

APRIL 2009

FOOD ARTS

AT THE RESTAURANT AND HOTEL FOREFRONT

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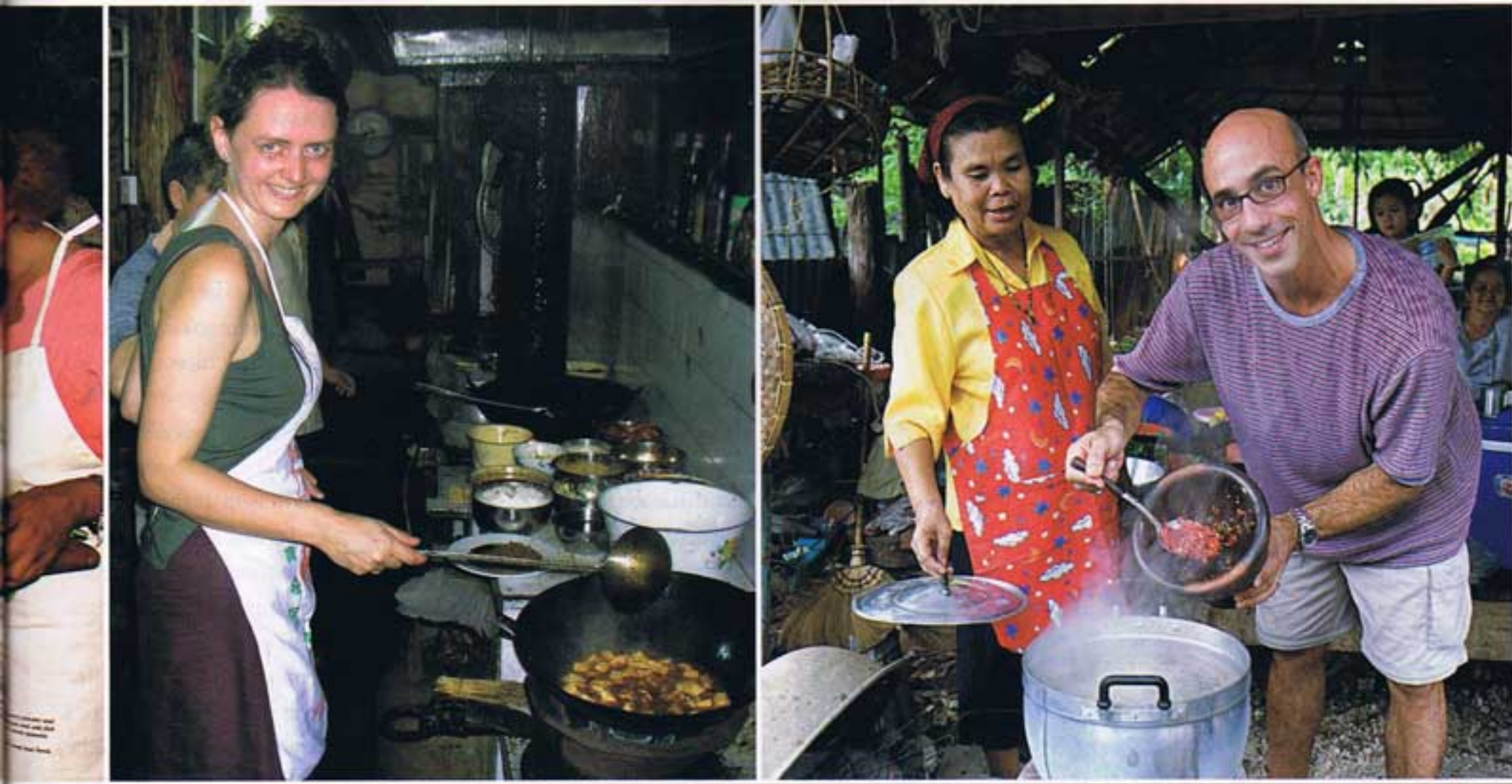
A photograph of a restaurant tray featuring three sliders with beef patties, lettuce, tomato, and cheese on buns, each topped with a cherry. In the background, there is a tall glass of beer with a thick head of foam, a basket of golden french fries, and a martini glass filled with a red liquid and garnished with a cherry. A small white bowl containing pickles is also visible on the tray.

HOT STUFF:
GASTROTOURISM
VINTAGE DRINKS & DINNERS
COST CUTTING ECO-GEAR

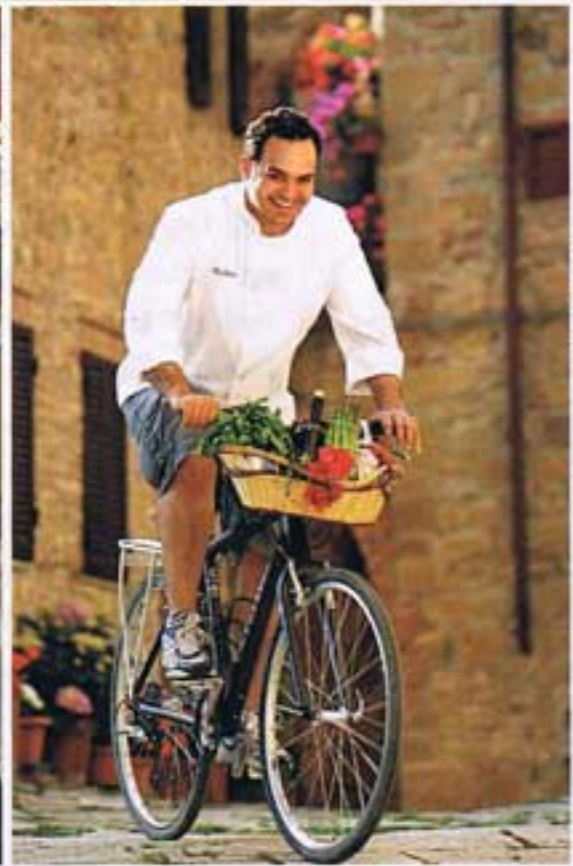


HUNGRY FOR TRAVEL





TRAVELING STOMACH GREAT NEWS FOR GASTRONAUTS: CULINARY TOURISM IS ONE OF THE FASTEST GROWING SEGMENTS OF THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY TODAY. BUT WHAT IS IT, EXACTLY, AND WHY IS IT SO POPULAR? WHO ARE THE INDUSTRY LEADERS, HOW CAN CHEFS GET INVOLVED, AND WHAT'S THE NEXT HOT PLACE? JULIE MAUTNER REPORTS. ➤





Overleaf, top row: In Chiapas, Mexico, Rick Bayless' group learned to make *cochito al horno*. Photo by Ignacio Urquiza. CIA Worlds of Flavor group at the Four Seasons Cooking School in Thailand. Photo by Michael Coon. Fuchsia Dunlop in China. Robert Danhi making hot-and-sour *tom yum* soup in Thailand. Overleaf, second row: CIA group led by Julie Sahni exploring an Indian market. Photo by Michael Coon. On Tour de Forks trip, chef Franck Quinton with mushrooms. Salt flats of Sicily were a highlight of a Nancy Harmon Jenkins-led CIA trip. Photo by Michael Coon. Mojitos with pomegranate seeds refreshed Bayless' staff in Mexico. Overleaf, bottom row: Carving up squash in a Chilean market. Photo by Andrey Wood. Bayless teaching Tausend's group how to make Chiapanecan tamales. Photo by Ignacio Urquiza. Chef Matt Abdoo on Bike Riders Tours in Italy. Photo by Erik Jacobs. Patricia Quintana and Fren and Marilyn Tausend at a wedding in Teotitlan. Photo by Ignacio Urquiza. Above: Chef Claudio Piantini's gnocchi class with the International Kitchen.

Every year, Chicago chef **Rick Bayless** heads to a different region in Mexico and takes staff from his two restaurants, **Frontera Grill** and **Topolobampo**, with him. The tours are time-consuming to plan and expensive to pull off. Even though staffers pay \$500 each (managers go free), the average trip costs Bayless around \$30,000. Yet he thinks the cost is well worth it.

"These trips have been one of the most valuable training tools ever," he says. "When a server is talking to a guest about the menu, how great is it that he can say, 'You should try this. I just got back from the Yucatán, and we had this there and it was truly wonderful.'?"

But Bayless' appetite for travel goes way beyond merely wanting to sell more quesadillas. "Learning about other cultures is vital," he believes. "Whenever I'm asked by a young hopeful chef, 'What is the best bit of advice you can give me?', my response is always 'before you go to culinary school—travel.' Every time I travel it refuels me. I come back to work with fresh eyes, even after 22 years."

Bayless is one of the many chefs who has found a way to incorporate a passion for travel into an already busy career, one that, in his case, includes cookbooks, food products, TV shows,

cooking classes, consulting, and charity work. In addition to his staff trips, Bayless also hosts culinary tours to Mexico organized by The Culinary Institute of America and Marilyn Tausend's company, Culinary Adventures. Today, growing numbers of consumers are intensely interested in food- and wine-themed travel, and Bayless and other food pros are jumping in to help satisfy the craving.

New York City-based cookbook author and cooking teacher Gail Monaghan recently teamed up with "travel architects" Brown & Hudson to offer a series of culinary trips, beginning with two to Puglia next month; future destinations will likely include Andalusia, Vietnam, and Morocco. Monaghan brings the culinary expertise and database of loyal clients; Brown & Hudson bring years of bespoke trip-planning experience in the luxury travel industry. Designed for both pros and consumers, the tours include classes with Michelin-starred chefs, meals at important restaurants, visits with food producers and winemakers, and more.

Santa Fe-based chef/author/culinary consultant **Mark Miller** is another legendary traveler who visits an average of 30 countries each year. While some of his voyages are purely for fun—like the two weeks he recently spent horseback riding in Mongolia—most are designed for intensive tasting, for his consulting clients (which include Coca-Cola, Heinz, Darden, and the Pei Wei division of P.F. Chang's), or for personal projects (such as books). It's not unusual for Miller to try 50 different foods and six restaurants in a typical day on the road.

"Chefs need to cook from taste memory, ultimately, and not just cookbooks or recipes," Miller believes. "If you want to be a good cook, you need to continually train your palate. The ability to know whether something's right or wrong comes from personal perceptual experience, which requires an understanding of flavors, spices, cooking techniques, flavor combinations, and ingredients. You don't get that in cooking school—those things can only be fully learned through experience in those actual culinary cultures."

The World Future Society calls globalization "the master trend" that will drive the food world in years to come. Indeed, if you listen to the experts, the chef who stays put in his kitchen these days runs the risk of becoming roadkill. "The future of American cooking is world cooking," proclaims **Greg Drescher** of the CIA. "Any chef who sees himself as a leader, trend-setter, artist, or fully competent craftsman needs to get out and experience these flavors."

To that end, Drescher launched the CIA's travel program called **Worlds of Flavor**, in partnership with Viking Range. Now 10 years old, the program currently offers 12 trips, each led by a nationally recognized chef, writer, or other food expert. Current destinations include Mexico, the Mediterranean, India, and Southeast Asia. Due to the current economic downturn, future trips have been put on hold and are being evaluated based on traveler interest. The trips, Drescher says, are typically "a happy mix of chefs, other professionals, and enthusiasts."

"Tasting a spring roll on the streets of Saigon or fish curry from a riceboat in Kerala sure beats watching it on TV," says Michael Coon, who coordinates the CIA program.

Coon estimates there are 5,000 or so different culinary trips

and classes out there today and believes the industry has yet to reach saturation. "It's hard to anticipate what this next year will bring in terms of growth," he says, "but trends reveal that people are more and more concerned about the quality of the food they eat and where it's grown. As we continue to raise our awareness, my guess is that food and travel adventures will increase exponentially to meet this demand."

Why foodie travel...and why now? Google the words "culinary travel" and you'll see the vast number and range of opportunities out there today for the food-centric traveler. Cooking classes in every corner of the world. Tours focused on specific regions and cuisines. Culinary-themed itineraries on cruise ships. Food- and wine-themed packages at hotels. The list goes on and on. And while not necessarily designed for the trade, many are serious enough to satisfy professionals.

The industry has expanded so widely, in fact, that it now even has its own trade group, the International Culinary Tourism Association, founded in 2003 to help businesses, groups, and destinations package and promote their wares. In just five years, ICTA president and CEO Erik Wolf has signed up 14,000 members. Wolf also publishes a weekly newsletter and a Web site, called FoodTrekker.com, which he hopes will soon serve as a central clearinghouse for culinary tours of all types.

"Culinary tourism is definitely a growing segment of the industry," says Judith von Prockl of Gourmet on Tour, which offers 80 different "gourmet holidays" and cooking classes taught by a network of 200 chefs. "These trips allow you to get to know a country through its food and to meet local people—something most tourists don't get to do."

Still other factors impacting the industry's growth are the availability of cheap air travel and the shifting geopolitical landscape: witness the current popularity of Vietnam and China, for example, two countries that were virtually impossible to explore 30 years ago. Plus, we've had years of a booming economy and unprecedented amounts of discretionary income, allowing more leisure travel. (At this point it's hard to measure the effects the current downturn is likely to cause.) Experiential travel in general—doing rather than seeing—is hot everywhere in tourism today.

"When they want to learn new dishes or a new cuisine, chefs and home cooks turn first to cookbooks and cooking classes," says Arlene Feltman Sailhac, who sold her cooking school, DeGustibus at Macy's, last year to start a tour company called Foodophiles. "Then, if they want to learn more, they travel."

A taste of what's available Despite an already crowded playing field, Feltman Sailhac's concept has been a success from the start. After 28 years with DeGustibus, she had one of the best Rolodexes in the business, filled with top chefs and scores of serious foodies willing to pay to learn from them. (Being married to chef **Alain Sailhac**, French Culinary Institute dean, doesn't hurt either.) "I definitely had a following of consumers and chefs interested in traveling," she says.

Her first trip was actually in 2002, six years before she sold DeGustibus, when she asked chef **Cesare Casella** to lead a group to Italy. "Cesare shared *bis* Lucca with us," Feltman Sailhac recalls, "which included his mother, his aunt, and about 300 cousins, neighbors, and friends joining us at various stages of the trip." The group stayed in a big farmhouse, took cooking classes, and made daily food and wine forays to neighboring hill towns.

Feltman Sailhac says this "great beginning" prompted her to offer one such trip each year; she has since done Piedmont, Provence, Sicily, Alsace, and Champagne. Last year, her clients "wanted to go domestic" so she offered Santa Fe; next up will be the Lowcountry, Maine, and Sonoma. This summer she'll take groups to Trieste, Croatia, and Slovenia, with Turkey lined up for next year. All trips are chef-driven and feature lots of local talent.

In the 20-plus years she's been guiding foodies in Mexico, Marilyn Tausend has watched her clients grow increasingly sophisticated. "When I first started Culinary Adventures in 1987," she says, "it was the first time for many of my clients to go to a foreign country. Now most of them travel a great deal. It's not unusual for me to be in a van listening to one person talk about their recent trip to India or South Africa while another counters with their experiences in Antarctica and Peru." ➤



Tausend's friend and legendary Zapotecan cook Abigail Mendoza frothing an *atole* (a corn/chocolate-based pre-Hispanic beverage) for photo workshop participants. Photo by Ignacio Urquiza.



Top: Hunting for truffles in Piedmont with Feltman Sailhac's Foodophiles. Center: Epicurean Ways travelers took in a specialty ham shop in Barcelona. Above: Bayless' staff get their arms around an authentic Mexican meal in San Miguel de Allende.

With a lifelong interest in Hispanic culture, Tausend writes cookbooks and consults to companies such as Jose Cuervo, Goya, Nestlé, and Taco Bell. Once a year, she designs a trip specifically for chefs, usually with two cooking classes a day. The trips are open to 12 chefs at a time, and many of her clients return year after year. Tausend also creates specialized trips and programs for other groups, such as the CIA, the International Association of Culinary Professionals, and for Bayless, who taps into her expertise. This year, she'll lead six trips.

Fuchsia Dunlop, a London-based China and Hong Kong expert who designs and leads tours for the CIA and clients such as the U.K. retailer Marks and Spencer, is another cookbook author who helps both consumers and chefs with travel plans. Having worked,

studied, and traveled extensively in various regions of China, she acts as a translator and guide for cooking classes, dining out, shopping and market tours, and other excursions that "make the most of the culinary opportunities."

"I speak the language of the professional Chinese kitchen," she says. "I can translate and explain in a way a normal guide or translator can not."

Dunlop says one of her biggest joys is helping non-Chinese travelers appreciate more unusual Chinese foods by encouraging a change in attitude. "For example, fermented bean curd has a strong ripe smell and an intense taste that can be disconcerting or even disgusting for the uninitiated," she explains. "But I've found that if I can get Americans or Europeans to think of it as a kind of Chinese blue cheese (equally smelly and strong tasting), they find it more acceptable. The same goes for dark brown preserved duck eggs. For most Westerners, the idea of a blackened cured duck egg is revolting, but it's easier to take if they think about how moldy cow's milk blue cheese would sound to someone Chinese—and yet how delicious it tastes."

Another expert on Asia is Los Angeles-based chef Robert Danhi, who's been traveling in Southeast Asia since he met his wife there 20 years ago. For the past four years he's been leading culinary tours for small groups of chefs, many of them members of Research Chefs of America, and other food professionals to Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore. "I take no more than 10 so we can all fit around one table," Danhi explains.

Gerry Dawes has 35 years' experience in Spain, including eight years living there. For the past decade he's averaged six trips a year, for a total of perhaps 100 trips. When it comes to Spanish food and wine, he's the "go to" guy for the media, and he's frequently asked to design and guide trips for journalists, food manufacturers, and chefs. Over the years he has traveled with Mark Miller, Michael Lomonaco, Thomas Keller, Jimmy Schmidt, Norman Van Aken, and Terrance Brennan, among others. (Brennan calls his trip with Dawes "one of the two greatest gastronomic experiences of my life.") Dawes arranges everything from special lunches and dinners to full-blown 10 day city-to-city extravaganzas. He also does scheduled culinary and wine tours to Spain through Epicurean Ways, a Virginia-based Spain specialist.

Based in Santiago, Liz Caskey is an American food and wine writer who has lived in Chile for the past eight years and traveled extensively throughout South America. In 2001 she launched her boutique travel business leading food- and wine-focused tours in Chile and Argentina; she recently added Uruguay. Currently at work on a Chilean cookbook, Caskey believes her country is poised to become the next hot food and wine destination—and she loves providing the insiders' view.

"Chile has gotten much press for its excellent wines, but the country's food charms have yet to be discovered," she says. "The peculiar geography—nestled between the Andes and Pacific—creates varied microclimates with a cornucopia of fresh ingredients, combined with a unique mix of European heritage and native roots. The ingredients, lifestyle, geography, and traditions

make Chile feel like a New World Provence or Rioja—but more wild, untouched, undiscovered.”

Caskey's particular passion is Chilean food artisans: colonial sweets bakers on haciendas, cheesemakers, *manjar* (dulce de leche) experts, biodynamic and organic farmers. “We do a baking class with an outdoor mud oven for empanadas and a slew of rustic breads,” she says. We learn to cook *pastel de choclo* [corn pie], the national dish, in clay pots; we visit fishermen and salt flats and eat oysters and hit a rodeo with *asados* [barbecues] and see the *trilla*, where live horses are enlisted to separate freshly harvested wheat berries from the stalk.”

Karen Herbst of the International Kitchen offers 90 different culinary trips, most of which she organizes herself. Herbst says two



Bourdain with Danya Alhamrani in his show's *FAN-atic* episode. Her video proposing Saudi Arabia as a destination was picked out of thousands submitted. Photo by Nari Kye/Travel Channel.

Where's Tony? The idea of eating like a local is taken to the extreme in the Travel Channel show *No Reservations*, now in its fifth season. In filming 60 or so episodes, host chef **Anthony Bourdain** has nibbled his way through 50 countries, eating everything from bat, warthog, and putrefied shark to the raw eyeball of a bloody seal carcass off a kitchen floor. “I don't even know what unusual means anymore,” he reports. “I've yet to turn anything down flat, although I have declined seconds.” We were curious which countries he liked best and where he'd like to go next.

“Italy and Sardinia are my obsession of sorts,” he replied, “and I'd love to get back to both Cuba and Beirut. I plan to continue exploring China. My chef friends are still hitting Spain hard but also are increasingly headed to Japan and Singapore. Singapore is the Next Big Thing every year. So is Colombia, which has really exciting food—a mix of Afro-Caribbean, Spanish, and indigenous—and shockingly good. I hear the food in Iran is fantastic. And it's always a joy to return to Vietnam, which is maybe the best travel destination on Earth: it's different, it's far away, the food's great, everyone loves to eat, and everyone loves to cook.” —J.M.



Bike Riders Tours sample two kinds of Pecorino di Pienza cheese. Photo by Erik Jacobs.

of the newer trends are combining food with other interests—she offers “opera and cuisine” or “watercolors, wine, and cooking,” among others—and culinary excursions for families: among the 3,000 or so customers she booked this year are quite a few families with small children.

Melissa Joachim traveled the world for three years before founding *Tour de Forks* in 2001. Today she offers “Uncommon Epicurean Adventures” to Italy, France, Australia, and India and reports that Sicily is her biggest seller. “Rome, Florence, and Venice are perennially popular,” she reports, “but Puglia, Emilia-Romagna, and Piedmont appeal to our more sophisticated travelers, as do Normandy and Brittany in France. Joachim has also gotten a great response to her Southern India trip, to Tamil Nadu and Kerala. “Each has distinctive traditions and exceptional cuisine,” she reports. Coming up are new programs in Turkey (Istanbul and Cappadocia), Argentina (Mendoza region), Martinique, Tasmania, and a tour of South Africa's Cape region with New York City-based Michelin-starred chef **Anita Lo**.

Relying entirely on word of mouth, cookbook author Eleanor Ostman started leading trips years ago for her food-writer friends, who told *their* friends, who brought their families, and so on. Her next one, to Egypt in September, will be her 51st foray, and it's open to the public. It includes six nights in Cairo and a seven day Nile cruise. “As a food writer, I know how to find interesting places to eat and food experiences that make my trips special,” she says simply.

When it comes to choosing a trip, solid research is key. Web sites such as Egullet.com encourage the sharing of tips and experiences by travelers. Wolf at the ICTA suggests checking for Certified Culinary Tourism Professional certification. “Be sure you're doing business with a trained professional,” he cautions.

“Be very careful when selecting a company,” adds Herbst. “It's easy to start a business without credentials or experience, and there are countless examples of that on the Internet today. Caveat emptor!”

How to get there So you've decided it's time for a trip. Now what? How can you get the most rewarding experience, the

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For a chef or restaurateur, the easiest and cheapest way to travel, of course, is to be invited, meaning to be "hosted" by a government tourist office, a food manufacturer, a wine importer, or a trade group. Sometimes these groups host lots of travel, other years none at all. The understanding, implied or explicit, is that you'll give something back: buy the products, promote the region, load your wine list up with their labels.

Another option is to sing for your supper. Bike and walking tour companies, hotels, tour operators, and restaurants all use guest chefs. Cruise lines, more than anyone else, offer free travel opportunities for chefs (see BREAD UPON THE WATERS). They pay your way and, in return, you cook, do demos, lead market tours, or what have you. Seven years ago, for example, **Sandy and Angie D'Amato** (Sanford, Milwaukee) began joining Bike Riders Tours on an eight day France or Italy trip each fall. Last year they went to Puglia, this year it will be Burgundy; all expenses are paid except for Angie's airfare. "My job is to be the food ambassador," Sandy explains. "Angie and I bike with the guests, pointing out 'look, a fig tree' or 'this is wild rosemary,' et cetera. I conduct a market day cooking class that concludes with a grand dinner, using all the wines and products picked up along the route. We've made many wonderful friends over the years this way and have seen parts of Europe that we probably wouldn't have otherwise."

Yet another option is to hire a culinary travel specialist to custom-design a trip for you. These folks can tell you where to stay, make restaurant reservations, arrange cooking classes and kitchen tours, hook you up with local food pros, open the doors to private cellars, arrange tastings, get you a *stage*, find you the right guide, and even escort you for a portion or all of your trip. Prices and fees vary greatly so shop around; here are a few names to get you started:

- Bike Riders Tours (www.bikeriderstours.com)
- Celia Brown in London (www.celiabrooksbrown.com)
- Philippe Brown in Europe (www.brownandbudson.com)
- Liz Caskey in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay (www.lizcaskey.com)
- Robert Danhi in Asia (robert@chefdanhi.com)
- Gerry Dawes in Spain (www.gerrydawesspain.blogspot.com)
- Greg Drescher, Worlds of Flavor (www.thevikinglife.com)
- Fuchsia Dunlop in China/Hong Kong (www.fuchsiadunlop.com)
- Arlene Feltman Sailhac, Foodophiles (grrcooks@aol.com)
- Karen Herbst (www.theinternationalkitchen.com)
- Melissa Joachim (www.tourdeforks.com)
- Wendy Lyn in France (www.wendy-lyn.com)
- Gail Monaghan (www.gailmonaghan.com)
- Eleanor Ostman (eaostman@aol.com)
- Marilyn Tausend in Mexico (www.marilyntausend.com)
- Judith von Prockl (www.gourmetontour.com)
- Liz Young in New York City (www.lizyoungtours.com)
- Faith Willinger in Italy (www.faithwillinger.com)
- Erik Wolf (www.culinarytourism.org)

Finally, there are industry groups that periodically offer organized trips specifically for professionals. Since 1979, Gruppo Ristoratori Italiani (gruppo.com), an association of Italian restaurateurs in North America, has hosted an annual trip to Italy, just prior to Vinitaly, the large wine expo. (The group went to Puglia late last month.) "We go to learn about new products, new dishes, new techniques," says GRI chairman **Tony May** of San Domenico in New York City. "We bring back ideas. These trips allow us to keep up with what's happening with Italian food and wine." The group usually numbers 35 to 45 people, May says, and the trips are open to GRI members, industry pros, and "amateurs who love Italian cuisine." ■