

Essential Guide for Foodies and Travelers
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Essentials for World Travelers and Foodies

The Best Food Festivals Around The World

Traveling around the world is such a rewarding and enriching experience. There is so much to learn from exposure to different cultures, customs, and lifestyles, and one really simple and delicious way to do it is through exploring cuisine. Food festivals have become popular around the globe as they host a rich array of delectable food choices all under one roof. For those of us who have ventured into these kind of festivals, you may be thinking of receiving overpriced little paper bowls of pudding or measly slivers of meat after standing in very long queues, but we have a list here for you of festivals around the globe that not only excite the tastebuds, but delight in their unique experiences, delivering to their fest-goers an array of new skills to learn and activities to engage in.

1. Salon del Chocolat (Quito, Ecuador)



About 15,000 chocoholics are expected to flock to this chocolate lover's festival every year in mid-June. Quito, the capital city of Ecuador, produces some of the highest quality of chocolate in the world and Salon de Chocolat is the perfect festival to sample it all. On top of receiving free samples at tasting sessions, one can take chocolate cookery classes as well. People most look forward to the last day of the festival in which the winners of several awards are announced, including everyone's favorite, the chocolate sculpture contest.

2. Pizzafest (Naples, Italy)



Where better to host a pizza festival than the very town that it was pioneered in? This five to seven day celebration takes place in Fuorigrotta in Naples usually in September, although the dates change every year. The most famous pizza chefs from around the world compete against local chefs who set up stands with tables where around 500,000 visitors may sit and taste their ways through more than 100,000 pizzas of every variety. By the end of one week, a jury will decide on the best *pizzaio* in the world. The best pizzerias serve around 50 versions of classic Napolitana, Margherita and Marinara pizzas throughout the week.

3. Melbourne Food and Wine Festival (Melbourne, Australia)



Thousands of food and wine aficionados flock down to the land down under to indulge in this 10 day foodie haven at over 200 events in March. One can enjoy multi-course meals, take workshops taught by renown chefs and join in “the longest lunch”, the signature event of the festival. In 2015, “the longest lunch” gathered a record 1,604 diners from worldwide at a 530 meter table.

4. Savour (Singapore, Singapore)



Singapore is a melting pot for many different Southeast Asian cultures, from Chinese to Indian, making it the ideal location to bring together these culinary influences and host one gourmet food



festival, Savour. This year, more than 18,000 people enjoyed *alfresco* dining from Michelin-starred chefs, including the UK's very own Daniel Clifford. Scrub up on your kitchen skills and take part in a demonstration, or shop for fancy fridge fillers in the gourmet market.

5. Wildfoods Festival (Hokitika, New Zealand)



This is the ultimate weird foods festival held every year in March in the quaint little town of Hokitika in New Zealand's South Island. What started as a celebration of locally sourced produce in 1990 has evolved into acreative (to say the least) display of foods from around the coast. This craze includes tasting fried grasshoppers, mountain oysters, and crocodile nibbles. Doesn't sound too crazy? How about possum cutlets, earthworms, Huhu beetle grubs? There's sure to be something new at this festival even for those tried-and-tested adventurers out there! Don't worry! "Normal" foods like salmon is served as well.

6. Oktoberfest (Munich, Germany)



7 million guests. 7.7 million liters of beer consumed. Oktoberfest is a 16 day celebration, known as the world's greatest celebration of beer where millions of people flock to yearly to take part in this Bavarian celebration in an area named the *Theresienwiese* (field of Therese) often called the *Wiesn*. Visitors in Munich can sample the regions finest brews, which help to wash down the festival's many food options such as *Schweinebraten* (roast pork), *Schweinhaxe* (grilled ham hock), *Wurst* (sausage), along with *Sauerkraut* (red cabbage) and Bavarian delicacies like *Obatzda* (spicy cheese and butter spread).

7. Dumpling Festival (Hong Kong)



This festival is celebrated on the fifth day of the fifth Chinese lunar month, when many Chinese families worldwide will feast on dumplings. The gongzi dumpling consumed on this day in June is made of glutinous rice with different fillings ranging from vegetables, stewed meats, and seafoods wrapped in bamboo, lotus, or banana leaves. This day is a national holiday in Hong Kong and Macau and the culminating event in the dragon boat race – a sport so popular now that it has its



own international federation.



How To Travel Like a Local

Here's our list of things to do to make your experience in a new city a true learning one, away from the tourist traps and activities. Travel like a local with these tips.

1. Stay in a Central Area

We are sometimes so consumed in finding the nicest hotel, we end up booking resort-like stays that are quite a distance from the city. Although it could be relaxing, it can also get boring after a couple of days, and 2 hour drives into the city are not that much fun either! We suggest you book hotels within a 30 minute walk from the center. That way, there's a lot of walking and exploring to do on your trip! Booking websites are equipped with maps that can help you analyze the location, make sure to always use this tool.



2. Talk to the locals

They could be your guide, taxi driver, grocery store owner, or anyone you come across during your trip. Talking to them will help you learn about people of the country, politics, economy and way of life. You should also ask them about the areas the locals hang out to eat or drink in the city and check those places out.



3. Travel Using Public Transportation

If a place you are visiting is not within a walking distance, we suggest using public transportation such as a tuc tuc, bus, train, or metro. This will give you a huge insight into the everyday life of the locals and once you get the hang of it, you'll feel like you belong in the city!



4. Eat Local Food

Make sure you use your stomach space on new and local dishes when you travel. One of the best ways to discover a place is through the cuisine. It gives you a great insight into the history of the country as well as the culture. From street food to snacks to fine dining, there's an explosion of flavors awaiting you. We recommend you ask a local about the best places to eat and not to rely on online reviews which target tourists. You can also [book a food tour](#) which is always run by locals and you'll be guided to taste the best local eats in town.



5. Learn the language

We are not saying you should learn a new language before you travel, however, we do suggest you learn a few words such as “thank you”, “hello”, “Goodbye”, “Please”, “How much is this”, “I do not understand”, etc.. Locals appreciate the effort and feel closer to you. It could even get you some discounts on items!





4 Cities to Travel To For the Food!

One's gotta eat. Especially on vacation. In fact, food is so important that oftentimes it can determine our destination! We get disappointed when we waste our stomach space on a flavorless meal, and rightly so. For the real foodies, tasting the cuisine is essential in order to discover all the flavors a new country has to offer.

For those planning to head to warmer climates this winter, here's our pick of the top cities you should visit based solely on the cuisine.

Mumbai Food

Chaat is the Hindi word for street snacks. These are heavenly pieces of fried dough with crunchy mixtures thrown in, you eat it dunked in savoury and sweet sauces. Chaat stalls and carts are found around every corner! For travelers on a budget, Mumbai is the perfect place to experience flavorful food for as little as \$3 a meal.

Some of our recommended eats include **sev patata puri** which are crisp flour crackers topped with boiled potatoes, chopped onion, chillies, coriander, and sev (fried chickpea vermicelli). A sweet and spicy chutney is also added. Get ready for a big explosion of flavor in your mouth.

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Sev Patata Puri ready to eat

Another must try dish is the **samosa pav**. This version has a samosa squashed between 2 milky buns filled with chutneys and mint yogurt. A very delectable delight.

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Delicious Samosa Pav from one of the stalls

A big Persian community settled in Mumbai in the early 20th century which resulted in a fusion of Indian and Persian dishes. **Parsi Biryani**, a rice dish cooked with nuts, dried berries, and caramelized onions is a dish that resulted from this fusion. Definitely worth a try for something new



and delicious.

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A closer look at colorful Parsi Biryani

Capetown Food

South Africa's cuisine is sometimes called "rainbow cuisine" because of the multi-cultural influences on the dishes. You will notice that Braai (bbq) is a favorite method of cooking using wood or charcoal for heat. You can find all kinds of meat on the Braai from beef, lamb, chicken, pork, and seafood.

Boerewors are a must try when attending a Braai, these are spicy sausages made of a lamb and pork mix spiced with cloves, coriander seed, pepper, nutmeg, and all spice. You can even have a Boerewors roll which is served in a bun with chilli, onion relish, and tomato. We also recommended you try the **Braai Broodjies**; bbq'd sandwiches filled with cheddar cheese, onions, and tomatoes and we find that these also go well with Boerewors.

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Boerewors on the bbq

A mix of sweet and curry can be tasted with what is considered to be the national dish of South Africa, **Bobotie**. It contains minced beef or lamb, apricot, banana, curry, and is topped with an egg mixture. Do not leave South Africa without trying this delicious meal.

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A mixture of sweet and savoury, Bobotie

Traditional methods of cooking outdoors are still used in South Africa, and one dish in particular is **Potjiekos** which is cooked outdoors in a cast-iron pot over coals or wood. All kinds of meats can be used in this dish, but one popular one to try is ox tail. All ingredients are put into the pot and left



for hours to cook. You can have it with rice, pasta, mash, even bread to soak up all those juices.

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Potjiekos uses the traditional method of cooking meat stews

Lima Food

Not only does Peru have beautiful scenery and temples, it also boasts a delightful cuisine which is starting to get the spotlight it deserves.

We decided to start out recommendation with the unusual dish of **Cuy** for the daring ones, which is the Peruvian word for Guinea pig. This has been a staple in Peru's cuisine for over 5,000 years. The meat, is usually bbqed or grilled and served whole.

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Cuy meat, unusual for some, but a delicacy in Peru

Peru is the land of **Ceviche**, do not leave without trying these delicious fresh dishes. Fresh raw fish is cured in lemon or lime, mixed with chillies, cilantro, and onions. A side of sweet potato or avocado is the perfect complement to this dish.

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Fresh and tasty Ceviche

Ají de Gallina is another traditional meal that cannot be missed out on. Served over rice and potatoes, this gravy like sauce is made of Aji Amarillo Peppers, which give the dish its yellow color, a walnut cream sauce with evaporated milk, and chicken. The dish is topped with boiled eggs and olives.

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Aji De Gallina a delicious spicy Peruvian dish

Colombo

One disclaimer about Sri Lankan cuisine: be ready to put your taste buds on fire. It is one of the spiciest cuisines in the world yet so tasty.

Polos Curry, or jackfruit curry, is a beautiful combination of sweet and spicy. It is a curry cooked in Sri Lankan spices with chunks of the fruit. The texture of the fruit once cooked is similar to that of a potato.

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Polos Curry served on a banana leaf

All around the country, you can find carts or stalls making this famous street food, the **Egg Hopper**. Made from Coconut milk and rice flour, they are shaped into a bowl and topped with a cooked egg and spices. Get your hands on one of these.

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Egg hopper is a popular street food in Sri Lanka

A very homey dish is the famous **Fish Ambul Thiyal**. The cooking method was initially used in the south to preserve the fish but has become Sri Lanka's signature dish with tamarind as a main ingredient that gives it the sour taste. This dish can last a week in a clay pot in room temperature.

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Fish Ambul Thiyal, a sour curry dish



Eating like a local is the best way to experience the city in an authentic way. We hope you enjoy our recommendations!



8 Surprising Global Dining Etiquettes

Have you ever thought of traveling to a different country and considered the idea that you may be so used to cultural norms and etiquettes in your own native country, that you would never even comprehend that you had offended a host or witness? Correcting dining etiquette is one of the key ways in which you can stand out less as a tourist, and even more importantly, prevent a possibly awkward or tense situation away from home and in more unknown territory. These eight global dining etiquettes outline a few ideas that would not automatically cross a traveler's mind, so prepare to expand your cultural horizons.

1. In Japan, never cross your chopsticks, lick them or stick them upright in a bowl of rice.



During funerals in Japan, the rice bowl of the deceased is placed before their coffin...with their chopsticks upright in the rice, so doing so while dining would be an insult to the deceased.

2. In Thailand, never eat with your fork – merely use it to scoop food onto your spoon.



Also using chopsticks is considered tacky and bad etiquette and do not culturally belong in Thai society as has been commonly mistaken.

3. In India, the Middle East, and parts of Africa, do not eat with your left hand.



Unless you are explicitly left-handed, use your right hand to eat the meal, as these cultures consider the left hand to be used for activities that are unclean. Finish the meal in its entirety. It is considered disrespectful to waste food. Also be prepared to potentially share large dishes with



others in your party. Family-style orders are common.

4. In Italy, do not ask for parmesan cheese to garnish your dish if not explicitly offered and drink cappuccinos before noon.





Many pasta dishes in Italy aren't meant for parmesan. For example, many classic Roman pastas like Bucatini Amatriciana incorporate pecorino cheese rather than parmesan. You won't see Italians drinking cappuccinos in the afternoon or evening especially after large meals. You will instantly be branded a tourist. Most Italians who do have a *digestivo* opt for a tiny espresso cup, not large mugs of coffee.

5. In China, don't finish all the food on your plate.





This is to show your host that you were given more than enough to eat. Additionally, burping and leaving a bit of a mess is encouraged to show proof that you enjoyed the meal.

6. In France, never split the bill and use bread to assist food to the eating utensils.



Crunchy Serving Bread Baguette

This is considered poor etiquette and very unsophisticated. Offer to pay entirely or let someone else pay. Also, use bread to assist food to the fork and tear off chunks of it rather than biting directly into it. Leave bread on the table rather than on your plate.

7. In Chile, never eat anything with your hands.



This includes fries. Chilean manners are a little more formal than in other South American countries. This stems from a need to identify more with European culture so exercise good etiquette and eat everything with a fork and knife.

8. In Russia, do not mix or turn down vodka.





Russians do not like to compromise the purity of this drink (even with ice), and so it is always drunk neat. The exception is if vodka is mixed with beer, which turns into a potent beverage known as yorsh. Even worse though than to mix vodka, is to turn it down at any time of the day, as offering someone a drink is a sign of trust and friendship. So drink that vodka even if it is 11 am.



What to Eat Where - The Best Picks

What to Eat in New York

We did our own food tour around New York to explore the best eats in the city. Here's a list of the top 6 favorites:

Ruby's

Head over there for brunch but keep the long wait in mind! We couldn't resist trying their lunch items including what's said to be the best burger in town. Perfectly spiced burger patties with delicious crispy spice coated fries. We also tried the pasta with Italian sausage, the sausage had a nice spicy flavor and complemented their exceptionally good sauce.







Santina

Boasting a coastal Italian menu, we were excited to try this new take on Italian food. We were recommended to try the Cecina, a pancake-like dough made from chickpea flour (gluten-free!) with sides of tuna tartar and avocado trapanese. The pancake was perfectly fluffy and tasted great combined with their smoked tomato sauce (make sure you try this sauce) and the sides we ordered. We also tried the octopus and squash carpaccio both bursting with delightful new flavors.





Ichiran

If you're looking for a different experience, Ichiran is the right place to check out! Situated in an industrial area of Brooklyn, you might wonder how a restaurant could have opened here. What makes Ichiran stand out is the option to have your meal in private. They have individual booths lined up within one side of the hall and guests sit facing the kitchen. You do not have to interact with the servers, just select items you want on a piece of paper, and they will get it for you. They only have one item on the menu, tonkotsu Ramen and you can select the level of thickness, spiciness, toppings, etc... It was definitely one of the best Ramen we have tasted so far.



Martha's Country Bakery

This giant bakery/coffee shop is a great place to stop for dessert and coffee if you're exploring the hip neighborhood of Williamsburg. They have over a 50 options for dessert from cakes, tarts, pies, ice cream, etc..and from what we've tasted, everything tasted great. We recommend you try the banana cream pie and New York cheesecake.





Bagelsmith

Your trip in New York cannot be complete until you have a great bagel! This place has about 10 different cheese fillings and also have a great selection of breakfast and lunch options. We recommend you try the BEC and the Reuben.







Manousheh

Manousheh is a word for a Lebanese flat bread/pizza baked to order and topped with cheese, zaatar (a thyme mix), and sometimes meat. This is a great stop for a quick breakfast or late night snack. The setting is very intimate and is decorated as an old Lebanese bakery. The manaeesh also tastes very authentic and is baked in the traditional way in a brick oven.







Other Useful Resources

Try Toronto [PATH](#) food tour if you are in there or planning to visit this winter! (we highly recommend it).

If you are somebody visiting Dubai this season, cultural [food tour](#) of old Dubai will help you get to know the history of the city while tasting up to 9 dishes.

Also, this [Jakarta food tour](#) in Indonesia is highly rated and recommended by other foodies.

If cooking is your passion or want to learn how to cook local traditional dishes, try these cooking classes next time you travel. [This](#) one is in Athens if you are a fan of Greek food, [click here](#) to unlock the secrets of cooking Sri Lankan food in Galle. If in Kathmandu, the [Nepali cooking class](#) shouldn't be missed.



Great Toronto Eats

The restaurant scene in Toronto is as vibrant as the city itself. People from all over the globe have settled here resulting in a huge international offering of restaurants serving up local dishes. With so many options, we've set out to find the best of each cuisine to help you go on a mini Toronto food tour experience of the city. Here's our list of great Toronto Eats:

1. [Pai](#)

Pai is one of the places where you should go early, or wait in line! Claiming to serve up real Thai food, their dishes did not disappoint! We tried the Khao Soi which is egg noodles in a golden curry topped with crispy noodles, coriander, and crispy onions. The curry was so delicious on its own that we were eating it like soup.



Khao Soi at Pai



2. [Paleteria](#)

With the vegan trend so strong in Toronto, we decided to try Paleteria, a shop that sells paletas and soft serves. The store is a colorful place in Kensington and their sundaes look just as fun. We tried a lime Pastella, which was refreshing, and their top seller: the Colada Sundae. The Colada Sundae's base is a pineapple serve topped with coconut whipped cream and coconut flakes. Very tropical flavors.



Colada Sundae at Paleteria

3. **Saffron Spice Kitchen**

It's always important to know a good Indian restaurant that can fulfill your curry craving, and Saffron spice hits the spot! The food is prepared by Sri Lankan chefs using authentic flavors. Curries to try: eggplant, palak paneer, and mattar paneer. Also make sure you try their Kothu Roti, a popular Sri Lankan street snack.



Huge selection of Indian and Sri Lankan curries

4. Grand Electric

A nice bar on Queen West which also happens to have great food! Although their specialty is tacos, we especially loved the appetizers they serve here. We tried the spicy squid which is crispy squid topped with avocado, sour cream, heavenly sauces and chillis. The Tuna Ceviche, also mixed with avocado had a nice mix of spicy and sour.



Tuna Ceviche and Spicy Squid plates

5. La Revolucion

We got our fill for a hearty Mexican meal at La Revolucion, a restaurant run by a Mexican family. All the traditional Mexican dishes tasted homey and delicious. We especially loved the twist on the Canadian poutine with a dish that replaced the gravy with a Mexican mole sauce.



Chicken Enchiladas with a side of black beans and rice



Poutine Mexican style with mole sauce instead of gravy

6. Tabule

Probably the best Lebanese food in town, this joint on the East side of Toronto is owned by a Lebanese family who have made sure to keep the authentic flavors in their dishes. We tried different appetizers like falafel, fried eggplant, tabule, hummus and muttabal.



Delicious Lebanese mezze at Tabule



7. Hibiscus

Hibiscus is a vegetarian cafe specializing in savoury and sweet crepes + other vegetarian snacks. All the crepes are made with a buckwheat batter. We tried the Vegan Cheddar Chutney Pecan Pear, Goat Cheese Tomato Basil, and Mozzarella Cheese Spinach Mushroom. All tasted great despite the super healthy ingredients. We especially loved the pear chutney which was actually thin slices of pears that have gone through a sweet pickle process.



Cheddar Cheese Chutney Crepe

8. Uncle Tetsu's Japanese Cheesecake

This is probably the fluffiest cheesecake you will ever taste. This Japanese style cheesecake has no crust and is made entirely from a cheese batter. The taste is light and the texture leaves every bite melting in your mouth! Expect to wait at least 30 minutes in line before getting your hands on one.



The fluffiest, melt-in-your-mouth cheese cake you will ever taste!

9. Saku

Our favorite place for Sushi in Toronto so far, serving up fresh ingredients with great flavors. We especially love the use of thinly sliced fried yam as the crispy element instead of fried batter on most of their sushi rolls.



Avocado shrimp roll topped with crispy yam

Want to discover the best eats in the Trinity Bellwoods neighborhood? Check out the [Toronto Food Tour](#)!

Other Useful Resources

None other than Toronto [PATH](#) food tour if you are in Toronto or visiting it. or to visit it!

Dubai this season, cultural [food tour](#) of old Dubai should be on your radar.

This [Jakarta food tour](#) is also getting a lot of positive reviews from tourists.

Try [cooking class in Athens](#) or learn the secrets of [cooking Sri Lankan food](#) in Galle. Also, [Nepali](#)



[cooking class](#) is recommended if you are in Kathmandu.



What to Eat in Dubrovnik

Tucked away at the edge of Croatia on the Adriatic sea, is the beautiful medieval city of Dubrovnik. Known for being one of the few cities in the world still intact within ancient city walls. The city is super lively with a fun nightlife, great food, and beautiful beaches!

[Image not found](#)

The old city walls run 1.9 km in length, enclosing most of the old city

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View of the beach from the hiking path

Tastecapade's Recommended Eats

1. Ham and eggs on toast

Sounds simple, but full of flavor. The eggs, fried to a medium consistency, and ham taste like they just came out of the farm. Great way to start the day.



2. Extra Dark Chocolate Ice Cream

Ice cream is a must to cool down in the scorching heat of the Dubrovnik summer. There are several ice cream stalls around town. One flavor particularly unique to Dubrovnik is the Extra Dark Chocolate flavor which we highly recommend you try!



3. Lamb Shank in a Red Wine Sauce

This dish can be found in most restaurants serving Croatian food. The lamb shank is served in a delicious red wine sauce with a side of mashed potatoes. The Croatians know how to cook their meat! It's always super tender with the meat falling off the bone.



4. Pljeskavica

A Balkan dish made out of minced meat shaped into a patty. This version is stuffed with cheese. The red pepper paste on the side is also typically Balkan and adds a nice touch to the dish.

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5. Truffles

All the truffle lovers out there, this is the place for you. In fact, Croatia is the biggest exporter of these food gems that come from the northern part in the Istria region. Apart from finding it on almost all menus in Croatia, you can also buy some to take back with you. I highly recommend you do so because you can find the cheapest yet best truffles in the world. Fifty grams of truffle (in a jar) costs only 199 kuna (29\$), as opposed to up to 150\$ anywhere else.

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Bon appetit!

Contributer: Mary Freij



Greek Eats to Try in the Islands

While food in cities like Athens in mainland Greece will certainly be up to scratch, the islands of Greece offer so much variety and flavors and ingredients will change from island to island based on locally sourced produce. Here is a list of Greek eats that must be tried on your visit:

Gyros

Everyone has heard of Greek gyros in some way, shape or form. Even Middle Eastern cultures have their own type in the form of shawarmas, the Turkish in the form of doner, and India in the form of kathi rolls. But this is so much more than meat and veggies and sauce wrapped up in a piece of bread. The cilantro, red onions, and tomatoes at Obelisk Gyros, a Santorini institution, tasted as if they had just been freshly chopped up from the back garden. Not usually a fan of thick, creamy yoghurts, We initially asked for the lamb gyros without the tahini yoghurt but a passerby informed me that I would be making a poor decision and he was absolutely right. The lamb too was tender, and the pita bread was soft, warm and fresh out of the oven. A delicious first meal in Santorini!



The freshest, most tantalizing lamb gyros with tomato, purple onion, coriander and yogurt

Fresh Seafood

The islands automatically must have delicious, fresh catch of the days. There will be very few restaurants especially in Santorini, where you would go wrong ordering a grilled sea bass with garlic and herbs, octopus with tomato sauce pasta, Greek shrimp saganaki, usually prepared in a small, two-handle heavy bottomed frying pan, called a saganaki or saganaki, or Greek mussels (the most delicious of which I had in Mykonos years before). This particular seafood risotto with sea shrimps was cooked to al dente perfection, infused with hints of saffron, burst with flavor and was really fresh.



A delicious shrimp risotto from a restaurant overlooking the Mediterranean Sea

Santorini Crepe

This was such a wonderful and healthy discovery. Found at almost every breakfast cafe in Fira, the Santorini Crepe will put a smile on anyone, knocked out from a crazy night before. This particular crepe is incredibly crispy on the outside, glazed with hints of parmesan cheese, and is stuffed to the brim on the inside with everything you could find in a Greek salad and more -melted feta cheese, cucumbers, lettuce, tomatoes, walnuts, pistachios. It was actually so delicious that we went ahead and treated ourselves to two huge crepes.



A fresh, hot, crisp Santorini crepe in the capital town of Fira

Ouzo

Ouzo is the poison of Greece but the pride and joy of Greek alcohol. It is essentially a pure white alcohol that has undergone a two distillation process (of course the process varies from distillery to distillery). After the alcohol has been distilled, it is infused with various **herbs** such as **aniseed** (most predominant), licorice, mint, wintergreen, fennel, and **hazelnut**. It is clear and silky and easy to underestimate because of its innocent aesthetic. Ouzo is customarily served neat – no ice. The Greeks will add iced water to dilute the strength causing the liquid to turn an opaque, milky white.



Greeks love this drink so much that there are countless ouzo bars across Greece called *ouzeries* (ooh-zeh-REE-es). These are casual places that specialize in many different types of ouzo, but even more importantly are popular for their sumptuous array of appetizers known as [mezethes](#) (meh-ZEH-thes).

These savory small plates of food are an essential component of the social side of ouzo drinking. Despite its strong flavor, ouzo compliments many different types of food and the [mezze](#) menu will often be long and varied.



Chilled ouzo

You can book a [food tour](#) or [cooking class in Athens](#) on www.tastecapade.com

Contributor: Disha Samaiyar



What To Eat in Spain

The regions of Spain are home to a vast variety of unique cultures and cuisines from Spanish cuisine is all about making the most of fresh, local produce. While in Barcelona and Madrid, the two major tourist destinations in Spain, we felt lucky to be exposed to a host of fresh and rich flavors from cured meats of Andalusian cuisine to the fresh seafoods of Basque country. We spend our first three days of travel in Spain in Barcelona, the eastern port city that is home to many of the stunning and distinctive architectural works of Catalanian Antoni Gaudi, such as the world-famous Sagrada Familia.

Leones Restaurant is a cute, tavern style restaurant located right across from the Tryp Apollo Hotel where we stayed on Para-lel Avenue. The hotel was a stone's throw walk from the ocean side as well as La Rambla – a road full of shops and road-side eateries where one can drink large pitchers of Sangria and eat paella while people watching. Hungry from the long flight, we stepped into this restaurant not knowing what to expect. We ordered grilled rabbit legs, pork chops, as well as a massive pan of Arros Negre – a Paella kind of dish consisting of Paella rice, chicken and seafood infused in squid ink – a Catalanian and Valencian specialty. The food was really delicious and we cleaned out the entire pan!



Grilled rabbit at the Leones Restaurant in Barcelona. The meat was tender with a herb-infused crunch to it.



Arros Negre is a Catalan and Valencian dish made traditionally with cuttlefish and rice. It gets its black color from squid ink.



We polished off the paella!

As for nightlife, Barcelona's is booming but we couldn't entirely handle the standard Spanish going out hours of around 1 am – 6 am so we settled for a good time at what became our favorite Pinchos bars. These kind of bars are very unique to Basque country and northern Spain, but a small street leading off of Para-lel Avenue had several to choose from. Tasqueta de Blai seemed the most happening and least pretentious with its wonderful selection of Beatles remixes, cozy atmosphere and friendly waiters and bartenders. Pinchos bars basically offer a wide selection of pinchos, small snacks (usually sliders with different fillings) that line the counter. One can then select how ever many one wants for usually 1 euro each. We ate about 6 a night for 3 nights along with a lovely glass of white Cava wine to drown them down.



Pinchos bars are popular in northern Spain and especially in Basque country. This particular bar Tasqueta de Blai in Barcelona was a gem of a find!





Goat's cheese and jamon iberico and mayonaise and Spanish pork sausage pinchos





Cava wine is produced in Catalonia. It is a sparkling wine that can be white or rose. Caves were used in the early days of cava production for the preservation or aging of wine. Catalan winemakers officially adopted the term in 1970 to distinguish their product from French champagne

Three days later, we arrived in Madrid, the capital city of Spain. It felt much more official and traditionally Spanish as could be seen in the architectural styles. The palaces and town squares were beautiful with their grand, symmetrical and imposing facades. Right next to Plaza Mayor, one of the major squares in Madrid within walking distance from my hotel, is the Mercada de San Miguel – an absolute foodie heaven. It showcases cuisine from all over the country from pinchos to tapas to small bowls of paella. Our favorites were El Pescado fish bar and the Mozzarella and Burrata cheese specialty counters.





The Mozzarella and Burrata fresh cheese tapas bar inside Mercado de San Miguel



My favorite shop inside the market – a seafood tapas bar that sold each tapa for only 1 Euro. The herring with avocado paste was the best fish we ever had





Fresh Mozzarella cheese with caramelized onions and speck (Italian juniper-flavored ham) and mint on a soft baguette

The next stop was the iconic Chocolateria San Gines just a few blocks away right next to Cathedral San Gines. The church was surrounded by a beautiful shaded courtyard. Inside this courtyard, we came across the Chocolateria which happens to be the most authentic spot for churros con chocolat in the city and we could see why. From the moment we stepped in, we were treated with such gracious warmth and hospitality and the waiter kindly informed us of the popular choices. We went for the crowd favorite – chocolat con churros which are 7 fat churros with a cup of the richest, thickest most delicious liquid chocolate in the Spanish way: thick and dark.





Hot chocolate served in Spanish style and churros

The final stop was Lolos Polos – a popular popsicle stop in the hipster neighborhoods of Madrid. We had a delicious fruit-sicle and continued through this wondrous city steeped in historical grandeur, meeting many friendly local faces and thoroughly enjoying our Spanish adventure.





Lolos Polos – a famous popsicle store in the Malasanas hipster neighborhood of Madrid





Pear and redcurrant popsicle. Other flavors included pistachio, blueberry banana, and chocolate churro