their tripe.

Relief. None on the menu. So I ordered the traditional Portuguese staple of fresh sardines: plump, juicy, lightly salted and grilled so their skin was scorched and bubbling. Knowing Portugal's most famous wine region is located up the Douro River from Porto, and that many superior wines produced in quantities too small for export can be bought here virtually for a song, I took the waiter's recommendation for a red. And I felt the blissful sense of freedom that comes when you're traveling alone, without a set itinerary, and realize nobody you know in the entire world has an inkling of where you are.

Porto, one of Europe's oldest centers—photogenic city of European ambience, churches, coffeehouses, *pastelarias* (pastry shops), mosaic façades, eateries, and great day and nighttime strolling—was registered as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1996. First thing next morning, to get my bearings, I bought a ticket and jumped aboard the hop-on hop-off bus.

First hop-off was at the famed old Bolhão

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city market, where stallholders sell everything from fresh fruit and veggies to artisanal cheeses, fish and cured meat. It was a great place to browse, take pictures ("man-size garlic" someone commented when they saw one I posted on Facebook of a mountain of the pungent bulbs) and to pick up on-the-road snacks. And the adjacent Rua Formosa has some of the city's best delis, including the photogenic Perola do Bolhão, a traditional family-run grocery that's been in business since 1917.

Back on the bus later, I crossed the river to do the (Cálem) port distillery tour, included in the ticket price. Porto being synonymous with port, I got to taste some fabulous versions of this truly Douro Valley fortified wine. The city has more than 40 distilleries. Some, like Sandeman, Cockburn, Taylor's and Graham's, are legendary. Most are located in the area of Gaia, across the Douro from the Ribeira, Porto's waterfront neighborhood. Crammed with steep narrow streets, alleyways and ancient houses, restaurants and eccentricities, this is one of the city's must-wander quarters, day or night.

There, come evening, hungry enough to devour anything—even tripe—I stumbled into a cool-looking café. But whew. None on this menu either. Instead, another Portuguese favorite caught my eye: *bacalhau*. Reputedly there is the equivalent of a different *bacalhau* (salt cod) recipe for every day of the year in Portugal. I got mine, which most likely had been soaked for two or three days to reconstitute it from its dried form, grilled and flavorful and moist and simply served with vegetables.

The next morning I headed off early for a Douro river tour (also included with the bus ticket) and more trudging. With my departure pending, I had tripe on my mind—again. Maybe I could eat it somewhere else in Portugal. But would I, really? Maybe I could use it as an excuse to come back. Who was I kidding?

It was just about then that I passed a small eatery in a narrow side street and saw people lined up right out the door. I stopped and popped my head in. At a bar counter people were seated, heads down, jaws moving, engrossed. Maybe they served tripe here. "But it's full," I told myself, and moved on. Only to be magnetized back.

"Why are all these people waiting?" I asked, gesturing, and kept asking until someone was summoned who spoke English and I learned: "Because the tripe is good."

Next thing I was being pushed to the front of the line and through the door. No option but to stand at the end of the counter and order. Tripe.

When it came, I looked at my plate and tried not to think beyond: Is that chewable and will it stay down? Wondering how much I needed to get down to be able to say "I swallowed"—and to not insult the chef.

My translator kept a close check on me. She stood and watched me persevere.

"Porto specialty," she said with—was that a wicked, knowing grin?

"Why the hell else would I be ordering it?" crossed my mind. But I smiled and nodded.

"Better with red wine than beer," she said, noting my Sagres. "Copious quantities of red wine so I don't know what I'm eating" was my thought, but I smiled and said, "Beer—better at lunchtime."

Finishing the beans, simply succulent in their olive oil, bay leaves, black pepper and garlic infusion, and trying to strategically hide the last bits of tripe, I wondered if "awful" derives from "offal." There and then, one of my father's favorite sayings, "Don't talk tripe," suddenly made good sense.

I felt a sense of achievement as I hurried back to my lodgings to pick up my bags. I got on the bus satisfied that Porto had been done. I could wear the badge "*tripeiro*." And that's no tripe.

Andrea Granahan

Kalo Nero (Good Water)

This story is excerpted from the book, *It's Greek to Me.* It's about something that Granahan says she learned while living with her husband and two children on a Greek island for two years—that simple things, such as good tasting water, are significant.

One day David came in and exclaimed, "There's an eel in our well!"

"An eel?! How did it get there?"

"Beats me. There must be an underground river or something. Where's the fish line? I'll fish it out."

The kids and I went along to watch the process and looked in the well. Sure enough, an eel about two feet long was swimming around. David tied a hook on the line and baited it. A man rode by on a donkey, looked at us and burst out laughing. I knew we looked a little silly with a fishing pole at a well, but I wanted to get the eel out. I began wondering about diseases one could get from fish-tainted water and I was concerned about how long the eel had been in the well. We were all looking intently in the well to see if it would take the bait when we heard a loud belly laugh. I looked up and saw our landlord, Nikos the Barber.

"There's no fish in there. Try the sea," he jeered.

"That's what you think, Nikos," David told him. "Come look."

"We have a veritable whale of a fish," I said. I knew my Greek was correct because on the ship I had worked hard to learn the word whale in hopes of seeing one, but never did.

He looked in the well, interested, then laughed again.

"It's the eel," he said. "I put him in there two years ago. Good, he is still working."

"You put him in there?"

"Yes, to eat bugs that fall in the well and mosquitoes and such. He keeps the water clean."

I looked at Nikos askance. "Really? This well is clean? We won't get sick from him being in there?"

"By the Virgin, Andrianni. This is the best well on the island. It is *kalo nero*—good water. I come on Sundays to get water for our dinner."

That was true. I had seen Nikos and Tarsa fetch water from the well many times. David shrugged and hauled up the line. Nikki, too, always stopped for a

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bottle of it on her way back home from our house.

"Oh, don't you want to catch your whale?" Nikos was still laughing at us.

"Not if he keeps the water clean," David replied.

"Oh, but if you want him for dinner, go ahead. I can bring up another someday."

"No," I said looking at our water purification system swimming below us. "I'm not hungry enough."

Periodically Nikos inquired after the eel, wanting to know if we had eaten him yet and laughing at us. For the most part the eel remained hidden, which was fine with me. We had written family and friends about our well, joking that we only had running water when we ran from the well, generally preferring walking water. I thought about writing about our eel, but David advised against it, thinking we would worry them as I had worried when the eel was first discovered.

I was reassured about the water when I noticed that people frequently did stop to fetch a bottle of it to take home. But I was absolutely convinced when one day I saw a friend, Yorgo Kano, stop his donkey at the well and start to fill a wine flask. He was from an inland valley about five miles over a steep mountain, so we didn't see him often. I went out to talk to him.

"*Yia sou,* Yorgo. How's it going?"

"*Yia sou,* Andrianni. It goes well. Tomorrow is Eleni's name day, and my son and his new wife are coming to visit."

"Tell Eleni *kronia pola,* many years, from me."

He chatted a few minutes, then remounted his donkey and started going back up the mountain.

"Yorgo, aren't you going to the village?"

"No, I just came to get a bottle of your water to offer my son and daughter-in-law tomorrow. It is a special occasion after all. *Adio*, Andrianni."

I offered glasses of our water to our guests with more pride after that.

"Kalo nero," I'd say.

Stephanie Levin

Ooh la la, Oysters

This article appeared at BeyondMainstream.com.

They're culinary conversation stoppers. Those in the know devour them raw.

Serve them at a party and guests either love them or leave them alone.

And if a man's virility is in question, count how many oysters he savors in a sitting. Oysters are repudiated to turn the most intimidated gentleman into a tiger.

Given the French reputation for food and romance, I left Paris, hopped on the TVG train and arrived on the Atlantic Coast three hours later. I rented an electric car at the station in La Rochelle and headed to oyster hotbed Marennes Oléron.

Huitres, or oysters, landed in France 150 years ago, accidentally. The crew of a sinking Portuguese vessel weighted with sacks of oysters tossed them overboard to salvage the ship. The oysters reproduced, and in no time, coastal fishermen turned a tasty cultivation into a thriving industry.

Cultivating oysters takes passion and patience. Stoic, seafaring cultivators work in cold, damp conditions. Hands chafe and feet freeze. Faces turn the texture of dried gingerroot. Amidst fierce competition, neighbors work side by side in small wooden huts called cayennes. Each cultivator stakes his plot or parc, paying a tax for the right to exploit and grow oysters. It takes four years of hard work before a huitre reaches maturity or the dinner plate.

Fifty years ago, French oysters were nearly wiped out by a bacteria carried by seaweed. Desperate cultivators turned to Japan for oysters that turned out to be more resistant than the extinct French species. These oysters are now known as huitre creuse and account for 90 percent of the French market.

As one longtimer explained, cultivating these oysters is a science. They begin their lives in protected waters between Ile D'Oléron and the continent. When eggs turn into larva, poles planted with sacks of plastic catch the larva. In September, the seawater is mixed with a special seaweed. This mixture gives the oyster its clear color and taste, called claire. If you want the best oysters money can buy, look for fin de claire. Supreme oysters don't grow in crowded conditions and are able to absorb more light, commanding more money on the market.

Like fine wine, oysters boast an appellation from France's 2,000-mile coastline that is always marked on

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the ticket. If there is no marking, you're eating generic oysters, not fin de claire.

Sixty percent of France's oysters are harvested in time for Christmas and the New Year. If you're lucky enough to be there at that time, you'll certainly savor oysters for Christmas dinner.

I'm no predictor of romance, but if you sit down at the table with a great glass of wine, a plate of oysters and a Frenchman, don't say I didn't warn you.

Rail Europe: 1-800-4 EURAIL, www.raileurope.com.
Visit Marennes Oléron and tour the oyster parcs: 05-46-85-20-85 in France.

An Authentic Taste of Palermo, Sicily

A version of this article appeared at Examiner.com.

The best way to experience the true nature of a city is through its food, sounds and sights during a stroll amid the thriving, bustling marketplaces. Palermo's has been in existence for thousands of years. Colors abound, from ruby red tomatoes and chili peppers to the rich leafy greens, vivid purple eggplants and golden oranges—all beckoning visitors to savor the fresh Sicilian farm flavors.

Palermo's marketplace, though, is more than just an endless array of colorful vegetables, fresh fish and meats, and stalls of enticing cheeses. It is the hub of locals' social life. At night the area comes alive with young people, music, eating and drinking. During the day, people of all ages gather and visit their trusted vendors to buy local produce. You can even see buckets lowered from windows above to collect the food as people did in centuries past.

Everywhere you turn, signs of early cultural mixes are visible. The elaborate domed mosques are evidence of the way Palermo thrived during Arabic rule during the ninth to eleventh centuries. Rich baroque architecture signals the Norman and European centuries that followed.

Sicily's grand capital has an extra advantage. Tour guides such as Marco Romeo of StrEat Palermo Tour (www.streatpalermo.com) offer visitors a food passport to be stamped along a four-hour tasting tour through the city's back streets and three main historic marketplaces: Capo, Vucciria and Ballaro. The markets open daily around 7 a.m. and close anywhere between midday and 8 p.m. except on Sundays, when most markets operate until lunchtime.

Your delectable journey starts in Palermo's striking Teatro Massimo, which some will remember from the closing scene in the film "Godfather III." You can take a 5- to 8-Euro tour of this elaborate building, considered to be one of the largest opera houses in Italy and throughout Europe, which stages dance and music concerts from September to June.

Marco takes your small group of four or five through the energetic Capo marketplace and its abundant fresh vegetables, fruits, fish, meats and cheeses. Stop for a taste of panelle, or chickpea fritters, cazilli or potato croquettes, and arancine, a stuffed saffron fried-rice dome filled with carrots, onions and veal, all popular with many locals.

Marco then buys some cheeses at a nearby store for the forthcoming picnic and guides you past the fish-mongers who proudly yell out their catch of the day to passersby.

A travel, arts and feature writer for some 35 years, Beverly Mann has published nationally and internationally. She has trekked many miles of terrain in the West Coast and Canada, Western and Eastern Europe, South America, Indonesia, India and China. She has received a BATW Award of Excellence in Newspaper Travel Writing.

You now head to La Vucciria Market, crossing the main street of Via Roma near the 18th-century, baroque-style San Domenico Church at the small Piazza San Domenico. The area is a bit more run-down than Capo, with less sumptuous produce, but it is historically important. First stop by a street stand to taste a sfincione, a pizza lookalike, with tasty tomato, onions, oregano and a touch of pepper or chili to liking, all on extremely soft bread.

The group is now ready for the schiticchio, or picnic lunch, inside the Taverna Azzurra, a popular evening hangout for young people. Marco spreads out the array of fresh cheeses, plump olives and rich red sangue, the local wine.

Once your appetites have been satisfied, you continue through the old Jewish Quarter for a taste of broiled spleen slightly cooked in lard, a 500-year-old recipe that may not be so good for high cholesterol. Take at least a bite because it is quite tasty.

The walk makes a turn back across Via Roma to Via Maqueda and Via Emanuele, other major streets at the Quattro Canti, or the four corners at the center of Palermo. Four similar baroque buildings, each of which contains a fountain that represents one of the four seasons, embrace you. On their roofs are sculptures of ladies who supposedly oversee and protect the city.

Other grand, historic buildings not to be missed are the nearby City Hall and Mayor's Palace, which are quite a sight when lit up at night. The group stops briefly at the temple of San Cataldo, which dates back to 1150 A.D. and exhibits Arabic and Norman style architecture. Notice the Arabic dome above.

The tour's final market tour is Ballaro, which specializes in household wares rather than fresh produce. According to Marco, the area is being phased out. The neighborhood youth have made an attempt to help beautify the area with gardens like the one in the Piazza Mediterranean. Since a tasting tour would not be complete without a dulce or dessert, you will visit F.lli Rosciglione, a family bakery since 1840, for a ricotta-filled cannoli or cassata.

The group will say farewell at the 700-year-old cathedral, an exquisite ending, or maybe just the beginning of your Palermo experience. Don't forget to have your food passport stamped for a memorable souvenir. *Buon Appetito.*

Note that a similar tour, StrEat Catania, has recently arrived in Sicily's other major city, Catania.

Slaughter Plate Anyone? Tales from the Volksfest in Stuttgart

This story was previously published at PubsPeoplePlaces.com and GoNomad.com.

The Volksfest starts at 11 a.m., so you leave the apartment at about 4 p.m. because drinking at 11 a.m. just seems wrong. It's a three-kilometer walk, which helps you build up just enough thirst for that first beer. You follow the throng of lederhosen and dirndls because the Volksfest is the only place to go dressed like that on a Wednesday in Stuttgart.

It's drizzly and grey out but you don't care, because once inside that beer tent the body heat of 5,600 yelling drunk people will keep you cozy and warm.

No reservations tonight, so you have your choice among eight different beer tents. The first two each hold about 5,600 people, the third one about 4,000. And each of the other tents hold about 2,500. You pick the Dinkleacker tent tonight because you spent last night in the Schwabenbrau tent and you feel like spreading the wealth.

It's already pretty full and your choice of seats is limited since most people reserve their spot online ahead of time. One of the waiters finds a seat for you and your two friends. They have to shoehorn you in between four older ladies and a guy who looks like Austin Powers. Yeah, baby!

Neither the ladies nor Austin Powers want to relinquish any space. Austin Powers wags a crooked finger at you and says he's saving two spots for his friends. You shrug your shoulders and say, "Nicht verstehn." This means you don't understand. This puts Austin Powers in an even worse mood. "Ach!" he barks with contempt for the foreign intruders. The old ladies are a little nicer, thinking they'll get to flirt with three middle-aged Americans. Regardless, your charm only works so much and they make you straddle the table leg, which cuts off your blood circulation and renders you a eunuch.

You want to eat now as to lay a foundation for the multi-liter beer onslaught you hope to endure. The waitress comes around and she is so busy you don't have time for questions about the menu. You choose the six mini-bratwursts on a bed of sauerkraut. "Only women and children eat that. You don't want that. Try this." She points to something else on the menu, Schlachtplatte (Slaughter Plate). "Okay, I'll have that," you say, trying to recover a little bit of manhood.

The Slaughter Plate arrives and at first it looks pretty good. Then you start to scoot things around with your fork and discover the massacre that must have happened to make this culinary delight. Atop a bed of sauerkraut is a boiled pork chop complete with an inch of fat attached. Next to that are two sausages encased in some gut lining of something. The ends are stapled together. This worries you a little. If something has to be stapled to hold in the insides, should that really be consumed? You cut out the dark brown-red sausage and coagulated blood with chunks of pork fat pour. Nasty, but it wasn't as bad tasting as the other sausage. You try cutting that one open and a very unnatural, grey-colored, meat-like substance oozes out. Revolting. You eat it. Yep. It tastes exactly like you think it would.

"Did you like it?" she asks while picking up the empty plates. "Wunderbar," you reply, forcing a satisfied smile on your face while rubbing your tummy.

Austin Powers suddenly has a little respect for you and winks as he bumps his beer stein into yours. The rule is, "If you clink, you drink." This can get out of hand, so you start guarding your clinks. You keep saying "Yeah, baby!" but Austin Powers doesn't get it, which makes it even funnier when he smiles in return.

One liter in and you feel the buzz. Austin Powers is hammered. His lower dentures sag out a bit overlapping

A traditional horse-drawn cart laden with kegs of Schwabenbrau beer are delivered to the tent, which houses in excess of 5,000 guests during the annual Stuttgart Volksfest.

David Greitzer is a northern California photojournalist whose other passion is traveling. "My goal in life is to combine the two every chance I get. I always aim—and focus—to have that show through in my work." DavidGreitzerPhotography.com

his mouth. He comes in for a clink and you meet his clink with enough gusto to send him nearly off the bench. You are standing on the bench at this point. The old lady next to you just ordered another beer, and this pisses you off because now you realize she won't leave anytime soon. While standing on the bench peering down, you notice she has some sort of tattoo above her breast. You think it's supposed to be a butterfly, but it looks more like a weeping pterodactyl. Standing up allows for returning blood circulation and the confidence that you can drink schnapps. A finger snap at the waitress and boom, schnapps is delivered.

You realize you haven't peed for about two liters, so you climb down from the bench and go in search of the toilet. Of course it's at the opposite end of the tent. You get caught up in the crowd and you're pushed through the gauntlet of drunken, weaving people and deposited in front of the urinal trough. You see a really drunk 16-year-old trying to stand up and not slip into the trough. Drinking age is irrelevant here. In the doorway is a woman collecting a half-Euro from everyone. Advisory note: Take a lot of change with you to the Volksfest, and if you're feeling generous, buy your friend a pee.

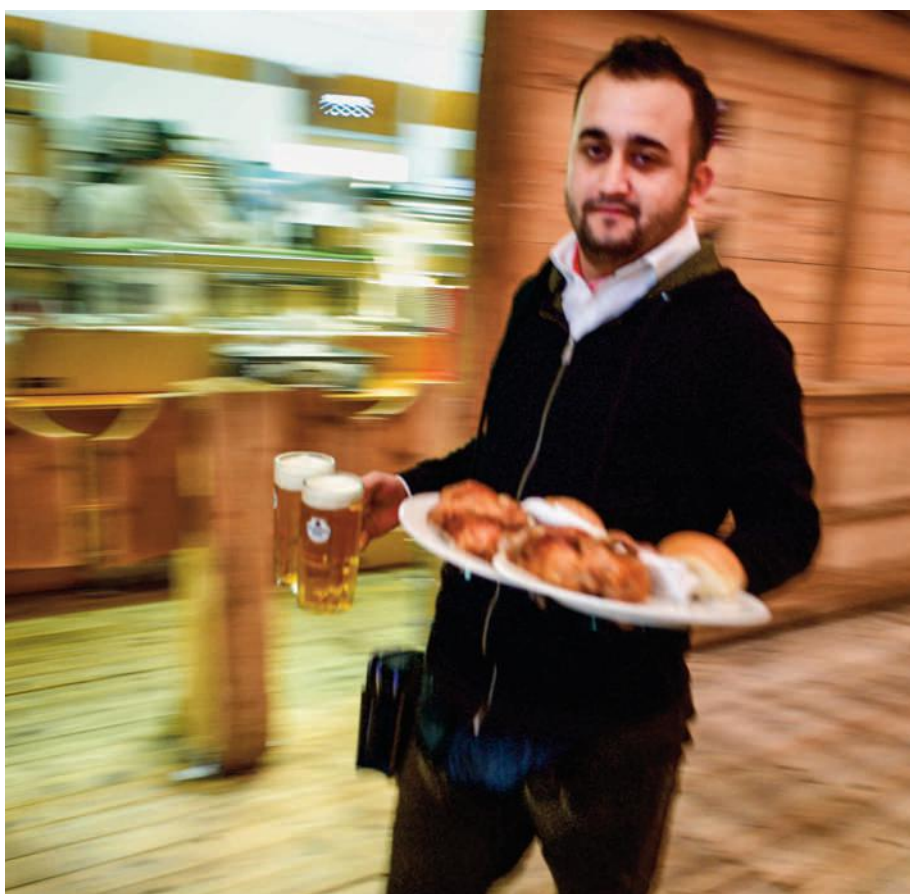
The old ladies have left and have been replaced by a group of teenagers. You realize one of them is yelling in your ear because the music is so loud. "Vare are sie from?" You say near San Francisco because no one has ever heard of Sacramento. And with this kid, named Jerkel, you realize you have to pull back even farther so you say California. He says cool, but it sounds more like *kewel*. Jerkel is nice enough. He and his friends are loudly singing all the words to Neil Diamond's "Sweet Caroline" as if it was a new top-of-the-charts hit.

Austin Powers looks jealous and tries to start a spontaneous clinking. You all do. Yeah, baby! More blaring music and more clinking. The band on stage is playing AC/DC's "Highway to Hell" with an accordion back up. You realize you've just surpassed your old record of three liters and there's a reason the record was so hard to break. You're seeing double and almost fall off the table.

This couple dressed in traditional German outfits enjoy each other and their beer.

It's time to go home. Where do you live? How are you going to get home? Yeah, baby!

Editor's Note: The Volksfest in Stuttgart, Germany runs concurrently to Munich's world-famous Oktoberfest. Though slightly smaller, it claims to be the "biggest party in the world." *Prossit!*



A busy waiter at the Volksfest delivers a meal for two.

California Rambling: Bracebridge Dinner

A version of this article originally appeared in the *Mountain Democrat*, California's oldest newspaper.

Snow had not yet fallen in Yosemite National Park. A hardened newsman from a major publication had been assigned to write about Yosemite's fabled Bracebridge Dinner, a three-hour performance and banquet at which the Ahwahnee Hotel's dining room is transformed into a 16th-century English manor, with heraldic banners suspended from the 50-foot-tall timbered ceiling, garlands and faux stained-glass roundels hung from its 24-foot-tall cathedral windows and a sea of tall candles warmly lighting dining tables for the pageant's 300 guests. The reporter sat alone beside one of the dining room's towering windows, surrounded by revelry as couples and families dressed in formal wear enjoyed the performance and worked their way through the seven-course banquet. The Ahwahnee's P.R. man passed by a couple of times during the dinner. Each time he passed, the reporter seemed detached, evidently homesick from being separated at Christmastide and unable to share the experience with family and friends. At a midpoint during the dinner, the house lights were turned down so that only the candles lit the room. A single spotlight illuminated a baritone, who stood in the middle of the dining room and began to sing "O Holy Night." As he did, snow began to fall. At first, big clusters of wet snowflakes fell slowly, then more and more snow fell until, by the end of the song, every oak branch outside the windows was coated white and the once-dusty valley floor was blanketed with fresh snow. All 300 pairs of eyes in the dining room had seen nature's performance as they listened to the baritone's. The audience gasped collectively as he concluded. A moment later, the P.R. man again passed the reporter, who reached out and stopped the P.R. man to say, "How did you ever arrange that?" Beginning Saturday and continuing for 13 nights, California's most storied holiday pageant and its associated free concerts fill The Ahwahnee in Yosemite National Park with music and pageantry as sublime as the natural beauty surrounding the hotel. Bracebridge Dinner is a holiday event unlike any other. It was conceived at the request of Don Tresidder, head of the Yosemite Park and Curry Company, which built and opened the Ahwahnee for the National Park Service. Bracebridge Dinner was to be a yuletide celebration befitting the grandeur of the new hotel. Tresidder hired Garnet Holme, a California pageant director to create it. Holme chose Washington Irving's sketchbook, "A Christmas at Bracebridge Hall," for the pageant's Old English theme. At the first

The Ahwahnee in winter— *Kristal Leonard / DNC Parks & Resorts at Yosemite*

performance, Tresidder and his wife, Mary Curry Tresidder, played the parts of Squire and Lady Bracebridge, who welcome their family and guests to Bracebridge Hall for an evening of merriment, song and feasting. To play the Lord of Misrule (Bracebridge Hall's jester), Holme retained an aspiring concert pianist who worked as the hotel's photographer and publicist. Two years later, after Holmes died unexpectedly, the photographer—Ansel Adams—was enlisted to polish and recast the program. The structure Adams gave to Bracebridge Dinner is pretty much what's seen today, though refinements are made regularly, just as Adams did. To guide the performance, Adams assumed the role of Major Domo, ruling over

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Squire Bracebridge's household. He led processions of larger-than-life replicas of each course of food down the dining room's long aisle for the Squire's approval while the chorus sang. In 1934, Adams asked well-known San Francisco choral director Eugene Fulton to lead the male chorus. Adams retired from directing Bracebridge in 1973, and Fulton, with his wife Anna-Marie, took over. Five years later, Fulton died of heart failure following a dress rehearsal. Then his daughter, Andrea, joined her mother to direct Bracebridge Dinner. Andrea Fulton continues in that role today, while also performing, as Adams did, in the similarly pivotal role of Housekeeper. Originally there was one performance of Bracebridge Dinner on Christmas Day, but as its fame spread, demand to attend grew. Four performances were added and a lottery system was implemented to allocate Bracebridge Dinner's 1,800 seats to nearly 90,000 people who sought them. In 2001, two more performances were added and the lottery was discontinued.

Bracebridge Dinner
— DNC Parks & Resorts at Yosemite

A year later, the number of performances was increased to eight. Tickets are now sold on a first-come, first-served basis. If there is one holiday event to put on your life's list, Bracebridge Dinner should be it. It is not just Yosemite National Park's setting in winter, not just the music, not just the comedy, not just the pageantry, not just the beautiful and colorful Tudor dress of the cast. Not just the overwhelming number of waiters who parade from the kitchen carrying trays stacked high with food to serve all 300 guests in a moment. Not just the festive atmosphere of attendees dressed in tuxedos and formals as they gather around a piano to hear Christmas songs. Not just the seven-course banquet, nor even the many free choral performances that occur in the Ahwahnee's Great Lounge. Bracebridge Dinner is a cultural landmark of our national parks and an overwhelming experience. Andrea Fulton calls it "a total fantasy…It evokes everything you dream about Christmastime…You walk into the dining room and it's unlike any other. The walls literally sing with tradition, and the music that's been performed there for so many years. All of a sudden, you're truly transported back to Bracebridge Hall." The Eugene Fulton Chorale that performs Bracebridge Dinner is comprised of professional singers and music teachers drawn from companies and programs across California. Johannes Mager, the current Lord of Misrule, acts the part of an impish knave, though he is the squire's favorite pet and involves the audience in hilarious hijinks. Then the music soars. From its heraldic trumpets, sonorous church bell, and dark and brooding entry hymn, "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence," Bracebridge Dinner is filled with traditional, original, emotional, lively and inspirational songs, including, "The Coventry Carol," "Adeste Fideles," "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen," "Masters In This Hall," "Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes" and the effervescent "Wassail!" Although Bracebridge Dinner is filled with classic liturgical music of the season, it is not a religious event. Still, Andrea Fulton felt that the spirituality one finds in Yosemite was missing and needed to be in The Dinner. So she wrote in a character, Nathaniel the Woodsman, who delivers a line in what has become her favorite moment of the performance, when he says of Bracebridge Hall, "Yes, this is a glorious place and it's rich in many, many ways, but come outside with me and I'll show you the true riches of the world." The best way to see Bracebridge Dinner is to stay in Yosemite Valley, so you have a place to be based when checking in on the day of the performance, to get ready (formal dress is recommended) and for the convenience of riding a Valley Shuttle Bus to the performance. One- and two-night packages, including Bracebridge Dinner and lodging at the Ahwahnee, Yosemite Lodge at the Falls or Wawona Hotel, are available in addition to individual Bracebridge Dinner tickets. For reservations, visit www.bracebridgedinners.com/tickets.

Head "Down East" for Maine Lobster

A version of this article appears at EpicureanDestinations.com.

The expletive "get cracking" takes on new meaning when faced with a freshly caught Maine lobster. A culinary challenge worth every crunch, consuming the Humarus americanus known more colloquially as the American lobster, is a rewarding hands-on experience. Considered the "King of Seafood," lobsters are harvested along the entire New England coast, but Maine is considered "Lobster Central." Every Maine fishing cove harbors its own distinct clan of fisher folk who "fence" their seacoast territories with brightly painted buoys.

The best place to get your lobster fix is where it's harvested. Little more than an hour's drive from Boston, Maine's southern coast boasts dozens of dining choices—from the salty harbor shanty sitting dockside to the white-table-clothed fine-dining eatery. One of my all-time favorites is Barnacle Billy's at Perkins Cove, within walking distance of downtown Ogunquit. From Ogunquit's seaside village, stoke your appetite by strolling Marginal Way, a mile-long footpath that curves along the wild-rose-edged cliffs above the Atlantic's rocky coast and ends steps away from Barnacle Billy's weathered dockside cottage.

Once inside, you'll notice the mainstays listed on a chalkboard menu: lobster, steamed clams, sweet corn on the cob, garden salad and garlic-encrusted rolls. Amble into the waterfront dining room for a seat at one of the rustic pine tables with views of the marina and cove. If it's cool, you can warm yourself near a crackling fire by one of two stone fireplaces. In warm weather, try the sunny outdoor deck overlooking the boat harbor with its view of lobster boats and classic New England colonial-style homes across the water.

Lobster aficionados know that messiness is part of the experience. You'll be given the necessary tools to extract the meat from the lobster's bright red shell: a claw cracker; a small pick or fork for those tiny, tight places; a mountain of napkins; lemon slices and a ramekin of butter for dipping. Lobster-cracking skills are sharpened with practice. Take your time, enjoy every succulent bite and wash it all down with a cold beer or a glass of chilled Chardonnay.

Today many people consider lobster a delicacy, but lobsters were once so plentiful that Native Americans used them as fertilizer and fish bait. In Colonial times, New Englanders considered lobsters poverty food and often served then to children and

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indentured servants. In those days, children who brought lobster sandwiches to school were considered the poor kids. Today, it is just the opposite.

Lobsters are neither fish nor mammal, but rather are arthropods. These two-clawed marine creatures have one claw called the pincer and another called the crusher. And like humans, lobsters may be right- or left-handed, depending on whether the crusher claw is on the lobster's right or left side. Most live lobsters are greenish until cooked, at which point they turn red.

Lobster meat is healthy for you. It contains iron, zinc, calcium and iodine, as well as vitamins A, B and B6. It has no saturated fat and is low in cholesterol and calories. Knowing "lobstahs" are good for you is one more reason to indulge your crustacean craving. Just don't get me started on clam chowder. That's another "only in New England" dish that goes well with salty air and Down East hospitality.

The name Ogunquit aptly means "beautiful place by the sea" in the indigenous Abenaki language.

If you go: Barnacle Billy's has become so popular that Barnacle Billy's, Etc., with a more formal menu, has opened adjacent to the original. Location: 50-70 Perkins Cove Rd., Ogunquit. View both restaurants' menus at www.barnbilly.com. Visit the Maine Office of Tourism at www.mainetourism.com.

Laura Deutsch

A Slice of Life

A version of this piece appeared in
Writing from the Senses
(Shambhala Publications)

Lemons and limes are juicy prompts for writing about the senses. One afternoon in Petaluma, as the temperature inched towards 90 degrees, my students and I sat on the narrow front porch of the house we'd rented, chairs squeezed into an oval of shade. Each person took a slice of lemon or lime from the plate I passed around. We tasted, sniffed, felt the texture of the zesty and juicy nubs within the spokes of membrane. Ready, go! There were a lot of stories about margaritas that day as perspiration trickled down our backs. Lemons, ice, salt, guacamole and Mexican trysts. A woman from Iran wrote about couscous from her childhood, tangy with preserved lemons.

What immediately came up in my freewrite was a perception of myself. Then I focused on the sensations in my mouth and finally moved to a childhood memory.

I am definitely a lime, not a lemon. An exotic flavor not normally wasted on a glass of iced tea. Tangy with a hint of sweetness hidden beneath the biting surface. The writer, critic, observer—lover of irony and wit. Can a lime be sardonic?

I taste and pucker, the insides of my cheeks drawing towards each other. My lips pursed like Leslie Caron.

I remember the jellied candy slices that we snuck at Friday night dinner at Grandma Celia's apartment in Brooklyn. Lemon, lime, cherry, orange, coated with course, granulated white sugar. Sophisticated chuckles. Grandma is sitting on a bridge chair by the open oven, her knees apart like a tough guy, her head wrapped in a white terry towel to absorb her perspiration as she bastes the chicken to its golden finale.

It doesn't matter that I've left the topic of lemons and limes. I've found an important memory, rich in senses, that evokes feelings about my family. I can use this topic of dinner at grandma's for another writing session.

When we did this exercise at another writing retreat in Santa Cruz, one person wrote, "A lime is a lemon with attitude." My thoughts exactly.

Author of *Writing from the Senses,* Laura has written for the *L.A. Times, S.F. Chronicle, Time Out* and other publications. Her writing has been anthologized in several collections, including *Best Women's Travel Writing,* and aired on public radio. She has taught at U.C. Berkeley and leads writing retreats from Tassajara to Tuscany. www.lauradeutsch.com

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Olio Nuovo

A version of this piece appeared in
Writing from the Senses
(Shambhala Publications)

When writing about Italian olive oil, my first thought is of touch, so I must tell you how the oil feels, streaming from a faucet, running through my fingers onto a piece of fresh-baked bread.

I'm traveling with four American chefs. We are eating our way through Italy. At a communal frantoio in Umbria, just over the border from Tuscany, the olives are pressed into a fine elixir. Olio nuovo, literally "new oil," is grassy green-gold, spicy, pungent, fresh and clean.

A weathered grandpa arrives on his Vespa with a white plastic laundry basket of olives he's harvested from his yard. Another neighbor, with a larger plot, arrives in a pickup truck and tosses his olives into the hopper.

Someone passes us paper cups, half-filled with oil from the spigot, toasting us to drink it down. *Mamma mia!* Raspy sharp at the back of my throat. But as a finishing oil on salad, vegetables or fish, or as a dipping oil for crusty bread, this is the food of the angels.

Culinary Magic in Sant'Ambrogio di Valpolicella, Verona

A version of this 2016 story appeared at Examiner.com.

The Groto de Corgnan, in Sant'Ambrogio di Valpolicella, la province de Vérone, is advertised as a simple family "trattoria." All previous notions of simple and trattoria were immediately cast to the vineyard-carpeted hillsides as we entered the courtyard dining area. Giorgio and Martina Soave, the magician and his daughter, are anything but simple and trattoria-like. Martina is a student of the Valpolicella wines and her father is the chef d' cuisine. Martina effortlessly welcomed their guests warmly and genuinely. Local wisdom is that Giorgio Soave knows more about food and the fresh Valpolicella produce and game than anyone alive. This night's unique dining experience reinforced that wisdom.

Things do happen magically at the Groto. Glasses of sparkling Prosecco appeared out of thin air. An amuse-bouche of pureed green peas also materialized without fanfare but to great delight. There was a master in the kitchen at this unpretentious trattoria, which looked more like a converted residence—truly a wonderful beginning.

Soon, Giorgio and Martina appeared to explain the menu, which was to be prepared fresh over the next few hours. With the greatest consideration for their guests, they offered to prepare alternatives to anything that might be the least bit too adventurous or possibly disagreeable. It was clear that no one would leave this evening dissatisfied or hungry.

Giorgio makes his own salami, pancetta, "lardo" and fresh pastas. He and Martina had just returned from the Lessini Mountains, just to the northeast of Sant'Ambrogio, a southern extension of the Italian Alps, where they had picked black truffles. These truffles would be perfectly matched with several dishes this evening.

After the novel amuse-bouche, sparkling wine initiation and menu presentation, we were poured a wonderful glass of 2010 Anselmi San Vincenzo, a white wine made from the Garganega grape, a variety of white Italian wine grape widely grown in this region of Italy, the Veneto, especially near Verona and Vicenza. Garganega is the basis of Soave wines. The San Vincenzo was a light straw color with significant minerality and fresh citrus aromas. This wine, like all the wines this evening, was plentiful and included in the price.

The first course was a simple fried egg topped with a generous portion of those wonderful shaved black truffles from the Lessini. A slice of fresh peach wrapped in a lettuce leaf added the perfect sweetness and freshness to the egg and truffle combination-- exquisitely simple and magnificently tasty! This starter, accompanied by the splendid Anselmi, was a sure sign of the magic brewing in the kitchen.

The truffle and egg disappeared from the plates as magically as they appeared. But not to worry, more magic was in the making. With the speed of presto change, a plate of Soppressa, a typical salami of the region, homemade by Giorgio, appeared in front of us. The Soppresa was served with lardo, figs and bread that had been toasted on the open wood fire. The bread had a swirl of extra virgin olive oil on it that was unworldly in its scrumptiousness.

John Compisi has a passion for travel, wine and food. John and wife Linda have lived in Northern California for 22 years. They have lived and traveled in Asia, Europe and North America. Favorite travel destinations are Italy, Hawaii, Virginia's historic triangle, Newport (R.I.) and California's North Coast.

With a wave of his magic spatula, Giorgio pulled another rabbit out of his hat to amuse and amaze, only this time the rabbit was replaced with thinly pounded beef served carpaccio style. The thin slices of raw beef were topped with very thinly shaved Parmigiano Reggiano (38 months aged), fresh strawberries from their garden, and a bit of very fresh and savory goat cheese.

The wine changed from white to red before our eyes. It was a wonderful Valpolicella Classico wine, a 2009 Giuseppe Lonardi. Valpolicella wines are made from Corvina grapes and are typically blended with Rondinella and Molinara grapes. The Classico was a perfect match with a meaty element of cured beef upfront, followed by thick aromas of mature cherry and blackberry tart. Abracadabra!

Like the rest of the magic of the evening, the clock seemed to have slowed or even reversed. The food and wine, like an exotic potion, erased any cares and worries and focused entirely on Giorgio's legerdemain. Two different plates were delivered: raviola with ricotta cheese and nettles on one and tagliolini with Lessini truffles on the other. The nettles dish was delicate and flavorful, with the texture of the ricotta cheese complimenting both the ravioli and nettles (a special delicacy with a little danger in the harvesting and preparation). The tagliolini with truffles was a substitute for those who do not believe in magic. The Valpolicella Classico was a great companion to these dishes.

One might think that one would be unable to eat more of this wonderfully rich and flavorful food after having enjoyed four courses already. But that is also part of the trick with slow food enjoyed *s-l-o-w-l-y* with excellent wine, service and surroundings. As proof of that, the staff made a plate of tagliatelle with chanterelle mushrooms appear. Again, there were exquisite flavors and contrasts between the pasta and the shaved mushrooms accompanied by the red wine.

Meanwhile, Martina was preparing the large wine glasses that she would use in pouring the next wine. She carefully poured a bit of Amarone della Valpolicella from a large-format (three-liter) bottle. Martina gently coated each glass with this nectar to be sure that the bouquet would put your olfactory into a trance. This particular Amarone was a 2005 from Allegrini. As we finished our tagliatelle, Martina poured the Amarone. It had a deep red color. The bouquet hinted at fruit with some heat, and on the palate, showed sun-dried fruit and acidity.

The food magic continued to emanate from the kitchen. A Guinea fowl prepared with sage and topped with more Lessini black truffles appeared tableside, creating another visual delight. Carrots and beans provided beautiful oranges and greens to contrast with the black truffles and green-hued pasta. The Amarone was a surprisingly good match for this plate. Although definitely a full-bodied red, it was nuanced enough to work with fowl and truffles.

By now, nearly three hours had transpired, but the magic of the Valpolicella continued with a wonderful selection of cheeses that included the local Monte Veronese cheese. Monte Veronese is a cow's milk cheese and is considered the great cheese of the Veronese Prealps. No argument there. A special homemade preserve was served to complement the various cheeses. And the Amarone also worked very well here.

Dessert was out of the question but, through the art of magic, was offered and—shazam!—accepted. A plate of gelato topped with chestnuts that had been cooked in honey was an irresistible feat of prestidigitation.

The food and service were magic. The waiter appeared and disappeared with just the right mix of helpful presence and discretion. Every detail of this experience was perfectly staged and choreographed. Placing oneself in the hands of a magician takes a modicum of faith, but when that magician is the Merlin-esque Giorgio Soave and his beautiful assistant, daughter Martina, the result is four hours of hedonistic pleasure, relaxation and enjoyment.

No Hocus Pocus at Groto de Corgnan!

Photos by Linda Compisi

Judith Horstman

Blueberry Memories

Reprinted with permission from
Yankee Magazine.

All year long the color of blueberries sleeps in the mind's eye, elusive.

A few days each year, I go and find it, climbing Wildcat Hill in southern New Hampshire with a backpack and my best friend, brushing through ferns and twigs and clambering over disheveled stone walls.

It's always high summer and golden hot, and we set off eagerly, tasting blueberry pie, blueberry muffins, blueberry jam. The climb leaves us breathless with exertion and anticipation.

Near the top of Wildcat we wade into overgrown pasture, rustling through heath and young trees. There, matting the hillside, are the blueberries.

So that's what it was: the color of babies' eyes, night skies, lake water. And I bend down, plastic milk carton dangling on a string from my neck, to pull off the fruit with both hands. The first ones always get eaten, a reward in advance, because soon, too soon, the back begins to ache.

It takes the patience of age and the supple body of youth to pick wild blueberries. They are so small, so sweet, so hard to pick, and it takes so many to fill a bucket.

I get annoyed at the time it takes, creeping across the heath, the heat. Then the rhythm takes over. In the hot high thrum of August, really, what is the hurry?

My friend wanders out of sight, pursuing a growth line of her own. We are separated by trees and shrubs, but still within earshot. Our fingers are stamped purple. Our tongues turn blue-black and loosen. This is when confidences come, amid the rustle of the stiff bushes, the silence of midday, and the isolation.

When our girls were young, they used to pick with us. They camped here in nightgowns, like Victorian princesses, eating

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smeary handfuls of blueberries from their bedrolls.

As they grew older, they preferred to go pick on their own, giggling and long-legged, blue eyes flashing. We would hear their voices singing across the side hill. They had secrets, too, probably the same ones my dear friend and I have been sharing since we were their age: the uncertainty of the future, the meaning of the past, mistakes and lucky guesses and what one should or could do next.

The August day ambles on. I tell her about the story that blueberries were once used to tint milk-based paint a mystical blue. "Imagine," I tell her as the afternoon birds swoop and dart above us, "picking enough blueberries to paint a room. Imagine!"

Cicadas hum on the hot rocks. The young trees sigh in the light wind. I hear my friend now, humming also, off-key.

She will climb up the hill many times this summer to fill the freezer, the jam jars, the pie plates. I do it only those few days when I come north each summer, so I recall the events, the exact turning of each blueberry day, with a piercing vision. In midwinter, a continent away, I will open a jam jar.

Ah. That's how it was. Blueberries.

Want to pick your own blueberries? The place we pick is private property, but there are many pick-your-own places open to the public throughout New England. To find a list of blueberry farms in New Hampshire, go to www.pickyourown.org/NH.htm.

Inga Aksamit

Alfresco Dining in the High Sierra

This book excerpt is adapted from
Highs and Lows on the John Muir Trail.

We hiked for hours in the High Sierra, watching the spiky peaks of the Minarets draw near, my stomach grumbling in sync with my footsteps. Breakfast had long evaporated in the first hour of hard climbing. Lemon drops and jelly beans got me over the highest pass. A tortilla stuffed with black beans, hot salsa and string cheese was downed in a flash during a lunch break beside a gurgling stream. Through the long afternoon descent, food fantasies occupied many hours of daydreams punctuated by chocolate M&Ms melting in my mouth. Sitting in dappled sunlight filtering through the pine trees at our camp, I craved a real meal. It was time to make dinner.

Steve, relaxing in his camp chair, called out, "Smells great! What's on the menu tonight?"

"Moroccan lamb with raisins, peas and lemon parsley couscous," I replied.
A cloud of aromatic steam escaped into the pure mountain air, evoking images of deserts, bazaars and camels, in contrast to the forests, soaring granite peaks and green meadows surrounding us. After fluffing the couscous to separate the tiny grains of semolina, I stirred the lamb stew to blend the flavors. I plated the meal, first dividing the couscous into our plastic bowls, then spooning the stew over the top, squeezing the bag to get the last bit out. I finished with a sprinkle of sliced almonds and drizzle of lemon oil. Our long, collapsible camp spoons were unfolded and we dug in hungrily, famished after a long day of pounding the trail. The taste of cumin, cinnamon and ginger exploded in my mouth, sweet grapes accenting the savory spices. The mild couscous was the perfect foil for the exotic seasonings and distinctive, mildly gamey flavor of the lamb.

Conversation ceased while we concentrated on every bite, relishing the satisfying meal filling our bellies. I washed it down with a Tang vodka cocktail, my aching muscles relaxing under the influence of the libation. The sun dropped lower, the azure sky deepening

Inga Aksamit is the author of *Highs and Lows on the John Muir Trail*, which won the 2016 Best Outdoor Book Award from the Outdoor Writers Association of California. She is currently working on a meal planning/cookbook for the John Muir Trail hikers. Her travel stories have appeared in numerous publications. www.IngasAdventures.com

in contrast to the golden alpenglow on the rocky peaks. We were content.

Cleanup was a cinch. All I had done to prepare our gourmet meal was pour hot water into a thick freezer bag containing a concoction of freeze-dried and dehydrated foods. After 20 minutes the reconstituted meal was ready to eat. After dinner we rinsed out the bag, washed our dishes and cleanup was done.

We were taking 23 days to hike the John Muir Trail. Food preparation had become one of the most daunting tasks of the entire journey, threatening to overwhelm me. I had read many accounts of long-distance hikers who subsisted on Fritos and Snickers on the trail, interspersed with pizza and hamburgers in towns. I didn't eat that way at home but figured that's what hikers ate. Luckily, extended shakedown trips showed me that I could not choke down unappetizing junk food. I knew I had to find a strategy to pack nourishing, appealing meals. On our early hikes we were content with commercial freeze-dried food, but after scrutinizing the calorie and protein counts, I realized they were lacking. I threw out the junk food and started over.

Soon my world became immersed in spreadsheets, calorie calculations, measuring cups and baggies,

endless reams of zip-top baggies. Everything that came in a can, bag or container was repackaged to save space and weight. Emergency trips to the store were frequent as I'd run out of one size or another of snack, quart or gallon bags. The dining room turned into a command center—Commissary Central. I put the extra leaves in the table, marked off sections for each day and started putting meals together. After assembly, I stacked bags of food against a wall, each wall designated for a different section of the trip.

Breakfasts were easy. Pour two packets of instant oatmeal into a snack-sized baggie and add different freeze-dried fruit to vary the taste. I used freeze-dried blueberries, strawberries, raspberries and cherries in succession and, for a real flavor bomb, a few baggies contained all four fruits. Each bag got a dose of chia and roasted flax seeds, along with hazelnuts for extra protein, crunch and flavor. A dusting of full-fat powdered milk completed the morning meal.

Next was lunch. Lunches were challenging to plan because we wanted something quick to prepare that didn't require a stove. We settled on a reasonable combination of speed, taste and calories. Tortillas, even though they were heavy, were endlessly palatable and easy to fill. As an added bonus, they appeared to last forever.

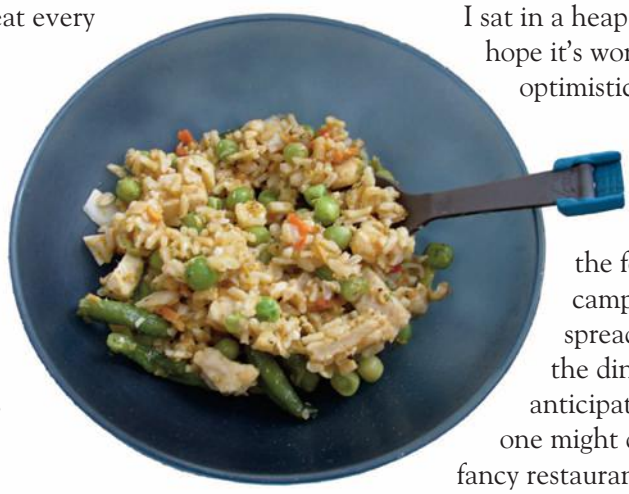
Once major ingredients were gathered for lunches, I was back at the dining room table running the mid-day meal assembly line. I procured more snack baggies and, one by one, filled each one with dried beans mixed with rice or quinoa, Mexican spices and a piece of salsa leather. On the trail, each morning after breakfast I prepared lunch. I dumped the bean mixture into small plastic cups, added water, snapped the lids on and let them hydrate while we walked. At lunch we spooned the zesty mixture into our tortillas, added pumpkin seeds for crunch and wolfed it down with string cheese. I never tired of it.

Dinners got complicated when I veered away from commercial meal pouches. I dehydrated turkey, beef and lamb to bone-dry gravel. Whole meals were dried with varying degrees of success. Asian foods held up well in terms of flavor and composition, but stews disintegrated into a baby-food mush, the ingredients becoming indistinguishable from one another. Portion sizes were wildly off base. Yes, we were hungry after hiking, but a few portions were large enough to feed an army while others were skimpy. It was back to the drawing board. On and on the testing went. Eventually I had a core group of solid recipes. Our menu reflected our eclectic international tastes—Italian marinara and sausage with orzo pasta, Cajun jambalaya, Asian stir fry, Indian chicken and lentils, barbecue chicken and mashed sweet potato, and Mexican beans, rice and corn, as well as the Moroccan lamb and couscous. Freeze-dried veggies rounded out the menu selections. A small bottle of olive oil, which enhanced the flavors in the meals and boosted calories, was included for each section of the hike.

Eventually, dinners were bagged and distributed to their respective areas. I wasn't done yet, though a couple of times I felt as though I was hitting the proverbial wall. Snacks still had to be portioned out. Cashews, almonds, M&Ms, hard candy, Jelly Bellies, high-protein energy bars, salami and string cheese had to be

bagged for each day so they would last until the very end. Otherwise the salami would have been demolished the first night. High-quality dark chocolate was our sweet treat every evening.

As exhaustion set in, I second-guessed myself about a million times. Back to the wall I went, over and over, obsessively checking my spreadsheet, counting meals and freaking out over a miscount. I finally dragged myself to bed with numbers and worksheets cavorting through my dreams.



Finally I could count no more. Mailing day was upon us, the final date for mailing to the resupply locations with a guarantee that it would arrive before we did. Steve came in with the cardboard boxes and bright orange buckets required by different backcountry stations, saying, "It's time. Pack 'er up." So we pushed, shoved and mashed all the baggies and bottles into the containers, reluctantly removing a few treats that wouldn't fit.

I sat in a heap on the floor and said, "I hope it's worth it." I was cautiously optimistic that we wouldn't starve.

On the trail, one of our favorite moments each day was pulling out my laminated meal plan from the food canister after we set up camp. We studied the spreadsheet to see what was on the dinner menu so we could anticipate the delectable flavors, as one might do for a *prix fixe* menu at a fancy restaurant. Then we relaxed in a stunning amphitheater of granite peaks surrounding a pristine alpine lake or stream. The panoramic view was better than any five-star eatery and hunger was not in our lexicon. As it turned out it was, indeed, worth it.

Fish, Veg & Wine: Exploring the Bounty of Monterey County

What makes the crops rejoice, beneath what star
To plough, and when to wed the vines to elms,
The care of cattle, how to rear a flock,
How much experience thrifty bees require,
Of these, Maecenas, I begin to sing.

—Virgil, *Georgics* (circa 36 BCE)

As the third largest county in the third largest state of the Union, with agriculture the dominant industry, Monterey plays an important role in delivering fine food and wine to tables across the nation. Having recovered from near extinction, the Monterey Bay fishery once again yields a bountiful harvest of seafood. Hospitality, the second regional economic driver, serves cuisine based on this fortunate confluence of epicurean bounty at the peak of freshness and flavor.

Fields of artichokes, berries, celery and just about every other letter of the produce alphabet line the highways and byways. Fishing boats ply their trade in a bay celebrated for the diversity of its marine life. Although health, safety and security concerns limit public access to these activities, there are many other opportunities for curious travelers to learn about the people and places that make "the crops rejoice."

Tales of Two Valleys

The majority of the county's agricultural output comes from two valleys named for their major rivers. Both are blessed with deep, rich alluvial soil and a temperate, largely frost-free Mediterranean climate moderated by the influence of the Pacific Ocean.

Bounded on both sides by rugged mountain ranges, the 100-mile-long Salinas Valley spans cool coastal conditions ideal for artichokes, broccoli and lettuce near the bay, to torrid pimento-ripening temperatures inland. Straddling Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties, the Pajaro Valley is the smaller of the two and focuses on apples, berries and flowers.

Popularly known as Steinbeck Country, these landscapes are the settings for Nobel prize-winning writer John Steinbeck's universal stories of everyday people in harmony and in conflict with nature, society and themselves. *East of Eden, Of Mice and Men* and *The Red Pony* unfold inland, while *Cannery Row, Sweet Thursday* and *Tortilla Flat* take place in coastal Monterey and Pacific Grove. The National Steinbeck Center in Salinas and nearby Boronda Adobe History Center, together with the Agricultural & Rural Life Museum 50 miles south in King City, tell tales and display agricultural implements that would have been familiar to the author's protagonists.

With close to 400,000 acres under production, the total value of agriculture is more than $4 billion a year and yields the most economically productive soil (acre for acre) anywhere on Earth. Proclaimed the "Salad Bowl of the World" by the chamber of commerce, the Monterey County Farm Bureau reports that the Salinas Valley grows more than 150 crops, including 61 percent of the nation's leaf lettuce, 57 percent of the celery, 56 percent of the head lettuce, 48 percent of the broccoli, 38 percent of the spinach, 30 percent of the cauliflower and 28 percent of the strawberries.

Most of this produce is shipped by a handful of large, vertically integrated agribusinesses such as Dole Fresh Vegetables, Tanimura & Antle, and Taylor Farms. As the bulk of their output is shipped outside California, they focus on crops that can be picked, packed, cooled, travel for days, and can arrive in distant supermarkets looking fresh and unblemished.

These varieties are not always compatible with optimum taste or texture. Produce that is best ripened on the vine or that is easily damaged in transit may prove superior eating but must be consumed locally. It is typically grown by small and family farms and sold at farmers' markets within hours of harvesting. Much is organically grown, although large operators such as Earthbound Farm now also supply significant amounts of certified produce.

Farm Tours

Many planting and harvesting operations can be viewed from the highway. Protectively clothed

David A. Laws photographs and writes about California gardens, Silicon Valley and Steinbeck Country from his home in Pacific Grove, California.

against wind-driven dust from the fine sandy soil, skilled farmworkers pick through lush-green, parallel rows of produce in lines that converge towards the distant hills. They lug baskets of artichokes, broccoli, lettuce, strawberries and more to giant, million-dollar, Rube Goldberg-inspired machines that sort and pack the produce as they advance slowly through the fields. Cleared to bare soil and leveled for efficient irrigation, adjacent fields lie fallow awaiting the next planting.

Dedicated agriphiles who wish to get closer can join educational and sightseeing tours conducted by Ag Venture Tours of Monterey. Beginning in the

The Santa Lucia foothills from River Road near Chualar

artichoke fields near Castroville, small van groups explore vegetable field harvesting and packing, irrigation, planting and organic farming. Owner Evan Oakes, a U.C.-Davis agriculture graduate, also conducts wine tasting and customized gourmet food and wine tours.

The Farm, an agricultural education center and farming business, offers fresh produce and baked goods for sale along with family activities and walking tours of the fields, with opportunities to pick and sample fresh produce. On Highway 68 south of Salinas, ten 18-foot-high, cutout murals of farmworkers easily identify the site. Similar installations by the artists John Cerney and Don Sung Kim promote agricultural interests along U.S. 101 and local highways.

Every Saturday throughout the May-to-November season, Serendipity Farms in Carmel Valley opens its gates to home chefs, canners, kids and anyone who wants to pick fresh, ripe organic produce off the vine. Signs along the road direct visitors to U-pick strawberry, raspberry and tomato fields.

Farmers' Markets and More

Roadside stands display offerings fresh from the field. In addition to seasonal pop-up tables, several permanent stands are located close to Highway One. South of Moss Landing, The Whole Enchilada Market Place and the Thistle Hut tempt drivers with ads for fruit and vegetables (avocados and artichokes respectively) at "10 for $1."

The Pezzini Farms store is set in the middle of acres of artichokes near Castroville, where Marilyn Monroe reigned as the 1948 Artichoke Queen. Local fields produce upwards of 60 percent of the artichokes consumed in the U.S. In business for nearly 100 years, Ocean Mist Farms is the dominant shipper.

Earthbound Farm, now the country's largest organic grower, continues to serve the local community from a retail stand and organic café on Carmel Valley Road, just down the way from the raspberry field where it began in 1984.

Edible Monterey Bay magazine lists 15 certified outdoor Farmers' Markets in Monterey County. Two or more are open every day of the week and are patronized by chefs from premier local restaurants. Vendors at the Friday morning Monterey Peninsula College market offer fruit, flowers and produce selected for optimum qualities in their local growing conditions. Strawberry specialist Paul Tao of P&K Farms will tell you that "every variety tastes different according to the soil, microclimate and how they are farmed." Customers wait in line to purchase the Albion cultivar that reaches perfection on his Castroville hillside. Shoppers know to arrive

early to claim the freshest, most flavorful produce of the day from Tom Coke's fields in the rolling hills of Aromas. Further south near warm Gonzales, Lisbon lemons and Hass and Bacon avocados thrive on the Violini brothers' V&V Farm.

To see the greenest artichokes, straightest carrots and plumpest tomatoes in picture-perfect arrangements, visit the agriculture hall at the annual, late-summer Monterey County Fair. If you don't have time to cruise farm stands or attend street markets, check out the "Bounty of the County" at the Monterey Wharf Marketplace. Fresh produce, sandwiches, salads and wine are sold in a renovated 1874 railroad depot. Look for a 1929 Ford vegetable truck and the owner's 1960s-era John Deere tractor next to the harbor parking lot.

Vineyards and Tasting Rooms

The quality and variety of Monterey County's wines, together with an extraordinary breadth of recreational and fine dining opportunities, inspired Wine Enthusiast magazine to anoint Monterey County as one of the world's top 10 wine destinations in 2013.

A heritage of winemaking dates back to the Franciscan friars of Mission Soledad in the late 1700s, but large-scale planting did not begin until the early 1970s when established wineries Paul Masson and Mirrasou sought replacements for urbanizing Silicon Valley lands in the north. Vintners took advantage of the wide range of temperature, soil and microclimate zones to experiment with numerous grape clones and wine-making styles. Cool climate-loving chardonnay and pinot noir varietals proved to be most successful. A dozen viticulture area (AVA) designated regions today host nearly 200 vineyards and the same planted acreage as Napa Valley.

With the opportunity to promote and sell their harvest onsite, winemakers are more enthusiastic about encouraging visitors than their produce-farming neighbors. Following the serpentine course of the Salinas River past rustic barns and bucolic pastures south of Salinas, the River Road Wine Trail divides steep foothill vineyards of the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA on one side from flat produce land on the other. Signs direct visitors to tasting rooms featuring the wines of local families who pioneered the production of nationally recognized premium vintages.

Other popular stops include Denis Hoey's small Odonata Winery and Talbott's Sleepy Hollow Vineyard. Gallo recently purchased Talbott to boost its portfolio of fine wines. Perched high on a hillside terraced with vines, picnic tables at Hahn Family Wines in Soledad overlook a vast brown, green and gold geometric agricultural quilt stretching east to the otherworldly granite spires of Pinnacles National Park. Walking and ATV tours of the property are available with prior reservation.

Alternatives to driving include the Wine Trolley cable car-style bus tour of Carmel Valley and A Taste of Monterey wine bar on Cannery Row. The latter offers seated panoramic views of the ocean while enjoying tasting "tours" of local wineries. Pedestrian oenophiles can stroll among more than a dozen Monterey County winery tasting rooms in busy Carmel-by-the-Sea or another cluster in the more rural ambiance of Carmel Valley Village.

The Bay Recovers

Ocean shellfish and freshwater steelhead trout provided important food sources for the indigenous coastal population. Commercial fishing began in the 1850s with Chinese entrepreneurs who shipped fresh salmon to San Francisco and dried squid to Canton. Sicilian immigrants followed with nets and techniques that transformed fishing into an industry. Sardine canneries boomed until overfishing, cyclical ocean temperature changes and decimation of the marine environment devastated the business in the early 1950s.

The collapse of canning led to the reinvention of Cannery Row as a tourist attraction. Monterey Bay Aquarium and the recently created Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary contributed to recovery of the fishery and stimulated popular interest in marine life.

Commercial fishing continues but is now managed sustainably. Retail outlets are located just yards from where the catch is unloaded on busy Monterey Municipal Wharf. Fishing vessels Tina Louise, Gardenia and others sell fish, shrimp and live crab directly from Dock A at Moss Landing

Harbor. Real Good Fish, a community-supported fishery organization, works with the owners to distribute their seafood to subscribers as soon as possible after landing.

Visitors planning to spend a day on the ocean can choose among recreational charter and excursion fishing boat operators leaving from both harbors daily. Modern vessels are outfitted with heated cabins, live bait tanks and plenty of seating for long hours out on the water. Depending on the season, you may return with a catch of albacore, bass, halibut, lingcod or salmon.

Fishing boats at Moss Landing

Dining: Bringing it all Together

From food trucks and neighborhood taquerias to upscale resort restaurants, visitors can choose among numerous dining establishments around the bay. Many bring together the bounties of fish, vegetables and wine with good service in a pleasant setting. Consult current recommendations of the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch program before ordering to be sure that your selection supports a healthy ocean, now and for future generations.

Hailed by the BBC as one of the world's best beach restaurants, Phil's Fish Market & Eatery in Moss Landing is famous for the proprietor's contest-winning cioppino. Also in Moss Landing and overlooking numerous sea otters playing at the mouth of Elkhorn Slough Estuarine Reserve, the Sea Harvest Restaurant & Fish Market is run by local fishing families.

Artichoke aficionados can explore exotic servings of the edible thistle at Castroville's Giant Artichoke Restaurant, easily identified by the 20-foot-high, bright-green sculpture. Fire-roasted, deep-fried and jalapeno-dipped are among the menu items at the heart of the "Artichoke Center of the World."

The Fishwife delivers flavorful seafood such as golden-fried oysters and a rock cod tostada salad to the blue-collar community of Seaside. Under the same management, Monterey's Turtle Bay Taqueria grills and charbroils seafood for tacos prepared as guests watch.

Monterey is home to countless other establishments specializing in seafood, wine and produce, especially along Fisherman's Wharf and Cannery Row, where intense competition usually ensures fast, fresh fare at reasonable prices. Lines form early to savor blackened, grilled and poached seafood with pasta at the Monterey Fish House. Famous for its starring role in Clint Eastwood's directorial debut, "Play Misty for Me," the Sardine Factory is noted for the depth of its wine cellar.

Feted as owners of the best restaurant in the county, Cindy and Ted Walter of Passionfish in Pacific Grove are annually showered with awards for serving sustainable seafood, organically grown vegetables and award-winning wine. With an unbeatable view and outstanding value for its menu, The Beach House at Lovers Point is a locals' favorite.

A jewel among the glittering resorts and restaurants that blanket the coast from Pebble Beach to Big Sur, Carmel's tiny La Balena (The Whale) frequently takes the honors for its creative Italian menu featuring whole-roasted or grilled daily fish specials.

Food- and wine-related events provide an opportunity to sample many local delicacies in one setting. Popular festivals on the annual calendar include Pebble Beach Food & Wine; Big Sur Food & Wine; Castroville Artichoke; Monterey Wine; Monterey Beer Week; Tunes, Trucks and Tastes; and SLH Gala X.

Presented with Monterey County's cornucopia of epicurean delights, the poet Virgil would have had to add more volumes to the *Geordics* four-book compendium of agricultural lore he dedicated to his Roman-diplomat patron, Gaius Maecenas.

Dick Jordan

Eating Europe: "Let them eat cake!"

A version of this story was published in the author's online travel magazine, TalesToldFromTheRoad.com.

Did Queen Marie Antoinette of France utter those oft-repeated words before losing her head during the French Revolution? Apparently not, even though the phrase—displaying disdain for peasants who had no bread on their plates—is often attributed to her.

"An army marches on its stomach!" declared Napoleon Bonaparte, who undoubtedly took French food with him to war.

Today, as you march across the European continent with your camera in hand, pause now and again to photograph its food while you enjoy partaking of it.

Going to Market

Visiting a local market is a great way to experience how Europeans feed themselves at home.

Some are small, open-air affairs, like the Albert Cuyp Markt in Amsterdam.

Others are mirror images of American supermarkets with huge indoor displays of meat, poultry, fish and produce, and aisles filled with paper products, household cleaning supplies and tons of other inedible necessities of life.

If a hotel is your home base, you can feast your eyes on the wide variety of foodstuffs you'll likely find in both street and "super" markets.

If you are staying in a rented apartment, farmhouse or villa, go to the market to shop, and then "dine in" on some evenings during your stay.

If you're ambitious, cook your meals from scratch. If not, just buy prepared food, like a roast chicken or lasagna, some side dishes from the deli, salad fixings from the produce section, and a bottle or two of wine.

Following "market etiquette" will keep you from running afoul of local customs. Just observe what

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other customers are doing when they select food.

At a street market in Venice, our American-born tour guide told us not to *handle the produce yourselves.* "Just tell the vendor when you plan to eat it and he'll pick something that will be perfectly ripe when you have it."

In a Tuscan supermarket, we acted as though we were "locals," donned clear plastic gloves pulled from a roll in the produce department, put our vegetables in plastic bags and weighed them on a scale that printed out a price tag.

"Street Food"

Throughout Europe you'll run across street-side markets, fairs and food stands where you can get a between-meals snack.

But instead of something familiar—and mundane—such as a chocolate chip cookie, your treat is likely to be something you've never had before and won't find at home, like the crème-filled "waffeln" served up at the Sunday Altmarkt in Dresden, Germany.

Dining Out

One of the pleasures of vacation travel relished by many is the joy of leaving cooking and kitchen cleanup chores behind. No meal planning, no grocery shopping, and no pots and pans to scrub. But dining out in an unfamiliar place raises a not-so-easy-to-answer question: "Where can we *eat well* tonight?"

Except in the smallest European villages, you'll have almost too many restaurant choices. Guidebooks can help narrow down the number of possibilities, and may provide ratings and recommendations, phone numbers and street addresses, and maybe even a locator map to help you find your way to lunch or dinner.

Don't hesitate to ask your innkeeper, hotel staff or tour guide to steer you to a good meal. In London, the Liberty department store concierge sent us off to an enjoyable and reasonably priced lunch just down the street at Cha Cha Moon, where we were surrounded by office workers enjoying their midday meal.

If you are dining out in France, don't turn down selections from a restaurant's cheese platter, no matter how full your stomach feels. If you decline to sample the proffered fromage, your server will no doubt believe that you are seriously ill and will immediately send for a doctor!

In Europe, Let Me Eat Cake!

Being a tourist is hard work. So many cathedrals to visit. So many museums to wander through. So many cobblestone streets to amble.

So during your "tourist workday," do what you do back home at the office: Take a mid-afternoon "coffee and cake" break.

In some European cities, such as London, you'll find a Starbucks on nearly every corner. And yes, even though Vienna is famous for its own coffee, Starbucks has "invaded" it, too. So, if you want a "triple shot, soy milk, venti latte," *you can get it in Europe*.

But for a better experience, look for a locally-owned, non-franchised, only-in-this-location place to get a cup of joe. Odds are good that it will also make its own heavenly pastries.

Which European country serves up the best sweet treats? Of those that I've visited, Germany tops the list. And a friend and I agree that in Munich, taking a "cake break" every 15 minutes sounds like a terrific, albeit fattening, way to spend your time between lunch and dinner.

So to paraphrase Marie Antoinette's famously misattributed line, "When in Europe, let me eat cake!"


WAFFELB
rische Waffeln
mit Schlagsahne
2,50 €
mit Vanillecreme
2,50 €
mit Konfitüre
2,- €
mit Apfelmus
2,- €
mit Puderzucker
2,- €
Waffel
mit Apfelmus
Zucker und
Zimt
2,50 EUR

"I cook with wine.
Sometimes I even add it to the food."
—W. C. Fields

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but rather a new way of looking at things."

—Henry Miller