

Taste of Travel

SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA TRAVEL WRITERS

FALL 2017



FOOD STORIES & PHOTOS FROM AROUND THE WORLD



**“The best education for a clever man
can be found in travel.”**

—Goethe



STU & JANET WILSON — CHINA



DAVID GREITZER — GERMANY



LAURIE MCANDISH KING — CROATIA



APRIL ORCUTT — PERU

You don't have to cook fancy or complicated masterpieces—
just good food from fresh ingredients.

—Julia Child



JIM SHUBIN — JAPAN

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.

WANDA HENNIG — PORTO, PORTUGAL



President's Message

Culinary encounters are an integral part of the travel experience and often one of the highlights of any getaway. Many travelers plan their journeys around wine regions, world-renowned restaurants or local cuisine. Whether you want to sample the most popular street food, explore a region's indigenous fare or try the most exquisite examples of fine dining, the professional and award-winning travel journalists of San Francisco's Bay Area Travel Writers (BATW) have a treat for you.

Food is one of the most tangible representations of a culture, and the most resilient. Languages change, borders shift, but recipes are forever. When on the road, trying a local dish is one of the most direct, and most delicious, ways to interact with a



new place. International food is as varied as the people who eat it, while domestic cuisine is as diverse as the melting pot that makes up the American population.

In these pages you will enjoy fascinating stories about the culinary adventures from some of our most celebrated journalists. Dine on Thai street food like coconut griddle cakes (“little mounds of heaven”) and rombutans (the fruit is a small red ball with wiry black hairs growing out of it), discover the joys of an exquisitely simple meal in a French backyard, or party in a “parklet” as close to home as Berkeley’s Gourmet Ghetto.

Happy Travels and Cheers,
—Molly Blaisdell, BATW President

Contributors

- | | | | |
|----|----------------------|----|--------------------------|
| 6 | Joan Gelfand | 46 | Alec Scott |
| 8 | Joan Aragon | 48 | Wanda Hennig |
| 12 | Lee Foster | 50 | Janet Wilson |
| 16 | Carol Canter | | Stuart Wilson |
| 18 | Rhonda Gutenberg | 54 | David Greitzer |
| 20 | Stephanie Levin | 56 | Carol Terwilliger Meyers |
| 22 | Lee Daley | 58 | Diane Covington-Carter |
| 24 | Jules Older | 60 | Donna Peck |
| 26 | John Compisi | 64 | John Poimiroo |
| 28 | Effin Older | 66 | Jacqueline Harmon Butler |
| 30 | Susan Alcorn | 68 | Wendy VanHatten |
| 32 | Carolyn Hansen | 70 | Diane LeBow |
| 34 | Laurie McAndish King | 72 | Jim Shubin |
| 36 | Al Auger | 74 | Monica Conrady |
| 40 | Beverly Mann | 76 | Barbara L. Steinberg |
| 42 | April Orcutt | 78 | Laura Deutsch |
| 44 | John Montgomery | | |

Joan Gelfand

Bangkok Street Food Finds and Fine Dining

Tour ancient temples, climb endless flights of steps to view a solid gold Buddha, peek at small chedis (sacred relics), stroll (or jog) through miles of tree-shaded paths in public gardens and parks, and you will be a hungry traveler.

Not to worry. In Bangkok, food is available around the clock. Unlike Europe, where dining times are strictly prescribed, Thais like to eat pretty much all the time. Food stalls get busy around 8 a.m. and don't close down until after 11 p.m. A wide variety of foods are on offer for ridiculously modest sums.

While there is much to see and do in Bangkok, one of the visual, aural and olfactory pleasures is watching street vendors prepare and serve exotic, tasty food. Travel guides, blogs and locals assured us that street food is safe in Thailand. Health codes apply and the cooking temperatures are high—extra insurance of food safety.

While all that is true, we approached this new sport with caution but eventually graduated to become food stall pros.

To start off: fresh-squeezed juice stands are on every busy street corner—near temples, BTS stations and universities. Our first sip of fresh pomegranate juice delivered a sweet tang, a welcome palate-pleasing surprise that quickly eased our anxiety about street food. We moved on to roasted nuts, crisp cashews hot off the grill with just the perfect amount of salt and smoke.

Near the Grand Palace and Amulet Market is the station for ferries—or longboats—that take locals and tourists up and down the Chao Phraya River. There, an open-air market serves delectable treats that range from soups to noodle dishes (variations on pad thai) and grilled pork and chicken skewers. Street food runs the gamut from pedestrian to haute.

We learned to ask questions. If the vendor doesn't speak English, someone nearby surely will. Or, take a Thai street food tour. In the Silom area, we were advised to visit the market around the corner from the hotel, Silom Soi 7. (Sois are the fascinating small streets between the wide boulevards. Away from noise and traffic, treasures abound.)

One early morning, the temperature had already climbed into the eighties, but the ladies in their flowered aprons busily tended their woks. We started with batter-fried kombucha. The sweet gourd is cut into small pieces, dipped in a rice-flour batter and deep fried. Also in this market was a stall with a variety of egg dishes (over easy, scrambled, omelettes) and noodle, vegetable and rice dishes. A mixed plate could be had for about 50 cents. Basil, lemon grass and fish sauce are used to season most sautéed dishes. Chicken and eggs are fresh and tasty.

Fried chicken is a category unto itself. We traveled with our friend Alan, a self-proclaimed fried chicken aficionado. He blessed Thai fried chicken as the best he had ever eaten, with a crispy rice-flour skin covering juicy meat, and his enthusiasm converted me.

The Silom Soi 7 market also holds stands that serve soups with rich meat broths, roasted duck and coconut griddle cakes, little mounds of heaven. On the street outside the market we found a vendor with a small grill selling salt-roasted fish. The salt makes for a crispy skin that keeps the fish from drying out over the high heat.

We watched a tiny Thai woman prepare green papaya salad, pounding herbs into a thick paste with a long wooden pestle. When she was satisfied with her paste, she tossed in shredded papaya and, on the plate, added fresh peanuts and dried shrimp. For one dollar, our plate fed four, a wonderful mix of sour and sweet, tangy and tart.

Fresh fruit fans can satisfy themselves with small plastic bags of cut mango, pineapple and mangosteens, with a flavor that's a cross between a crisp apple and a peach. The price for these and bags of durian and watermelon is 25 cents.

Also available are rombutans, a food paradox that is nasty looking but incredibly tasty. The fruit is a small, angry red ball with wiry black hairs growing out of it. Beneath the skin is a clear, gemlike fruit similar to a lychee but a bit more complex in flavor. Its taste is somewhere between pineapple and coconut, sweet with just a hint of tart.

Other food market specialties are sautéed morning

Joan Gelfand is the author of three poetry collections and a chapbook of short fiction. Her work also appears in national and international journals and anthologies. She is a member of the National Book Critics Circle.



glories (they look like broccolini stalks and taste sweeter), sticky rice in banana leaf, grilled corn, and dozens of meat and vegetable stir fries.

Like eating French cheese in France, dining on these specialties in a Thai market is an elevated culinary experience because you are so close to the source of the local meat, eggs, vegetables, fish, herbs and spices.

While you're enjoying delectable treats on the streets, with passersby, traffic and motorbikes humming by, don't forget that you can also enjoy a Michelin-star, world-class meal. At dinnertime, we found that we craved the quiet and peaceful surroundings of a sit-down restaurant.

Keep in mind that Mondays are street cleaning days, when most vendors stay home. Key food market areas are at Petchaburi Soi 5, Victory Monument, Chinatown (Yaowarat) and Charoen Krung Road.

Here are our favorite off-the-beaten-path finds:

Sra Bua: Have you ever been offered eight starters when you ordered an a la carte meal?

www.kempinski.com/en/bangkok/siam-hotel/dining/restaurants/sra-bua-by-kiin-kiin

Namsaah Bottling Company: A fun and hip bar and restaurant. www.namsaah.com

East Side Story & Sala: Our friend guided us down a small side alley directly across from Wat Po, where we were delighted to find a hipster restaurant not mentioned in the guidebooks. East Side Story is located on the same alley as the more elegant Sala. Both are on the river, with large decks and tables with umbrellas. We spent a delightful hour at East Side Story one warm December afternoon gazing at the colorful longboats drifting up and down the Chao Phraya River.

Loy Nava Dinner Cruise: Also missing from the guidebooks was the small, romantic teak ship that picks you up at the dock near the BTS station near Grand Palace. Along with the seven-course tasting menu (\$35), we enjoyed live Thai music and a performance by dancers in traditional Thai garb. A beautiful souvenir booklet handed to you when you board describes sights and monuments seen on the cruise. www.loynava.com

Joan Aragone

Discovering Street Food in Beijing

This story appears at www.joanaragone.com.

Travel is about taking chances. Call it intelligent risk-taking. And with a little research, the risks are worth it. I learned this when I lived in Beijing in the late 1980s when, on my first bike trip alone through the city, I stopped to sample street food—a major “no no” then for travelers in Asia. My plan had been to ride on Christmas morning from the foreigners’ compound in northwest Beijing to the cathedral 10 miles across town and stop “somewhere” for breakfast. What was I thinking? For the Chinese, this was a regular workday, the streets mobbed with cycling commuters in navy and dark-green parkas. And, as I rode, I found no cafes, only long stretches of dusty lots, drab storefronts featuring electrical wiring, and blocks of ugly cement high-rises.

Until the People’s Republic was founded in 1949, street vending had been as much a part of Chinese life as firecrackers on New Year’s. But, in slumber mode for decades, it was only now beginning to awaken. Thus, no cafes.

Hunger pangs were strong when I spotted by the side of the road a ragtag group in heavy padded army coats and fuzzy-lined wool hats gathered around a battered tin oil drum. They were barbecuing meat on tiny bamboo skewers. Others sold tired looking vegetables from tables or plopped into their mouths pieces of steaming hot yams that had been roasted in another drum. It was a neighborhood market. Perhaps here I’d find my brunch. “If street food is going to be safe anywhere in China, it will be safe in Beijing,” locals joked. “So many secret police and government agents work undercover, vendors wouldn’t dare sell unsafe food for fear of being arrested.” That belief plus smart advice from a student—“Only eat in a restaurant that’s crowded”—buoyed me, so I followed a long line in front of a wooden stove on wheels, reminiscent of hot bagel stands in the U.S. Behind the glass, a man in a greasy apron stood in front of a griddle made from a flat stone that was heated from underneath by hot coals. Nearby, happy customers chewed on what looked like huge crepe sandwiches, filled with egg and dripping hot sauce and oil.

I watched the cook make each order on the spot, the ingredients lined up in plastic cartons in front of him: eggs, oil, chopped scallions, salt, hot sauce and

fried bread. For each order, he moistened the flat stone griddle with oil from a plastic bottle, then brushed a beaten egg mixture over the surface. As the egg began to harden he flipped it with a spatula, brushed the soft side with spicy hot sauce, and sprinkled it with salt and fresh scallions. Speed was essential. He flipped it again, then grabbed a strip of the twisted, seasoned bread and placed it in the center of the crepe, folded it around the bread like an envelope, and—voila!—a hot meal for 75 fen or about three U.S. cents. I watched for a long time and finally joined the line, the only foreigner in sight.

“One,” I ordered, using the universal sign language—fingers. Ditto for how many eggs. He broke the egg and brushed it across the hot stone griddle, forming a large thin crepe that filled the flat stone. In seconds he turned it over, brushed it with sauce, and sprinkled it with salt and fresh green onion. The crowd watched, clapping gloved hands together to keep warm. As he placed the fried bread in the center of the crepe, he asked again in sign language if I wanted more hot sauce, “Yes,” I said. “Hot or extra hot?” “Extra.” He gave a wide grin and with a flourish dipped his brush into the second jar of chili and ran it over my bread. Then he folded it up, wrapped it in brown paper and handed it to me. The crowd grinned. “Thumbs up” all around.

“Hao chi,” they said. “Good food.”

I remember biting into a hot, steamy mouthful of soft egg and slightly salty bread flavored with a spicy chili flavor I had never tasted before and the taste of tart green onions. Hot, spicy, light and fluffy all at once, the flavors mingled in my mouth, soothed my stomach and filled my cold body with warmth. I grinned in pleasure and the crowd again gave the “thumbs up” sign. Oil dripping down my cheeks, I devoured the huge concoction, wiping my face with my gloves and the paper towelette I had brought from the U.S. I had eaten my first “jian bing,” or fried crepe.

After topping off brunch with water from my plastic bottle, I got back on the bike and headed downtown, waiting apprehensively for the muscle cramps and nausea to begin. They never did. That started my investigation of Beijing street food. I learned local inspection techniques: food cooked in boiling water or oil is probably safe; avoid raw vegetables; follow crowds. And to evaluate a “jian bing” cook? Check for cleanliness. Did he work alone or with a partner who handles the money? If alone, avoid. Did he wear

gloves? Check which cooks are generous with ingredients and who offer extra-hot sauce. Some cooks gave foreigners only mild sauce in the belief that “big noses” were unable to withstand real Chinese heat.

Eventually I sampled street food everywhere through the Beijing winter: barbecued mutton and warm flatbread baked in a steel drum in the Muslim Uighur neighborhood; sweet potatoes roasted over coals; candied haw berries, cooked, dipped in sugar and served on sticks like flowers. In summer, I tasted fresh watermelons that cascaded from street stands in streams of green and pink, a sweet refreshment to the millions of bicycle riders pumping through Beijing streets in temperatures hovering at 90 degrees. Sometimes entire Food Streets would appear, block-long rows of vendors selling scores of foods, soups, noodles.

Available all year round, “jian bing” became a

frequent meal. Absent from the menu of any restaurant I entered, it became one of my favorite foods. I never got sick from street food. To the contrary, it often set me smiling. In Sichuan province, cilantro-flavored chilies on freshly rolled noodles opened nasal passages and sent rockets to the brain; in north China, a light, fried dough dipped in sugar tasted delicious in the cold. Hot noodle soup near a frozen Beijing canal. “Jian bing” everywhere.

I remember street food with delight. The food was part of a carnival and the carnival was part of why we travel—a joyous celebration of everything out there; strange, odd, weird, and often, unexpectedly, delicious.

Postscript: According to an April 21, 2016, article in the New York Times news (not food) section, jian bing has recently migrated to the USA, with outposts reported in the San Francisco Bay Area, Seattle, Portland and New York City.



Joan Aragone





Lee Foster

Berkeley's Gourmet Ghetto Today

This article first appeared on Lee Foster's website for Foster Travel Publishing at www.fostertravel.com.

Alice Waters remains a presiding spirit over Berkeley's celebrated Gourmet Ghetto, where I happen to live. But there are newcomers also who enliven the scene.

Here are my 10 recommended stops if you want to immerse yourself in this remarkable stretch of six blocks on Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley, California, from roughly the BART Station downtown to Rose Street as the northern terminus.

I start this walk near the north end.

1. Alice Waters' Chez Panisse restaurant (1517 Shattuck, www.chezpanisse.com, 510-548-5525) is in and will remain in a stratosphere all its own.

Alice began the restaurant in 1971. The vision behind her restaurant has been immensely influential. I expect a TV evening news report tomorrow that Alice is in the White House Food Garden with Michelle Obama extolling the virtues of kohlrabi as a vegetable.

At a recent charity event, I gave Alice, for reasons of nostalgia, a copy of my 1983 book on the organic gardening revolution. My publisher was Chronicle Books and the title was *Backyard Farming*. I was writing a lot for Rodale in that era and living out the vision, growing all the vegetables for my family of five on a sunny but small urban hillside lot in Oakland.

Meanwhile, Alice was transforming the landscape in Berkeley, such as the vegetable gardens at Martin Luther King Middle School, making an edible schoolyard garden a point of instruction on many matters, including the virtues of sustainable, local, organic, simple, tasty and fresh food.

The triumph of the entire organic and fresh/local

effort unleashed in America back in the 1970s and 1980s is evident partly in the relatively new Safeway in the neighborhood, at Shattuck and Rose, two blocks from Chez Panisse. This Safeway now has about half of its total produce section as organic, and possibly half of all the produce presented as grown "locally," meaning California in this case. California, with its gifted climate for year-round growing, is, of course, an unusual place.

Today I recommend either a casual lunch at the upstairs café or a more elegant full-course dinner downstairs at Chez Panisse.

2. Across the street from Chez Panisse, you can plunk down exactly \$12.05 of your hard-earned money at arguably the most popular restaurant in modern Berkeley. For that you will receive a large box with half of a vegetarian pizza, enough for two people. You can also get an inventive salad, which might have "spelt" in it. If you need to Google "spelt" for a Wikipedia explanation, you are in for a delicious new treat.

That restaurant is the Cheese Board Pizza (1512 Shattuck, www.cheeseboardcollective.coop/pizza, 510-549-3183).

Several aspects of this restaurant are extraordinary.

It is the offshoot of the legendary establishment next door, Cheese Board Bakery & Cheese, coming up next on my list.

Cheese Board Pizza makes only one kind of pizza every day and you can see the ingredients of the changing daily pizza on the website.

The pizza is always and only vegetarian, consisting of vegetables and cheeses. A vegan pizza is also possible, with nut "cheeses."

Music at lunch and dinner is an important part of the scene. On my last visit my friend Ian Carey was playing some of his marvelous modern California jazz. I wrote up Ian Carey last year after seeing him play at Yoshi's and buying a few of his CDs. I gave his CDs as Christmas presents. The website for Cheese Board Pizza indicates what musicians are playing daily, lunch and dinner.

The front of the restaurant opens onto a "parklet,"



Chez Panisse

Lee Foster is a veteran, award-winning travel book/article writer, as well as a travel photographer. His work can be seen at www.fostertravel.com. His books appear on his Amazon Author Page at <http://amzn.to/1jl9Lnz>. More than 7,000 of his digitally-ready photos can be licensed by consumers and content buyers at <http://stockphotos.fostertravel.com>.

a reclaimed rectangular section of the street, creating an outdoor café space that is safe, replacing a few parking places. Architecture helps create the community feeling at Cheese Board Pizza.

Somehow, Cheese Board Pizza has the magic. At a busy time the line may extend out to the corner as return customers arrive to buy pizzas, either consuming them there or taking them home. On a slow day they make and sell about 300 pizzas. On a brisk day that number rises to 1,200 pizzas.

A glass of wine is available to enjoy with your pizza, salad and music. There is no need to rush.

3. Next door is The Cheese Board Collective (1504 Shattuck, www.cheeseboardcollective.coop, 510-549-3183).

You may get a sense that you are indeed in Berkeley when the word “collective” is in the business name. This has been a “worker-owned collective since 1971,” as the website asserts.

Be sure to click on the website to enjoy the endearing cartoon depicting this happy scene.

The people inside this establishment love cheese and they are in no hurry to sell you anything. Sample a few cheeses under their expert tutelage. Find something you like and they’ll custom cut any size portion you wish.

A vast collection of worldwide cheeses is sold here, ranging in geographic origin from Europe to California to Wisconsin. Cow, goat and sheep milk cheeses are available. The knowledgeable palates of the career cheese-sellers here make the establishment one-of-a-kind.

Here you can also pick up a fresh house-made baguette, baked today, to go with your cheese.

4. The late Dutch coffee enthusiast, Alfred Peet, started his Berkeley “coffee revolution” in 1966 and eventually settled into a Vine Street location in the Gourmet Ghetto, one block off Shattuck, for the duration.

Be sure to stop in at his flagship store, Peet’s Coffee (2124 Vine, www.peets.com/about-us/our-history, 510-841-0564).

Arguably, for the benefit of the fastidious, the

coffee beans present at this store will be ever so slightly fresher than in the Peet’s packages so widely dispersed at coffee shops and supermarkets around the country.

Visit the special side-room display filled with coffee-milestone media memorabilia honoring Alfred Peet. Paraphernalia of the coffee roasting, grinding and serving craft are also presented.

Certainly other folks, such as the Italians in North Beach in San Francisco, knew a thing or two about roasting coffee and were carrying on in their enclaves to celebrate the maximum taste that each bean could provide. But cans of pre-ground coffee were the norm in America before the arrival of boutique commercial pioneers such as Alfred Peet.

The experience of taste had been somewhat suppressed by the need to distribute in the known preground-coffee-in-a-tin-can-technology of the day.

It took a few pioneers, such as Alfred Peet, to get the notion of quality coffee roasting and fresh grinding into the mainstream of America’s highly caffeinated bloodstream. It took a couple of

English majors up in Seattle, on a parallel path, to get the Northwest and then the nation behind their vision in 1971. What would they name their company? They turned to a bible of modern American literature, “Moby Dick,” and pulled out the name of a possibly coffee-loving sailor known to have a euphonic name, Starbucks. At least, it could be said, some of these whaling ships may have participated in some of the worldwide coffee trade and its romance. The defining sentence on the official Starbucks site today is, “The name, inspired by ‘Moby Dick,’ evoked the romance of the high seas and the seafaring tradition of the early coffee traders.”

5. Consider the culinary complexity of being inspired by New York deli visions, yet placed in 21st-century Berkeley and sustained by local neighborhood patrons. That’s the story of Saul’s Restaurant & Deli (1475 Shattuck, www.saulsdeli.com, 510-848-3354).

The dish to savor here is a classic pastrami-on-rye





sandwich, perhaps with the split-pea or other soup of the day and a side of potato salad.

Saul's is a locals' favorite, especially on what are called Thirst Thursdays. On Thursdays the "parklet" in front of Saul's becomes a party zone as the robust farmers' market stretching from Saul's to Rose on a side street begins to wind down. If you enjoy farmers' markets, this one will delight you. In fact, come to see it midday if you can, when it is at peak activity. Fish, meat, produce, fruit, nuts, honey—the whole panorama of California food—is on display, and you can talk with the original producers.

At Saul's in the early evenings a "beer garden" scene, emphasizing "craft" brews or wines, helps quench the parched palates of Thirsty Thursday folks. Since this is Berkeley and the town is progressive, if not righteous, you are even encouraged to bring your own beer mug to cut down on trash.

Walking from Saul's south to the BART station along Shattuck, here are my second five recommended for culinary stops. Be aware that my sins of omission in this short list are great and there are many who will chide me for not including their favorites. The area business promotion entity known as the North Shattuck Association has a fuller presentation of restaurants and various food categories in the

business directory on its website—which is, you guessed it, www.gourmetghetto.org.

6. Walking south on Shattuck, my next recommended stop is Taste of the Himalayas (1700 Shattuck Ave, www.tasteofthehimalayasca.com, 510-849-4983).

This is a good example of the "ethnic" restaurant in the Gourmet Ghetto, this one featuring Nepalese and Indian fare. My recommended dish here would be lamb, with its subtle panoply of spices. Try the Lamb Tarkari, boneless lamb pieces cooked in a special sauce flavored with herbs and spices. The lamb is served with lentil soup and basmati rice.

One touching aspect of this restaurant is that the proprietor, Rajen Thapa, uses the profits to fund a school for girls in Nepal.

Proceeding south, one dramatic aspect of the evolving Gourmet Ghetto is what is now absent. There used to be an immense restaurant focused on the raw food movement, Café Gratitude, at 1730 Shattuck. The restaurant closed at the end of 2015 after a 10-year run. I remember an intense beet juice/carrot juice cocktail available there.

7. For rustic Italian fare, such as one might find in Florence, the recommended stop is Corso (1788

Shattuck, www.trattoriacorso.com, 510-704-8004).

Rabbit sausage pasta is an interesting exotic on the menu here, which can be paired with a nice glass of Italian wine suggested by the knowledgeable waitperson. The Crostini with Tuscan chicken liver pâté, sage, capers and anchovy is another intriguing dish.

8. The wise choice for classic French cooking in the Gourmet Ghetto would be Bistro Liaison (1849 Shattuck, www.liaisonbistro.com, 510-849-2155).

Consider beginning with a traditional French onion soup and then indulging in their most popular dish, which draws patrons from far and wide.

That dish is their classic Boeuf Bourguignon, which has helped them earn some Michelin recognition.

Purists may call me out for including my final two mentions on this list as not respecting the proper “geographic” boundary of the Gourmet Ghetto. But with so many people coming to Berkeley now on BART, these two

downtown eateries on Shattuck on the walk north are worth considering as you step off the train. You may also find yourself heading back to BART from a Gourmet Ghetto walk so mesmerized by the plethora of excellent options that you haven’t yet made a restaurant choice. These two final selections are also close to the Arts District and the Berkeley Rep, in case those attractions are part of your travel plans.

My final two choices are a perky Mexican restaurant and the newest kid on the block.

9. The perky Mexican restaurant is Comal (2020 Shattuck, www.comalberkeley.com, 510-926-6300).

This modern establishment can send your spirits aloft with “flights” of curated tequila and mescal if you want to venture beyond the basic margarita. The menu is extensive, and you might begin with guacamole and then proceed to the white shrimp ceviche and the wood-grilled rock cod tacos.

Dishes are closer to small plates than the overwhelming amount of food served at some Mexican restaurants. The menu can change daily,

offering a modern interpretation of classic Mexican dishes, with Oaxaca as the original inspiration. Menu details for the day of your visit are on the website.

The venue is large and chic, with subdued lighting inside, and a pleasing, secluded outdoor patio in the back.

10. The new kid on the block is B&B Kitchen & Wine Bar (2116 Shattuck, www.bandb-berkeley.com, 510-647-9329), which opened in May 2016.

This intimate, 40-seat restaurant patterns itself after the proprietors’ successful Bourbon & Beef restaurant on College Avenue in Oakland’s Rockridge area.

Besides the indoor area, there is a small patio dining section outside in front.

The menu emphasizes close farm-to-table relationships that the proprietors have with local farmers, fishermen and ranchers. The theme is “American cuisine with a seafood emphasis.”

My first meal at the restaurant was pleasing, starting with the Dungeness California crab cocktail, all reward and no work. Then I tried the grilled octopus, artfully presented with miniature baked vegetables. Finally, the coffee braised beef short ribs were tender and juicy, with special flourishes, such as a sunchoke puree side dish.

Berkeley’s Gourmet Ghetto is a dynamic and changing entity. While Alice Waters and her Chez Panisse restaurant have flourished there since 1971, there is always a spirit of entrepreneurial delight in Berkeley, such as the new B&B Kitchen. The restaurant scene is not ossified. On the contrary, the Gourmet Ghetto in Berkeley is lively, accessible, progressive and open to innovation. This walk on Shattuck is always available for another pleasant stroll and a sampling of a new-to-you dining option.



Carol Canter

Chef Patricia Quintana at Festival Gourmet International Riviera Nayarit

A longer version of this article appeared on Examiner.com.

The photo (shown) of these two accomplished Mexican chefs, Patricia Quintana and Alfredo Jimenez, captures the essence of the annual Festival Gourmet International—the synergy between an invited guest chef and a local host chef.

Born and raised in Puerto Vallarta, Jimenez, executive chef at the Marival Residences and World Spa, is the “local” chef, albeit one with an impressive international resume that includes stints from Beverly Hills to Indonesia.

Quintana—a legend in the world of gastronomy, Mexico’s culinary ambassador, and the author of many bestselling cookbooks including *The Taste of Mexico*—was invited to prepare a menu for the festival week, which would be featured at Omaggio, the resort’s flagship restaurant. Omaggio translates as *Homage*, “a dedication to the senses.”

So it was a great opportunity to meet the two over a sumptuous breakfast at the Marival Residences in Riviera Nayarit, where they presented a panoply of tastes and textures that derived from the bounty of the land and sea.

Dazzling in an orange dress with Huichol beading, Quintana explained it was an honor when the beading is done by hand.

Then we turned our attention to the table, as the dishes were served, one more enticing than the next.

The salsas glistened with fresh herbs, chilis and crunchy red onions in handmade earthenware dishes, as did the grilled serrano peppers served with sea salt. The duck tamales, neatly tied and packaged in banana leaves, delivered on their tasty promise, while the frijoles de olla (bean casserole) offered comfort food with a twist. Local fresh cheeses like panela, corn tostadas and deep red cola de rata (rat’s tail) peppers paired with grilled onions were also part of the bountiful buffet. Freshly baked breads had just a hint of sweetness.

With the orchards and fields of Nayarit boasting seven types of mangos and pineapples so sweet they’re called *gota de miel* (drop of honey), a fruit plate was *de rigueur*, enhanced with slices of coconut, oranges, watermelon and strawberries.

Did I forget to mention the *huevos rancheros*, cooked to perfection?

The stories that accompanied the dishes also satisfied, for Chef Quintana is the ultimate weaver of tales. Her 14 cookbooks are testament to her passion, knowledge and years of deeply personal research through which she has revived Mexico’s culinary heritage, state by state.

As a girl of four spending summers in Veracruz, where her parents owned a hacienda, she would run barefoot to the huts of the workers on the ranch, searching for the meanings of food, starting with the corn, tortillas and beans. Over time, she was looking at the Huastecos and Totonacas, who found the vanilla bean and with it scented chocolate, and developing an interest in bringing back the habits and interpretations of these foods and their uses. Taking care of nature was common to the indigenous cultures, and she was fascinated by their eco-friendly solar *cazuelas*, where they cooked with the sun’s reflection.

Chef Quintana loves to draw attention to the connections between the techniques of ancient and



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.

modern cuisine through a story about quelites, the prehispanic wild reeds gathered by the Huichol.

After more than a quarter century researching traditional gastronomy, she decided to go to the Sierra Madres, to walk in the mountains with the Huichol women as they selected, prepared and cooked the wild reeds. She was joined by renowned Nayarit chef Betty Vasquez, co-owner and head chef of El Delfin restaurant at the charming Garza Canela Hotel in San Blas.

Quintana's first experience with Nayarit gastronomy was eye-opening.

"These women with eagle eyes were able to make out the tiny green leaves growing wild," she recalled. "They gathered and cooked them, but though they were cooked in water, the quelites remained green."

They blanch them with sea salt, using cold water to stop the cooking at just the right moment to keep them fresh and green, as a Michel Guerard [one of the founders of nouvelle cuisine and the inventor of cuisine minceur/slimming] or any other renowned French chef would do."

Quintana's sheer delight in these universal connections—whereby today's sophisticated chefs share a technique that has been used for centuries by an ancient culture—is at the heart of her work, and make her books, lectures and cooking so compelling.



Rhonda Gutenberg



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



Stephanie Levin

Chez Didier

It's never about food. It's about the people who share your table, who invite you into the beautiful blessing of friendship, the profoundly social urge to share, a small mitzvah of psychological wellbeing. I didn't fully grasp this concept until I moved to France, and even then my American habit of adamantly requiring advance notice in lieu of spontaneity caused culinary chaos in my new marriage. It's not about the food; it's the company, my husband reprimanded.

So, I shouldn't have been surprised when he greeted me at the train station in La Rochelle all smiles, with a sack of mussels and an announcement. We would be dining in our friend's backyard for my birthday.

"C'est pas vrai!" I quipped, eyeballing the mussels.

I had studied French linguistics in Paris for most of the summer while my husband toiled away on the Atlantic Coast with his friends Françoise Glemet and Didier Poitvin. It was my 39th birthday, and I had dreamed of dining in a sumptuous seaside restaurant, decked out in a saucy sundress, champagne glasses clinking and après-dinner sex, not a foursome cracking shells in a backyard.

"Mussels buried on a board in a backyard for my birthday," I whined like a child. My husband assured me I would not be cooking. He was absolutely correct about that. I wasn't about to root around in a smelly, bearded bag of mussels. Their nano anatomy reminded me of Georgia O'Keefe's retrospective of female genitals. Yawn.

Mind you, no one from California ate mussels at this time. This was before California crowned itself the West Coast culinary capital. Mussels were simply clumps of black shells clinging to pilings under a pier, with the stark warning: Toxic, do not eat!

I harrumphed and whined until we arrived at Françoise and Didier's doorstep on rue Amboise. Both greeted me with the traditional two kisses on each cheek and were excited about my birthday dinner, Didier's recipe for moule au fou, Eclade, a

specialty of the Charente region, which I translated as barbecued mussels.

"Oh, sounds divine," I lied as we headed for the backyard. A chilled bottle of champagne was uncorked and served. We spoke in French about my amazing linguistic articulation after a summer of classes, the ability to pucker my lips and cull the infamous French "r" from the back of my throat, a feat that took months to conquer. And how I would no longer embarrass myself by confusing cou (neck), coeur (heart) and cul (ass), an unfortunate linguistic mishap I recounted.

"Monsieur," I requested in my best French. "C'est possible de enleve le cul de le poulet?" The butcher replied with a negative nod as only a French butcher could, "Pas possible madame; le cou oui, mas pas le cul."

We laughed. I settled down, recalibrated my attitude and sat mesmerized as Didier crafted 100 spanking-clean, hairless mussels, each positioned vertically, pointy tail down, round mouth skyward, the entire mastery culminating with a circular labyrinth of bivalve mollusks on a flat wooden board. Jacques Pepin couldn't have come up with such a perfectly planned concoction.

Someone uncorked another bottle of champagne while we spectators sipped and watched Didier dig a shallow hole in the yard and gently place the board bearing the moule into the hole. Next he blanketed his masterpiece with piles of fragrant pine needles. We all stepped back, admiring Didier's work before he set it ablaze. An hour of preparation ablaze in an instant.

A table in 10 minutes, declared Didier. Our table was a blanket plunked on the ground. Françoise whipped out four dishtowels and our bibs, followed by baguettes and juicy plump tomatoes to spread on the baguettes, apparently another Charente custom. Lounging like royalty, giddy from the champagne, the heady smell of burning pine needles, the afternoon sun sinking, four of us in a circle laughed like loons, dining al fresco on the grass, devouring

Francophile Stephanie Levin lived in Paris for five years, spending her summers on the Atlantic Coast. She spent hours trolling through French markets. She still returns every other year, and has written about France for Child, American Way, the New York Daily News and other publications. www.steffelevin.com

moule with our fingers, slurping the juice, tossing the charred shells into a glass bowl, and appreciating Didier's supreme joy of sharing a sacred recipe from his family. The moon rose and sailed past. Stars announced their entrance. We sipped more champagne, bibs around our necks flecked with crust and tomatoes, friendship sealed forever. This was the first of many birthdays celebrated in La Rochelle, but none as memorable as my 39th birthday.

I am no longer married and I no longer live in France, but every other summer I go back to France. Francoise and Didier have long since moved 30 minutes out of La Rochelle into the countryside, with a big backyard. They always drive to the train station to retrieve me as I descend the train. Our first agenda is always food. The three of us frequent the big open market in La Rochelle with our baskets, but we spend most of our time in the

backyard over breakfast, lunch and dinner, lingering over conversation. Their two grown sons stop in for dinner, friends drop in for friendship and afternoon espresso. Moule à la Didier, served in various ways, is always on the menu, and I always recall my ex-husband's admonition: It's not about food. It's all about who shares your table.

This element of sitting in my friends' backyard fills me with joy; it's missing in my life back home. In that backyard time stands impeccably still, the word love need never be mentioned. It circulates around the table, embraces and acknowledges all present. It's in the preparation of the food, the excitement of everyone eating together, the conversation, the thimble-size coffee, a nightcap under a French country sky. It's time, the elusive time I cannot catch in California, the precious time that weaves food and friendship into a delicious bond, one that defies all explanation.



Downtown Napa: Sipping and Savoring

*A version of this article appears at
EpicureanDestinations.com.*

If you haven't visited downtown Napa for some time, you are in for quite a treat. The city is experiencing a thriving renaissance with an explosion of new restaurants, wine tasting rooms, nightlife and trendy shops. For good measure, add in the Napa River walk, outdoor sculptures, expanded walking and biking paths and you're spoiled for choices.

Wine Tasting

You'll find a cornucopia of tasting rooms at almost every turn. Downtown boasts more than two dozen within easy walking distance of First and Main Streets. Many welcome visitors on a drop-in basis. Vermeil Wines, known for its generous pourings and sports bar motif, is a good choice with its comfortable seating both indoors and on its outside front patio.

Tips for an overnight or two-day visit

Plan on spending the night at the Napa River Inn at its prime location right on the Napa River. Located within the Historic Napa Mill, it is walking distance to everything you will want to see and do and is surrounded by greenery, gardens and art work. Choose a room in the hotel's Plaza Building, where your sumptuous king-size bed faces a fireplace and your balcony overlooks the river. If it's a day when you don't feel like walking, a complimentary shuttle will be there for you. Alternatively, you can borrow one of the inn's bicycles for a free-wheeling neighborhood roll. And if you're feeling really adventurous, you can kayak right off the inn's riverside dock.

In the same historic complex, you'll find the Napa General Store, a prime place for all sorts of "only in Napa" buys. Top tip: check into the shop's wine-tasting seminars. Next to the General Store overlooking the river is the French-inspired Angele Restaurant, one of the city's premier venues for a romantic dinner.



A great place to start your day is the Oxbow Public Market, named for a bend in the river where the market resides. You may find yourself spending a couple of hours here as you graze your way through this gourmand's version of an artisan market. Open stalls and sit-down eateries sell organic produce, cheeses, spices, seafood, coffees, teas, and of course, wine. Oyster lovers can savor the juiciest ultra-fresh bivalves in town at the Hog Island Oyster Company's counter.

Stop by the Oxbow Cheese and Wine Merchant counter for delicious cheeses selected by expert cheesemongers. Or choose among the boutique assortment of wines from artisanal producers from around the world. Better yet, take a seat at the Wine Bar and savor an artisanal cheeseboard with a flight of wines, a fine draft beer, a charcuterie assortment or whatever else whets your appetite on the menu. During my visit, I attended an enjoyable, educational wine physics class and wine tasting hosted by Master Sommelier Peter Granoff. The company offers a series of educational and entertaining classes designed to make wine more accessible, less mysterious and more enjoyable. Check out their classes in the Browse & Order Section on the website:

Lee Daley is a widely published, award-winning writer and photographer based in Sausalito, California. www.leedaleytravelwriter.com or www.epicureanddestinations.com (blog).



www.oxbowwinermerchant.com. Prices are reasonable.

Stepping outside, one can't help but drink in the aroma of freshly baked bread emanating from Model Bakery. Rated Napa's number-one bakery, everyone agrees their English muffins are amazing. Best of all, you can buy the bakery's cookbook and take their secrets home with you. The artisanal bakery serves breakfast and lunch plus cakes, cookies and an array of specialty breads. www.themodelbakery.com.

Directly across First Street from Oxbow Market, a cottage-style tasting room with the moniker Uncorked serves award-winning wines and live evening entertainment. On my most recent visit, tastings were free with the purchase of a bottle of wine. The winery's multi-award-winning Ahnfeldt cabernets are exceptional. During warm weather, head out to Uncorked's back deck for open-mic entertainment along with your wine. www.uncorked-at-oxbow.com.

End your day with a stroll along Napa's River Walk with its dynamic outdoor art and sculpture, open-air cafes, boutiques and inviting plazas. Be sure to seek out waterfront Frati Gelato Café, where gelato maker Dr. Anthony serves up Italian gelato so delicious you'll think you're in Rome. Homemade

and authentically Italian, it's the perfect after-dinner cap to an evening out.

You may be in the same time zone as home, but in Napa it's all about serendipity and relaxation. For more about downtown Napa, visit www.donapa.com.



Jules Older

In Defense Of Fast-Food Chains: Why I love Colonel McBurger

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

I used to live in Dunedin, a city on the South Island of New Zealand that was at the bottom of the world and, literally, the bottom of the food chain. It's the only place I have ever been where Coca-Cola was unavailable.

Then, one day, an ad appeared in the morning paper: Colonel Sanders' Kentucky Fried Chicken was coming to town!

On opening day, one of the few other Americans in the city set up a one-woman picket line outside the Colonel's new home. She was protesting—oh, I don't know—the hegemony of American culture or Yankee imperialism or something equally worthy-sounding and high-minded.

Me, I cheered. And when the glass doors opened, I was first in line because I knew that finally—finally!—finger-lickin'-good chicken was coming to the South Island.

Colonel Sanders is but one species in that much abused genus, the American fast-food chain. Is there any aspect of American culture more despised than the fast-food chain? Plastic, monocultural, identical, unexciting, tasteless, anti-local, fattening. Let me count the slurs.

But I love 'em. I'm just back from Puerto Rico, and I ate in a Burger King or McDonald's once a day, every day.

Because there are McD's and B-Kings all over the island, it was easy. And guess who I met there? No, not timid American *turistas*, afraid to try indigenous food. *Al contrario*, I met Puerto Ricans. Everywhere I went, the places were filled with locals.

The question is, why? Is it the power of advertising? The hegemony of American culture?

Yankee imperialism? The thrill of the new?

I don't think so. I think the locals were there for the same reasons I was. To wit:

1. In the national chains, you know you will get a decent meal. Not a fancy one, not a gustatorially exciting one, but a breakfast or lunch that ranges from fair (McDonald's cardboardish chicken sandwich) to very good (Burger King's Croissan'wich and McD's Egg McMuffin). Mom & Pop burger joints range from a high of very good (American diners are usually right up there) down, down, down to way below cardboardish chicken.

2. They're fast, fast, fast and downright cheap. An Egg McMuffin consists of a fresh egg, a slice of Canadian bacon and a slice of cheese sandwiched in an English muffin. It costs roughly one-fourth the price of an egg and toast at a mid-range hotel, one fifth of a "continental breakfast" at a resort. And you don't waste half the morning waiting for the waitress, waiting for the egg and the bill.

3. Cleanliness and safety. When you walk into one of these chains, you know the bathrooms will be clean, the food will be hygienically handled and the staff will be trained in food preparation. If this sounds like the perspective of a germophobic, uptight American, that only means you haven't personally experienced the delights of food poisoning. I have, and it has given me new respect for the power of the tiny microbe. Gimme clean, any day!

4. American food. As a food critic, I have long thought that other food critics vastly underrate basic American food. A great hamburger is a thing of pleasure, and the Yankee breakfast is far superior to the French baguette, the Japanese rice-and-seaweed, the Israeli salad, the New Zealand beans

on toast and just about every other breakfast the world has to offer. Admittedly the chains don't sell great hamburgers, just okay ones (the char-broiled models are the best of the lot), but breakfast is where they really shine. It's no accident that wherever in the world I've traveled, the fast-food joints are jammed every morning.

Finally, the chains are not quite as monocultural as people think. In Miami's Little Havana, the local McDonald's sells *café con leche*. In Japan, Ronald McDonald advertises "Burger with Melon Soda" and "Moon Viewing Burger" (which has an egg on it). And throughout Puerto Rico, both McD's and B-King dispense excellent Puerto Rican-grown coffee. Olé!



John Compisi

Feasting and Fêting through la Toscana e l'Umbria

A version of this story appeared at Niume.com.

Italy is so well known for its wine and food that it may seem ludicrous to write one more story about this wonderful vino e la cucina. Over the past eight years my wife, Linda, and I have embarked five times on the grande viaggio to the land of romance, pasta, vino and gelato. Rather than invest 1,000 words on one restaurant or wine experience, this tome will highlight four unique gastronomical experiences around Tuscany and its lovely neighbor Umbria.

Tuscany is a fabulous destination sporting such wonderful cities as Lucca, Siena, Pisa and Florence. All are beautiful and famous for their architecture, art and food. Lesser known but equally delightful are smaller cities and towns in largely rural regions. Panzano in Chianti and Cortona in Arezzo are two of our favorites.

Panzano is quite small, but home to many wineries making Chianti Classico. Il Molino di Grace, a winery in Panzano, is named after the Grace family (expatriate Americans with roots in San Francisco) as well as the historic 19th-century windmill located on the property. Bordering Il Molina di Grace is an amazing property called Villa Le Barone that offers hotel-style rooms and affords unparalleled views of the surrounding olive groves, vineyards and rolling hills of Tuscany. The Villa has been turned into a luxury hotel and is owned by current heir Corso (Conte) and his wife, Jacqueline (Contessa) Aloisi de Larderel.

Both Il Molina di Grace and Villa le Barone figure prominently in our Panzano experience, which included its annual wine festival. Panzano is in the Chianti Classico DOCG (Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita), the highest category for Italian wine appellations. Every year on the third weekend of September, the vintners of Panzano meet in the village square to show their wines during "Vino al Vino Panzano." Visitors have the chance to sample the different styles of wines, interact with the winemakers and enjoy an authentic local festival. Perhaps 30 winemakers



participated in this simple four-day event. We had planned our visit to Panzano around this festival, and we were not disappointed in terms of wonderful wines and an authentic Italy experience. In many cases the wines were being poured by the winemaker/grower, so it was very personal. It appeared that most of the attendees were locals. Perhaps we were in on a secret.

After attending the festival's opening day celebration, we returned to the Villa. The Conte and Contessa had invited us to join them for dinner at the Villa's restaurant. Corso and Jacqueline, as they prefer to be called, are warm and engaging people who have accomplished much in their lives. (Jacqueline has worked at the Director level for the Industry and the Environment Office at the United Nations Environment Program.) We dined al fresco under a trellis of fragrant flowers and shared stories of our mutual interests and travels. The food was simple and fresh and a perfect match for the local Chianti wines that we shared.

The next day we hiked for three hours through the vineyards and olive orchards that surround the Villa. At the end of our brief stay, we bid farewell to the Contessa and drove the short distance to Il Molina di Grace. We were greeted by Tim Grace, the chief operating officer and son of founders Frank and Judy Grace. The winery was modern, with familiar equipment, but in a building that had at least a century of history. Tim guided us through a private tasting of all six of their current releases. Despite the American ownership, these are Italian wines with distinction and have been recognized by

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.

Wine Spectator and other critical wine reviewers. The Chianti Classico and the Riserva were our two favorites. Of course we bought some wine before saying goodbye to Tim with a promise to reconnect in San Francisco.

Our next stop was the hilltop city of Cortona about 100 kilometers southeast of Panzano. The drive was glorious, through vineyards and forest lands. Our destination was Il Falconieri, a restaurant, winery, spa and relais, owned by Silvia and Riccardo Baracchi. The complex is built around



a 17th-century villa they restored and opened in 1989. The word fabulous is just too everyday to describe Il Falconieri. Silvia, a renowned chef, is also a friend and confidant of Francis May, author of the book, *Under the Tuscan Sun*.

The experience at the ristorante, the only Michelin Star in the province of Arezzo, was stellar. The service, presentation and flavors truly achieved what one would expect from a Michelin Star. Our budget only allowed for lunch, but the experience was special. We also accompanied Silvia and other guests on a tour of the spa, hotel and winery, each exceeding the other in character and luxe. The tour ended with a sparkling wine sabering display and tasting lead by Silvia. Il Falconieri is bucket-list worthy.

We departed Cortona the next day and headed to Umbria, Tuscany's lovely neighbor. By way of comparison, Umbria is to Tuscany as Sonoma is to Napa. One is world renowned for beauty and world-class wines, while the other is equally beautiful and also home to world-class wines, just somewhat under the radar. The cities of Orvieto, Perugia, Montefalco, Todi and the legendary Assisi are among the most interesting in Umbria.

We stayed with an American friend who owns a 17th-century farmhouse that she has carefully restored and also offers as a rental. We also had plans for attending the Montefalco Sagrantino



Wine Festival. The restored farmhouse, named Fondo le Teglie, is a few minutes away from the medieval city of Todi, an hour from Assisi and Montefalco and only two hours from Rome and Florence. Fondo offers all the modern conveniences you'd expect at a luxury property. Our friend Susan had arranged a surprise for us—a dinner prepared by our favorite local Umbrian cook, Dina. We feasted on wood-fired pizzas, fabulous pastas, wild boar (cinghiale, a local favorite) and roast chicken, all except the meats made from scratch while we watched. Fresh herbs, spices and vegetables make food so much more palatable.

The next day, we drove to Montefalco, a very small hilltop town, to experience the wine and the festival. The central piazza was filled with tents offering locally made products and food. The wine tasting was held in a large hall that had tables running down two sides. Montefalco apparently takes their Sagrantino very seriously. Behind each of the dozen or so tables were tuxedoed sommeliers who did not represent the winery or the wines being poured. This was to ensure that no marketing was conducted and that the wines were objectively presented for the guests to enjoy and evaluate.

All of our travel "must-dos" were now complete. We don't recommend the fast pace and numerous changes in cities and lodging, but we had an aggressive agenda to meet. Both Umbria and Tuscany have so many wonderful and beautiful places to experience and places to stay. They provide perfect settings for a holiday, a honeymoon or a romantic journey in a rich and unique part of Italy.

Photos by Linda Compisi

Effin Older



Kaempff-Kohler, Luxembourg

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



▾ San Jose, California

▾ Waiheke Island, New Zealand



Kaempff-Kohler, Luxembourg

Susan Alcorn

Raclette Demystified

Even though many of the hiking trips that my husband Ralph and I have taken are full-on backpacking trips requiring that we carry lightweight (read: freeze-dried) foods and a tent, many more of our miles have been on trails that go through municipalities with restaurants and hotels. We have hiked more than 3,000 miles on Camino routes in Spain, France, Portugal and Switzerland. It's more than the scenery and people that keep us going back. It's also the food.

In June of 2012, we started a hike in Geneva, but a few days after we crossed the border into France, I developed a leg infection. We took a day of rest, but the redness and swelling didn't go away, so we decided to seek medical care. I was given a prescription for antibiotics and we were advised to end our hike.

Suddenly, we had to come up with an alternate plan for the remaining time we had in Europe before our flight home. We decided to visit nearby Grenoble, France. We knew little about the city of approximately 160,000, except what we had seen of it during the broadcasts of the Winter Olympics of 1968—not exactly current information, but we do enjoy seeing new places.

Our usual way of exploring a new city is on foot, but we didn't know how much walking I could do without overdoing. We brushed aside questions of how would we spend our time and what my limitations might be as my leg healed. We would simply play it by ear.

We took the bus to Grenoble. Once there, we visited the tourist bureau and obtained information about the attractions. My leg was already feeling better; we decided to try some short walking tours. I found that walking a mile or so was okay; swelling didn't start until the end of the day. We rode the tram up a mountainside to the bastille for the impressive views overlooking the city and out into the Alps. We visited the fine arts museum of

Grenoble and enjoyed some of our favorite paintings by Renoir, Pissarro and Picasso. I bought a French sailor's shirt at Lafayette Printemps.

And we ate! For lunch on day two, we had croque monsieur. We enjoyed the pleasant meal while seated at an outside table, in the warm sun, with seemingly no cares. I wondered, "How can a grilled ham and cheese sandwich taste so good?"

Our food at dinner, however, was more than a tasty repast—it was an experience. Ralph had heard from his French teacher about a specialty food of the region, raclette, so we went in search of it. We found it listed on a menu outside a bistro and went inside. There we were warmly greeted and escorted to one of the closely spaced wooden tables—all

covered with the traditional red-checked tablecloths.

As soon as we ordered the raclette, our server brought over an apparatus (also called a raclette) that required plugging into an electrical outlet. To the device's cord, he attached an extension cord, plugged the entire length into the wall, then ran the cord under a

neighboring table, across an aisle, and up to our table. "Would this hazardous assembly even be legal in the U.S.?" I wondered.

The electricity was needed to run the heating coil of the raclette. The exposed element of the coil was positioned over a wedge of cheese, in this case Tomme de Savoie. It seemed like a huge amount of cheese to eat—about a sixth of a four-inch-high round plus a smaller piece. We were also served a large bowl of boiled potatoes and a platter full of charcuterie (various sliced meats), as well as green salad and bread.

As the heat melted the cheese, we were supposed to let it drip onto one of the potatoes that accompanied the cheese; what we didn't catch on the potatoes would drip onto a plate. At first things went at a reasonable pace—pick up a potato, top it with cheese, enjoy the delicious blend of flavors. However, as the coil got hotter and the cheese



Susan Alcorn is the author of six books, including *We're in the Mountains Not over the Hill*, *Camino Chronicle: Walking to Santiago* and *Patagonia Chronicle: On Foot in Torres del Paine*. She has completed the Pacific Crest Trail, trekked thousands of miles on European pilgrimage routes and climbed Mount Kilimanjaro. www.backpack45.com E-mail backpack45@yahoo.com

melted faster, it became increasingly difficult to keep up. I began to feel like Lucy in the “I Love Lucy” episode where she and Ethel spend a day working in a chocolate factory and have to keep packaging candies coming nonstop down a conveyor belt. Frantic!

The cheese melted faster and faster; we grew fuller and fuller. In desperation, we searched for the on/off switch. Whew!

Raclette, from the French verb “*racler*” meaning “to scrape,” refers to the way that hunters, farmers and shepherds in Switzerland and parts of France prepare the cheese. They set a wedge of cheese by the campfire and, as it melts, use their hunting knives to scrape the softened part onto bread, meats or vegetables. It’s often enjoyed communally.

The cheese that we enjoyed, Tomme de Savoie, is a mild, semi-soft cow’s-milk cheese with a beige interior and a thick brownish-grey rind from Savoie in the French Alps.

Here in the U.S., many styles of the raclette device are available in kitchen stores and online. In addition, one can melt the Tomme de Savoie, or

a similar cheese, at low heat on a stovetop in a saucepan or in the oven on a non-stick sheet pan. But wouldn’t it be more fun to stick to a more traditional way of serving it—around the table with friends or family?

Recipe for Raclette

Ingredients:

1 pound, raclette cheese
24 small, new waxy potatoes
Pickled onions
Cornichons
Sausage (I prefer garlic sausage, but use whatever kind you like)
Thickly-sliced cured meats (prosciutto, bresaola, Speck ham, Westphalia ham, etc.)
Crusty sourdough bread/levain
Freshly ground pepper
Paprika (half-sharp, sharp or smoked—your choice)
Whole-grain mustard

Directions:

Boil potatoes in their skin until tender, slice in half and set aside. Set table with meat, pickled veggies and slices of bread.

Trim rind off cheese, slice into eight equal pieces.

Place the sausages onto the raclette grill and cook.

Have each diner take a slice of cheese and place it into their individual raclette tray and slide it under the grill. (This is a good time to nibble on a few slices of ham and some cornichons.

When the cheese is melted and turning brown at the edges, remove the tray from under the grill.

Scrape the cheese from the tray onto a potato, give it a grind of pepper and/or paprika, and eat.

Spread some mustard onto a slice of bread, place a hunk of sausage or meat on the bread, top with a pickled onion and some melted raclette, and eat.

Many thanks to Jeff Diamond at Farmstead Cheeses and Wines (www.Farmstead.biz) for this recipe.



Carolyn Hansen

Gourmet Delights Worldwide

These stories have appeared in the Powerhiking Series of books, coauthored by Carolyn Hansen, on San Francisco, Paris, London, Seattle and New York City.

Tasty Treats in San Francisco

The San Francisco Ferry Building, at the foot of Market Street and The Embarcadero, is the historic terminal for ferry boats crossing the Bay. The interior is a grand food hall with shops and restaurants and an attractive plaza and promenade. It is a must visit for visitors to San Francisco and a favorite of locals as well. The food hall is a wonderful blend of eat-in and take-out cafes and restaurants and gourmet vendors. You can find artisan cheese, local fish, organic meat, organic fruit, Blue Bottle Coffee, ice cream, gourmet chocolates, fresh bread, a French bakery, honey, wine, olive oil, nuts, oysters and a restaurant with one of the hardest-to-get reservations in town. If all of the eateries are not tempting enough, there's the Farmers Market Marketplace along The Embarcadero. Every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, foodies and shoppers come from far and wide to find organic, locally-sourced produce and products. The San Francisco Ferry Building is unique to San Francisco and definitely worth the visit.

Java House is nestled next to South Beach Harbor on the San Francisco waterfront. This fun eatery has been a staple on the waterfront since 1912, serving San Francisco Giants and their fans, sailors, yachtsmen, longshoremen, dockworkers and the military. For burgers, breakfast or sandwiches, Java House is a not-to-be-missed experience near the Bay Bridge in the City by the Bay.

The Gourmet Scene in Paris

A visit to Paris is synonymous with gourmet food and fabulous French wine. At the corner of rue St. Honore and rue Royale is Lauderee, a celebrated French tearoom serving lunch, tea and fabulous desserts. For a special treat try one of their famous macarons. Whatever you try, Lauderee is a delightful location to spend a relaxed afternoon in Paris.

Hediard, a renowned gourmet shop, is on the corner of avenue George V and avenue Pierre 1er

de Serbie. Wander inside for a special delicacy—chocolate, famous fruit candies, ice cream, pastry or a meal to go. A small red box of Hediard fruit candies makes a wonderful souvenir.

Berthillon, on picturesque Ile St. Louis, is known for its ice cream. Pick your favorite flavor and sit at a table outside, enjoying your ice cream and a beautiful view back to Notre-Dame cathedral.

You cannot miss a visit to Angelina, a Parisian favorite for ice cream, chocolates, pastry and their famous hot chocolate—the richest, creamiest French hot chocolate. They also have beautiful boxes of chocolates and hot chocolate mix as wonderful souvenirs. Angelina is a truly special Parisian indulgence.

Scrumptious Delights in London

Harrods, the iconic British Knightsbridge department store, is home to the Food Hall of Harrods. The food vaults are located on the lower levels and they are truly an experience not to be forgotten and a paradise for foodies. There are cafes, bakeries, teas, coffees, chocolates, meat, fish, fruit, vegetables and row after row of prepared entrees. There's even the French tearoom, Lauderee, offering a spot of tea. While tourists wander in a daze, marveling at all of the remarkable delicacies and snapping photos, busy Londoners hurry in and out to gather a snack, lunch or dinner. Join them and select some yummys to take to nearby Hyde Park for a picnic.

The Grenadier is a pub located on Wilton Mews in the neighborhood of Belgravia, tucked away from the hustle and bustle of London. Nestled between cottages, the location is unlikely for a pub but it allows a step back in time to the 1700s. It was the mess hall of the Duke of Wellington's Grenadier Guards and is filled with military memorabilia and, reputedly, the ghost of an officer accused of cheating at cards. Reservations are a must for this small restaurant, but bar food is also available and sausages and beer are staples. There is always a crowd spilling down the steps onto the cobbled Mews.

St. Katherine's Docks was a significant trade site in the 1800s. Now, shops, restaurants, apartments and a yacht harbor are found there. A little beyond this dock area in Wapping is the Prospect

Carolyn Hansen (powerhiking.com and powerhiking.wordpress.com) is coauthor of the PowerHiking Series guidebooks. All of the photos that appear in those books on walks through San Francisco, Seattle, Paris, London and New York are also hers. She is a graduate of U.C. Berkeley.

of Whitby. In existence since 1543 and a hangout for smugglers and pirates, London's oldest riverside pub nestles between the River Thames and old docks and warehouses converted into modern apartments. Rich in history and legend, the pub sits on a 400-year-old stone floor and has old barrels and masts built into the walls. In a city overflowing with history, the Prospect of Whitby is one of a kind.

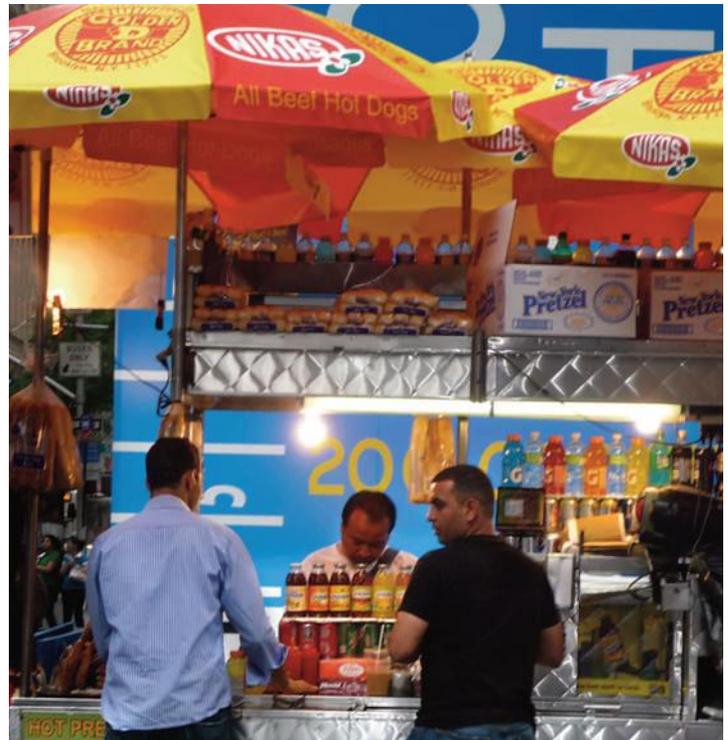
Flavorful Fare in Seattle

Pike Place Market and the city of Seattle are synonymous. It is referred to as “the soul” of Seattle and is the original farmers’ market. The market history is unique and rich, from the early settlers to ongoing urban renewal. Eight farmers started it more than 100 years ago, in 1907. It has grown considerably, and it’s not only a major tourist attraction but also where Seattle goes to shop. If you are looking for fresh fish, fresh fruit, flowers, baked goods or crafts, you can find just about anything at Pike Place Market. There are charming restaurants and stores and craft booths lining the busy street front. The market covers nine acres, and the purveyors grow the fruit they sell, catch the fresh fish each morning and butcher the meat themselves. Everywhere you turn is an explosion of flowers, vegetables, and sparking piles of colorful fruit, teas, spices and honey. Taste as you explore, or visit one of the many specialty food shops or restaurants along Pike Street.

Starbucks originated in Seattle and everywhere you turn there is a Starbucks. The original store is on Pike Street near Pike Place Market and there is always a line out the door. The original mermaid hangs above the door, and inside, Pike Market Coffee is available—the only Starbucks where this special blend can be purchased.

New and Old Cuisine in New York City

New York City is a mecca for foodies and demands constant decision-making regarding where to eat and which delicious neighborhood restaurant to try. Bubby’s Pie Company TriBeCa and Bubby’s Pie Company High Line are unique gastronomic exper-



iences. Locally-sourced American dishes that “are ever evolving expressions of our collective traditions, heritage and history” create an exceptional eating experience. Bubby’s is a popular family eatery that you cannot leave without tasting the pie!

The Winter Garden Atrium was badly damaged in 9/11 but has been restored and is a spectacularly beautiful building. On Vesey Street in Brookfield Place on the Hudson River, the complex is filled with shops, restaurants, and row after row of takeout food, pastries, chocolates, cookies, coffee and ice cream. To sit under the Atrium while enjoying a bite is to be surrounded by world-class beauty.

Magnolia Bakery has three locations: Bleecker Street, Avenue of the Americas and 42nd Street, plus several others worldwide. First opened in 1996 in the West Village, Magnolia Bakery is a New York tradition for cakes and cupcakes. There is usually a line out the door and always a featured daily cupcake. A visit to Manhattan is not complete without a visit to Magnolia Bakery.

Laurie McAndish King

From Guinea Pigs to Great Wine: A Bold Experiment in Sustainability

In New Zealand's celebrated Marlborough wine country, there's one innovative winery that leads the way. Yealands Family Wines serenades its vines with classical music, breeds miniature sheep to manage the weeding and is a global leader in sustainable agriculture.

Founder Peter Yealands explains the musical experiment: "I heard about a bloke who was playing music to wine in the barrels," he says, "and I did some research to see whether there was any scientific evidence to support that. It was easy enough to try it out here. We put solar panels to power the speakers on the chook [chicken] house." The chickens are there to help with insect control.

Yealands says it's too early to know whether the music has any effect on his grapes, but it has resulted in a happy accident: Hens in the serenaded area began laying eggs that were 19 percent heavier, on average, than those of the vineyard's non-serenaded poultry. "Now we have four speakers around the vineyard," he says. "I don't care if people go away and say I'm loopy."

Loopy or not, Yealands has always been an experimenter. His personal mantra—"Think boldly, tread lightly and never say it can't be done"—has guided his entrepreneurial vision across successful careers in industries as varied as aquaculture and deer farming. What they have in common is Peter's almost magical ability to get things to grow—that and a firm commitment to sustainability.

A third-generation Marlborough man, Yealands believes in leaving things better for the people who come after him. That commitment led to what Peter calls his guinea pig experiment. In an attempt to limit the use of herbicides, shrink his carbon footprint and decrease the need for tractor mowing, Yealands brought in sheep to do the weeding. "Unfortunately," he says, "they developed a taste for the grapes.

"Our second idea was to use guinea pigs, which were too short to reach the vines," but that ended after a neighbor reported seeing a guinea pig fly past her kitchen window. It turned out the local birds of



prey were catching the guinea pigs and flying off with them.

Yealands' next, and current, plan was to use miniature Babydoll sheep to graze the vineyards without eating the vines. "Because Babydolls only reach 60 centimeters [about two feet] tall when fully grown, they're no threat to the grapes," Peter explains. "They're also a handy source of fertilizer." Peter is cross-breeding the Babydolls with Saxon merino, which will allow him to use the herd for wool and meat, as well as weeding.

But that's just the beginning of Yealands' quest for sustainability. He installed a huge boiler system that burns vineyard prunings for energy to heat water at the winery. He uses biodiesel from recycled cooking oil for some of his tractors. For others, he's installed hydrogen generators that produce no greenhouse-gas exhaust. He glues broken fence posts back together rather than swapping in new ones. And he has introduced the Full Circle brand of wines, sold in plastic bottles.

Plastic for a sustainable product? Well, this is not your typical soft-drink-bottle plastic; the containers are designed to begin deteriorating after 1,000 days. Especially popular with hikers, boaters and festival attendees, the self-destructing eco-bottles are 89 percent lighter than traditional 750 ml glass bottles. They use 19 percent less energy to produce and generate 54 percent less greenhouse gas emissions

Laurie McAndish King is an award-winning essayist and photographer whose work has been published in *Smithsonian* magazine, *Travelers' Tales' The Best Women's Travel Writing*, Lonely Planet's *The Kindness of Strangers*, and other magazines and literary anthologies. Her second collection of travel stories, *Your Crocodile has Arrived: More True Stories from a Curious Traveler*, was published in 2017.

in the process. "Our winery and wines are already carboNZero certified," Yealands says. "Plastic takes us to a whole new level of sustainability."

Yealands' creative approach yields real benefits. His winery is four times more energy efficient than the industry average and has earned many awards for sustainability. His specially designed plastic bottles lead the industry in another way: They contain an oxygen-scavenging additive that prevents the bottle from "breathing" and also helps remove oxygen from the top of the bottle.

So how does all this innovative wine taste? Yealands' Marks and Spencer Single Block Series S1 Sauvignon Blanc won the International Wine Challenge's gold award for World's Best Sauvignon Blanc in 2012.

I wanted to taste it when I visited, but they were sold out. Yealands' other brands are consistent winners, too, garnering more than 40 International Wine Challenge awards in 2016.

Whether you're inspired by state-of-the-art sustainability, innovative viticulture practices, ingenious manufacturing processes, roving chooks and sheep, or award-winning wines, Yealands' Family Wines has something for everyone.

Find out for yourself when you visit the winery, open from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., seven days a week (closed Christmas Day, Good Friday and Anzac Day).

Yealands Estate Cellar Door,
Seaview & Reserve Roads, Seddon,
Marlborough 7285, New Zealand,
yealands.co.nz.



Al Auger

Hemingway Slept Here

This story was published in Siliconer magazine (October 2013) and at siliconer.com.

It was a lovely Thursday afternoon as Louise and I sat on the patio of the neighborhood pub looking forward to the weekend of the Running of the Bulls in the famed city of Pamplona. As we sipped our sherry a gentleman at the next table asked if we were Norte Americanos, here for the Running of the Bulls festival. When we answered “si,” he shook his head and offered some advice.

“At one time,” he began, “this was a wonderful and exciting time for us. A true and traditional festival for the people of Pamplona and Spain. But today it is nothing but a carnival for thousands of tourists—mainly drunk college students—and it means big profits for the local businesses. That’s why most of us leave until it is over and we can return to our home and a life of sanity.”

When he stood and wished us a good life, we looked at each other and agreed that was advice to consider. After a meal of tapas and more sherry, we decided to load up the “blue whale” van and continue our trip to France up Highway N135. A few miles north of Pamplona we found a beautiful site to camp just off the road, with umbrellas of trees for shade and vibrantly colored wildflowers along a clear bubbling stream. As we strolled along the stream, I noticed a poster on one of the trees announcing an olive festival in the nearby hamlet of Auritz-Burguete on Saturday, Sunday and Monday. Shades of our days at Toledo Norte.

The next morning we drove into the tiny burg of Burguete (in Basque known as Auritz) about 40 minutes from Pamplona, a photogenic village of whitewashed buildings, narrow cobblestone streets, the ubiquitous

church and the Hostal Burguete in the center. Formerly a farmhouse, the converted building housing the Hostal Burguete featured high ceilings, a large main room with handsome dark-wood walls and strong Spanish-style furniture. Francesca at the reception desk was overwhelming in her welcoming us. She escorted us to our room, telling us we were in for an unforgettable party. How right she was!

That evening we were reading the menu in the hotel’s spartan but super-clean restaurant, with white, starched linen and dark furniture. As we perused the menu, Louise suddenly looked up and proclaimed, “Omigod! Look down the menu.” And then I saw it: Hemingway Soup! (See recipe below.) I then remembered an earlier conversation with Louise. We both had a memory that we had heard the name Burguete somewhere, but neither of us

could put words to that memory.

We asked the waitress if Francesca was available to join us for a moment. Francesca appeared in a few moments and sat with us. We asked her the history of the Hemingway Soup. And this was what she told us:

“It was, of course, well before my time, but the story has been passed down from generation to generation. In 1924 Ernest Hemingway was on his way to Pamplona for the Feast of San Fermin and checked into our hotel. Apparently he was a serious trout fisherman, and our region is world-famous for its first-class fishing. Later we discovered he had characters in his most famous novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, staying in Burguete here at the hostel. In our lobby you can see the piano with the name E. Hemingway etched on its side. There’s no proof, but it’s assumed the writer did it. And that’s the history behind Hemingway Soup.”



In the novel the narrator Jake Barnes stays at the hotel with his friend, Bill Gorton, before continuing on to the bullfights in Pamplona. Hemingway writes through Barnes about the two dining at the Hostal Burguete: “Bill plays at the piano to keep warm. The girl brought in a big bowl of vegetable soup and the wine.”

As we lay in bed the next morning a loud blast of a trumpet jarred us completely awake. Looking out the window we saw high-spirited local musicians in a mix of colorful uniforms marching down the main street followed by a large contingent of citizens and, surprisingly, a number of soldiers in uniform. According to Francesca they were forces stationed at a small outpost a few kilometers north. We dressed hurriedly and ran down the stairs to join the rally. The party had begun!

It seemed all 400 residents had come out to hear

the mayor open the festival and selections from the band. After the celebratory speeches, the band played a number of spirited numbers. We joined some locals at a sidewalk shop for coffee and pan dulce and to find out what we had to look forward to. A local told us the afternoon would be turned over to vendors, mainly citizens of Burguete, selling food, vegetables and fruit and native handmade garments. That night the big event would be a dance in the school gymnasium that should last long into the night, our new friends warned us.

While we strolled through the open marketplace, it finally struck us we were the only outsiders at the weekend party. It was warming and touching how the people took to us, asking, of course, about America, and in concert telling us of their lives in the Basque country. In Barcelona I had purchased a black beret, which became a regular part of my



Al Auger

wardrobe as we cruised through Spain. It was a bit embarrassing, as many locals would begin conversations with us in their Basque language. Perhaps they thought I could also speak this elusive and unknown language, because, as Louise pointed out, there was a telling look of my father's own French-Basque features and build in me.

After dinner we joined the crowd heading for the gymnasium and the dance. Inside, the memory of my high school prom was reinvented with a roomful of multicolored balloons and flamboyant streamers. Unlike the sophisticated and structured weekend at Toledo Norte, Burguete became a town-wide party, uninhibited and joyful. The band from the nearby army base joined the locals in providing nonstop dancing. Everything from Spanish love songs to polkas kept the happy crowd hopping late into the night. All this frolic was ably abetted by local wines, sherries and beer. By the end of the long night, Louise and I had become the unofficial mascots of the festivities.

All day Sunday we were taken by locals into their homes to show us their children and fill us with homemade goodies. And in perhaps the greatest compliment, we were allowed to join them in neighborly gossip. While Louise gossiped and told tales of living in California, I joined the men in sitting at the sidewalk restaurant enjoying Spanish beer and tapas, along with the usual male Basque braggadocio.

We weren't forewarned about what would follow that night. We were in our room after dinner, getting ready for the announced street dance, when the familiar blast of the trumpet and band let us know it was time to go. Standing on the sidewalk in front of the hotel, we watched the street quickly filling up with expectant revelers marching behind the band. A group of soldiers dancing by spied us standing there and began shouting, "Hey! Hey! Vamos, es hora de fiesta!" (Hey, Hey, come on, it's time to party!) In a seeming flash, we were swept up and carried away.

Well into the early-morning darkness, bottles of



Spanish rojo wine and local beers were passed around with complete abandon. By the time we stumbled into bed, numbed by an endless offering of bottles of wine and beer plus dance partners beyond count, we quickly fell into a near-coma sleep.

Again we were wakened out of a groggy sleep by the flare of trumpets and the band. This was Monday, the final day. The citizens of Burguete once again gathered at the plaza for closing remarks and more musical numbers. The vendors in the bazaar spent the morning closing down. We packed up our belongings at the hotel and exchanged long and intense goodbyes with Francesca and the staff, returned with hugs and "Vaya con Dios." Many of our new friends were out in the street to wave adios as we drove off.

Driving away, heading for the French border, there was a palpable quiet in the van. We were both reliving the past three days of wonderment among the Spanish people and, particularly, their immense joy. The people of the tiny hamlet of Burguete left us with a feeling that our unconscious ongoing learning from the people of the world had just taken a huge leap forward. A warmth came from being so quickly accepted, nurtured, and let into their lives and culture. Such intense episodes in our fantasy-like gypsy life were to become never-to-be-forgotten points.

Unfortunately, the olive festival is no longer held.

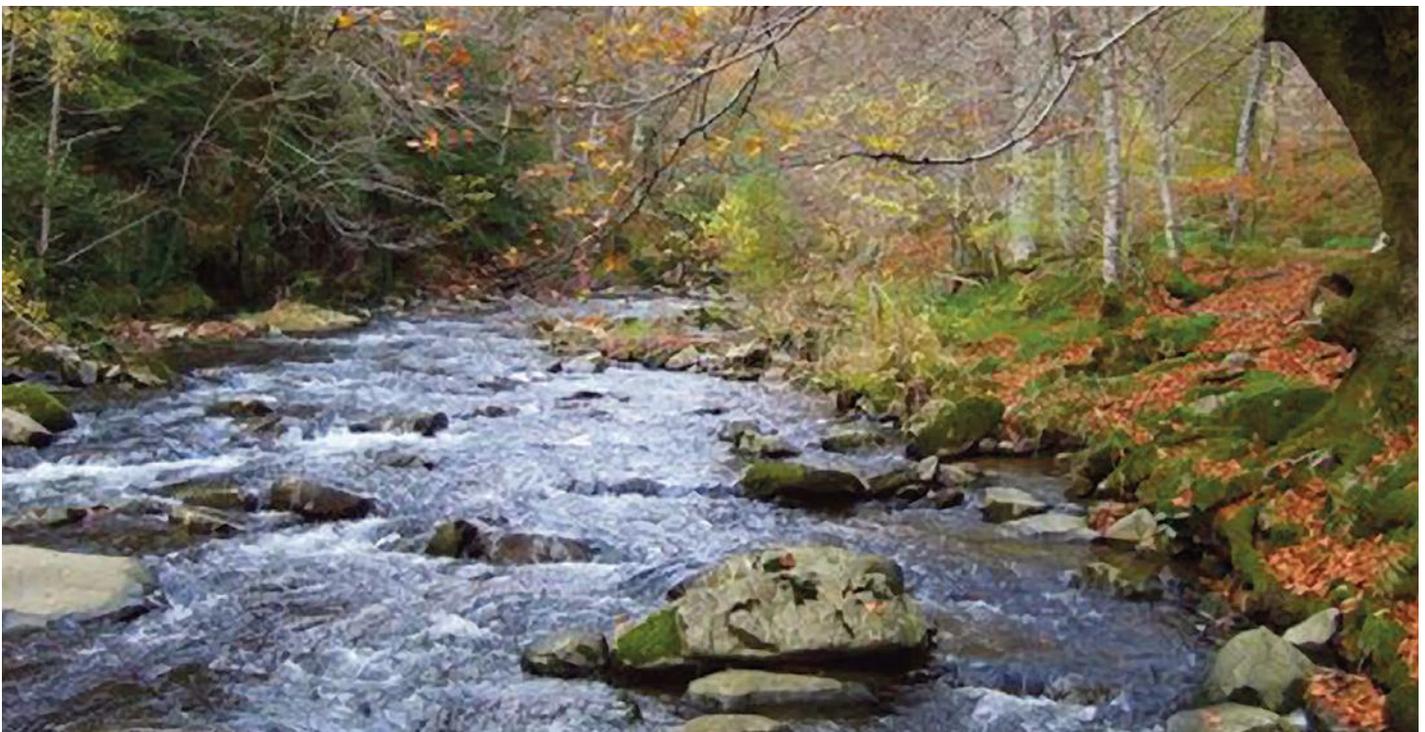


Still, there are many, many reasons to visit Auritz-Burguete. The small community has numerous public events, parades and religious festivals. The trout is still among the finest in Spain and the countryside is a hiker's delight—green, rolling hills surrounded by deep forests and burbling streams. And always the people of Auritz-Burguete, warm, vibrant and brimming with *abrir el corazón*. Imbedded in all this are the ghosts of Papa, Jake and Bill.

Hemingway Soup

- 3 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
- 1 onion, finely minced
- 2 leeks, white part only, thinly sliced
- 4 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 lb. cured ham (serrano or possibly prosciutto), preferably one piece
- 1/2 lb. dry white beans
- salt to taste
- freshly-ground black pepper to taste
- 1 thinly sliced green (or possibly white) cabbage
- 1 cup fresh green beans, snapped into halves
- 1 cup frozen green peas

In a medium (4- to 6-quart) soup pot over low heat, combine extra virgin olive oil, onion, leeks and garlic. Sauté/fry until onion has softened, about 10 minutes. Add in 9 cups of water plus ham, white beans and salt and pepper to taste. Simmer covered until beans are tender, about 2 1/2 hours. Add in cabbage and green beans. Simmer covered for 20 minutes. Add in green peas and continue to simmer 5 more minutes. Remove ham. Adjust seasonings and serve. Yields four servings.



Beverly Mann

A True Taste of Kauai: Savoring the South Shore

This story was previously published in Epoch Times.

Dolphins and whales arched through the air in crystal turquoise waters, as cascading waterfalls draped along the dense forestry of cavernous, emerald mountain ranges. The dramatic landscape was my first day's taste of Kauai's southwestern coastline, aboard a spacious catamaran leaving from Port Allen on Captain Andy's Sailing Adventures & Raft Expeditions. This 5 ½-hour sail and snorkel was merely an introduction to a scenic and culinary adventure on a slice of the 552-square-mile island of Kauai, the Garden Isle, which overflows with exotic foliage and the flavors of creative cuisine.

A short distance from the Lihue Airport sits the white South Shore beaches of Poipu and the former sugar plantation town of Koloa, established in 1835. I spent most of my week's stay there, being pampered with endless choices of eateries, fine dining and tropical beauty to savor.

I first sampled the exotic fare at the palatial Kauai Marriott Resort, which was decorated with elaborate fountains, statues and gardens, and boasted rooms with ocean views. Heard of farm to table? Marriott's Chef Guy Higa brings in an array of organic delicacies from his nearby farm and uses them to prepare fresh salads and entrees for the guests. My evening meal contained a sampling: fresh guava, passionfruit, papaya, mangos, curry leaves, kale and thyme, with a twist of calamansi, a citrus fruit he used in a lemonade and vinaigrette. I realized that using local produce was the emerging trend in Kauai, a

much different cuisine than I had experienced some 15 years earlier.

My next night's dinner at the nearby Sheraton Kauai Resort's Rum Fire Restaurant on Poipu Beach included delectable fried Brussels sprouts with a miso vinaigrette, sweet sausage and macadamia nuts. The Hawaiian Paella featured tender fish, shrimp, sausage and clams. Chef Michael Young describes his creations as "Hawaiian-inspired cuisine with a global influence."

The ultimate in fine and affordable hotel dining was lunch at the elegant, but comfy Grand Hyatt Kauai Resort and Spa's Ilima Terrace, which was surrounded by picture-postcard gardens. The menu featured a filling Hawaiian Pesto Crusted Island Fish and Prawn Salad. I also could have created my own salad, choosing from an ample selection of local farm-fresh veggies.

My tasty culinary experiences at these impressive South Shore hotels

led me to Koloa's four-hour Tasting Kauai South Shore Food Tour, created by Marta Lane, who has also written a cookbook featuring local fare. Our small car caravan followed Michelle, our tour guide, through six stops in adjacent shopping centers. Our first stop was at a popular food truck for a tasty taco, moving on to a sushi bar for a succulent salad on rice, with raw ahi, ono and salmon. It was satisfying enough to serve as my lunch. At the Poipu Shopping Center, we enjoyed the Papalani Gelato's house-made gelato, with a wide array of tempting flavors.

The highlight of the tour was the local farmers' market at The Shops at Kukuiula, where we tasted the Kauai Sugarloaf Pineapple (an extra-sweet, low-acid and white-flesh fruit that



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.

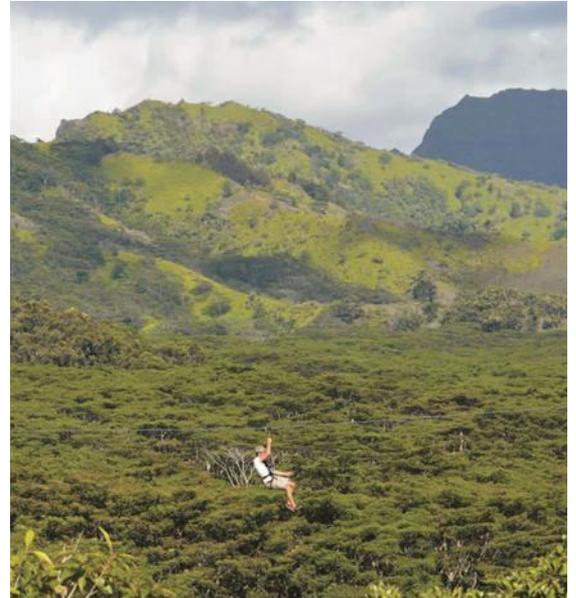
melted in the mouth), savory Kobe sliders from Living Foods Market and a buttery stuffed croissant.

For a true taste of Kauai's plants, herbs and the world's largest offsite collection of Hawaiian flora, I signed up for the 3 ½-hour tour of the National Tropical Botanical Garden. The tour includes the 259-acre McBryde Garden and 83-acre Allerton Garden, with 400 varieties that include 50 types of fruit. Its sculptured fig trees were featured in the movie "Jurassic Park."

The Botanical Garden's focus is a combination of scientific research, public education and preservation. Don't miss the sweeping views of

purple bougainvillea carpeting the landscape. And on the new Biodiversity Trail, I was able to walk through time, covering 450 million years of nature's richness.

For a 360-degree view of this luscious landscape, it's possible to take a helicopter ride or a 3 ½-hour ride on Kauai's longest zipline, my final thrill on Kauai's South Shore. Its fragrant florals, vivid colors, delectable tastes and spectacular scenery left me repeating these words: Aloha...A Hui Hou. Goodbye, until we meet again.



Do-It-Yourself Foodie Tour in Kona on Hawai'i Island

This article originally appeared in the Los Angeles Times.

"Don't dip your head into the dark chocolate," a male voice behind me warned. Dark melted chocolate swirled in two-foot-wide pots, filling the tropical air with heaven's scent as our informal group toured the Original Hawaiian Chocolate Factory in Kailua-Kona on Hawai'i Island (also called the Big Island). After an hour of looking at trees, pods, drying racks, seeds and processing equipment, I couldn't blame anyone for being ready to submerge.

But our moms told us not to start with dessert, so first I'll tell you about some of the healthy food my husband, Michael, and I found on our do-it-yourself foodie tour of the Kona Coast —although the owner of the chocolate factory will be happy to tell you about the healthful qualities of chocolate, too.

During our weeklong trip, we decided that when we weren't snorkeling, we would explore the little back roads of Hawai'i's jungles, an investigation that soon turned into our DIY foodie tour in coffee country along the southwestern part of the island. We had gone coffee tasting before, but because the food scene has grown over the past decade, this time we were going for more substantial cuisine.

Our first stop was a 90-minute tour of the Amy B. H. Greenwell Ethnobotanical Garden in Captain Cook. The 12-acre garden's manager, Peter Van Dyke, said traditional staples were taro, sweet potatoes and breadfruit, plus pigs, coconuts, bananas and other plants emigrant Polynesians brought. Van Dyke pointed out kuku'I, or candlenut, which is roasted and mixed with salt to create inamona, an oily, nutty condiment still used in raw-fish dishes.

We walked past a taro garden. The large taro leaves resemble philodendrons. Van Dyke told us that taro, which is highly revered in the Hawaiian religion, is made into the bland, purple, pudding-like

poi. He said that the most authentic lau lau, a traditional dish in which butterfish and pork are wrapped in taro leaves like small tamales and steamed, was served at Ka'aloa's Super J's, two miles south.

Super J's, in an unassuming building with red benches out front, is owned by Janice Ka'aloa and her husband, John. The casual café with Formica counters and tables has neatly hand-printed signs listing the menu: "Kalua pig and cabbage" and "lau lau." The traditional lau-lau plate lunch came in pork or chicken with macaroni-potato salad and a choice of rice or poi. When Michael ordered poi, Janice squinched up her face in disbelief. Michael ate every bit of his lau lau and complimented Janice on it and her poi. "Other places make bad poi," she said. "Like the hotel buffets. I told them it's bad. I said, 'By making bad poi, you're insulting our people.'"

The bill was \$8.50 each. "We keep prices low so

the locals can afford to eat here and remember the traditional foods," Janice said. "We want our grandchildren to know our culture. We do it for the locals, and it's a bonus for the tourists."

We wandered north along densely jungled Painted Church Road, winding past coffee bushes, papaya trees and banana plants. When

we got out to listen to the birdcalls in the otherwise quiet area, we noticed a sign for Joe's Nuts with the invitation to "Visit the nut farm." Owner Diane Hein gave us a mini-tour of the macadamia trees, which grew over 30 feet tall. Her Kona-coffee-flavored mac nuts were great.

The next morning we headed to Kailua-Kona's colorful downtown farmers' market to buy local pineapples, mangoes, bananas, star fruit, "scaly" dragon fruits, "hairy" rambutans and several varieties of papayas (four for a dollar), as well as fresh local peppers, carrots, broccoli, cauliflower and four types of actually green lettuce. Twenty years ago, lettuce on the Big Island looked like wrinkled brown paper bags.

Next we stopped at Da Poke Shack for the local specialty of poke (POH-kay), Hawai'i's seasoned and



April Orcutt writes for *National Geographic Traveler*, *TravelandLeisure.com*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Dallas Morning News*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Alaska Air*, *AAA magazines*, *Global Business Travel* and more. Yahoo's, MSNBC's and the BBC's travel websites have also published her stories. She is honored to have won a number of prestigious travel-writing awards.

chunky raw-fish version of sashimi. Sauces ranged from sweet or sesame to “Pele’s Kiss,” a spicy homage to Hawai’i’s goddess of fire. “Always fresh, never frozen” is their motto and they used *inamona* as seasoning. Alas, no poi—instead we could get quinoa.

After snorkeling near Puuhonua o Honaunau National Historical Park—also called Place of Refuge—we stopped in Kealahou at our favorite quirky store, Discovery Antiques, for ice cream cones made with Tropical Dreams ice cream, which comes in mango, lilikoi (passionfruit), coconut-pineapple, chocolate-macadamia nut and Kona coffee.

The next day we moseyed south, where we discovered the Kona Coffeehouse & Café at Honaunau. We sat on the patio where flowers and ferns grew out of a lava-rock wall. I skipped the local chicken and grass-fed beef options and went for the “mac-nut veggie burger,” made of ground macadamia nuts, eggs and spices with local lettuce, and avocado. It was incredible—rich and nutty. Michael had perfectly grilled ahi, but after I reluctantly gave him a bite of my burger, he insisted that later in our trip we would return here so he could order his own mac-nut veggie burger. Our lunches were so good we went for dessert: coconut cream pie and a lilikoi bar. We needed coffee to cut its sweetness, but that was fine because we were sitting in a coffeehouse in the middle of Kona coffee country.

We drove west down to Kealahou Bay and later back up Napoopoo Road to Big Island Bees, a honey-and-beekeeping museum, factory and shop.

Variegated yellow-and-coral-colored orchids grew in pastel, wooden beekeeping boxes. Inside the museum were a natural beehive-shaped hive, beekeepers’ equipment, framed historic photographs and drawings of the area—and samples of their three single-flower honeys: wilelaiki (Christmas berry), dark macadamia-nut blossom and mild, indigenous ohia lehua, a flowering evergreen tree.

The next day it was finally time for dessert: a tour of the Original Hawaiian Chocolate Factory, which has been making chocolate for 15 years. While passing out samples and leading our group to the only cacao-tree orchard in America, owner Bob Cooper said this was also the only chocolate factory in the country that uses American-grown chocolate. The football-shaped, six- to 14-inch cacao pods grow directly off the trees’ trunks and branches, like scarlet, vermilion and yellow water balloons after a pin-the-balloon-on-the-trunk contest. Every two weeks they harvest the ripe ones, which Cooper described as “somewhat like an Easter egg hunt.”

Cooper cut a pod in half and pulled out the walnut-sized cacao seeds. The beans are dried, fermented, cleaned, roasted, winnowed and put through other steps before being stirred in the vats of melted chocolate.

The Hawaiian food scene has really improved in the last 20 years. We were delightfully surprised with the cafés serving delicious food, as well as the fresh discoveries in stands and along Hawai’i’s twisting and verdant back roads. Hawai’i Island is now both a climate and a food paradise.



John Montgomery

Contented goats and delicious cheeses at historic Harley Farms goat farm in Pescadero, California



Farm House & Goaty

Harley Farms, is a restored 1910 working farmstead dairy, on nine acres of pasture in Pescadero, California. Their 200 happy alpine goats produce internationally award-winning chevre, fromage blanc, ricotta, and feta cheeses.

The farms are open all year for farm and dairy tours, retreats, and events. Watch milk journey from goat to dairy to curd to cheese. Enjoy the gift shop and a picnic at their tables.

<http://www.harleyfarms.com/>



Resident goat being milked

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



Cheese curd draining



Making cheese patties and decorating them with flower petals



© 2007 John Montgomery

Polyglot Port: Oakland's Great Culinary Leap Forward

This article originally appeared in Western Living's January/February 2016 issue.

My grandmother said her favorite food was “anything cooked by someone else.” After my grandfather’s death, the only time I saw Mema tear up in public was when Johnny, their favorite maitre d' at their local Italian spot, Il Tulipano, expressed his condolences—formal and heartfelt, just right.

I don't eat out as much as she did, but I still enjoy it. Oakland, the old industrial port by San Francisco Bay, where I live, is suddenly awash in good restaurants. Food writers from around the continent have descended here, marveling at the creative ways its chefs have put to use California's bounty.

For sure, there are many trendy places in grand, industrial-chic spaces, plying a diversity of culinary waters—Barbadian, Burmese, Korean fusion, soul food, Japanese, Oaxacan, you name it. But just a few hit my particular spot, the ones that draw accolades from reviewers but also consistently serve up that something extra. All four take divergent approaches, and together they give some sense of the city's booming dining scene.

Camino's front-of-house manager Allison Hopelain is as different from Johnny as can be imagined. She dresses in casual, quirky vintage and notices everything. If something's off, there she is. “I don't know what I do here, exactly,” she once said, “but it must be important, because when I'm not here things fall apart.” At the back of this barn-like space, with long communal tables cut from a single redwood tree, her chef husband, Russell Moore, cooks in a blazing hearth, always in a gingham shirt.

Like so many top Oakland chefs, Moore trained at Berkeley's Chez Panisse under the first lady of California Cuisine, Alice Waters. And here, as there, a few high-quality ingredients are combined artfully on the tiny menu, crafted each day based on what's in the market. I've had extraordinary roasted lamb, a creamy *boudin blanc* sausage made by Moore and some succulent cardoons, edible thistles foraged from nearby. Moore and Hopelain are always in the place, and it's been great watching their hard work



pay off in positive *New York Times Magazine* and *Saveur* reviews.

A restaurant you like has a way of concentrating your memories. I have my mother enjoying the hell out of her first Dungeness crab; a rather unadventurous acquaintance looking down at the electric-green nettle soup he had gone and ordered; my partner's work colleague trying to wrest a Bacardi and Coke out of the no-national-brands bar. There's something earnest about the project—the wines are organic, and they've led the movement to incorporate tips into the prices. And some whimsy—at this fall's cookbook launch, homemade paper masks hung from the chandeliers, including one of a gorilla and an excellent Frida Kahlo.

Where Moore's food is haute rustic, James Syhabout's is just haute haute. A meal at his tiny, tasting-menu restaurant Commis involves eight small courses, each served on pottery to display the food to maximum effect. The artistry of the presentation is reflected in the subtlety of the tastes; Syhabout trained at Manresa south of San Francisco, and it is, in culinary terms, the opposite of Chez Panisse. His production values are high, his meal pacing is careful, and the Zen of staffers in the open kitchen infects the diners, making those scallops surrounded by a crown of woven escarole feel somehow sacramental. Although good-time (Motown) music is usually playing, Commis never feels casual, with a rare level of excellence on the plate.

Syhabout just earned his second Michelin star and is the only Oakland chef so recognized. That's

Alec Scott is a writer from Toronto based in Oakland. He has taught travel writing at Stanford, and a piece on Germany won a North American Travel Journalists' Association gold. His miscellaneous magazine work has been nominated for 12 National Magazine Awards and won three. www.alec.ugali.com

no surprise. Oakland's restaurants don't tend to serve food that is Michelin bait. The old working-class disdain for fancy remains here in the industrial port whose shipyards helped win the War in the Pacific. Its signature fusion is Asian-accented soul food, reflecting the city's storied, long-established black and Asian communities.

That may be the closest you can get to describing what Sunhui Chang does at his living room-sized Fusebox. Chang comes from a factory town in Korea and makes his own hot gochujang sauce and kimchi, but he takes Korean impulses and runs with them. His unique food comes from months of experimentation that are recorded in a notebook. He writes down what works and what doesn't and even includes a brief description of the odysseys that brought him to his homemade tofu and (particularly excellent) Korean-fried chicken wings, evidence of an obsessive nature. "The staff hate me because the sauce has to be applied with a paintbrush," he says.



It's something else that keeps me returning to *our* local Italian in Temescal, a neighborhood that has become a food mecca. Pizzaiolo is a far cry from my grandmother's favorite, Il Tulipano, a restaurant right out of "The Sopranos." Night after night, the diverse and funky humans of Oakland pack its seats, their lively conversations bouncing

off the exposed brick walls. The chef, Charlie Hallowell, is another Chez Panisse alum, and it shows. His pizzas are thin crust, topped with just a few good things; the vegetables and salad greens come from named farms of impeccable pedigree.

When we last came here in mid-October, I took particular pleasure in eating this food prepared by others. In September, my rather stalwart partner of ten years, David, had a tangerine-sized tumor removed from his brain. The operation went well, but there was a worrisome month afterwards, one in which I cooked three meals a day as he came back into himself. When at last he felt ready to go out again, into the world, this was where we went. We

had a waitress we had often had before.

David lobbed a couple of his quips at her and she had good, smart responses. I told her the origin of the L-shaped scar on his head, and she took it in. When we opted out of the dessert, she brought one anyway, on the house—a fresh pear cake with crème fraîche ice cream and huckleberry sauce. "So glad to see you," she said. "Welcome back."



Wanda Hennig

Na zdrowie! A little shot of Poland

Versions of this article have appeared in the Sunday Tribune (South Africa) and Cuisine Noir magazine.

It's blustery and raining in Krakow for my lunch date at Pod Baranem, reputedly the most popular restaurant among locals who want to indulge in upscale, seasonally inspired traditional Polish fare in the city's vast medieval Old Town marketplace area.

I've barely had time to settle in when waiter Mariusz Scetlak brings a small platter that includes a tapas-size serving of steak tartare. The restaurant prides itself on the freshness of ingredients. And except for some of the more "exotic" fish that come via a contact at a market in Berlin, everything is locally sourced.

The meat for the tartare is from a farm checked out by Pod Baranem's owner and chef, Jan Baran's "number-two chef" son, Patrick. It is prepared with gherkin and marinated foraged mushrooms, both made in-house. Along with my starter, Scetlak brings me what he tells me is "quince-infused vodka—made by the owner; to warm you up."

You have to love these Poles. Every time they offer you a shot of something alcoholic, be it at breakfast time, lunch (which they typically call dinner, the main meal of the day eaten mid to late afternoon) or after supper, they tell you it's for your health—or that it will warm you up. That it will whet the appetite (good *apéritif*) or settle your stomach (if you've overindulged). It's a tonic. It's restorative. It's good for the constitution.

The list is creative. It goes on.

I am usually a wine drinker and know from a previous visit that the Poles make excellent beer, but prepping for this trip, I read that vodka is like wine for many Poles in terms of subtleties of flavor; that one might try sipping their smooth, refined vodkas with meals.

When in Rome, as the saying goes. And so: "I will have a beer—whatever is on tap—and a vodka," I tell the waiter the afternoon I arrive in Warsaw where I've met up with a friend who, like me, had a Polish dad. We are going to spend a few days on a road trip, looking into our roots. Given that my dad was a passionate cook and that culinary

travel is my game, I am looking forward to blissful indulgence in the name of research. I have heard that Poland has been reviving traditions lost during the post-World War II Soviet years. That the country has seen a culinary renaissance. That it is becoming a hot travel destination for foodies.

In Warsaw that first day, we order Polish specialties, naturally. The ubiquitous pierogi (Polish dumplings), melt-in-the-mouth herring and a hearty cheese platter. We gulp our long glasses of *Zywiec* (beer); we sip on the *Wyborowa* (vodka).

This sets the scene for as many vodka experiences as there are days during a trail through small Polish towns that make us feel we've stepped back into the last century; of Teutonic castles that force us to read up on our history; of churches and cemeteries that leave us with no doubt that we're in a Catholic country.

Our first morning in Krakow, eight days after arriving in Warsaw, we stop in for an early coffee and a *kremówka*—a custardy cheese cake often called a *papieska* (papal) *kremówka* since the late Polish pope (John Paul II) said it was one of his favorite things to eat—at *Cafe Jama Michalika*, a gallery-like restaurant and bar that opened more than 100 years ago.

Long a haven for writers and creatives, in its heyday—when notorious as a venue for burlesque-type *avant-garde* cabaret—artists, often drunk, swapped much of the *risqué*, satirical art that adorns the walls for food and drink. It is a cabaret and poetry venue to this day.

Owner (since 1991) Stanisław Jerzy Kuliś, chef and writer, shares its history through an



Veteran photojournalist Wanda Hennig is an award-winning food and travel writer and author of *Cravings: A Zen-inspired memoir...* (Say Yes Press). She has a large international portfolio, print and online; a special affinity for Poland, South Africa and California; and a fervid appetite for travel and adventure. www.wandahennig.com



interpreter. After not too long he calls his pony-tailed manageress, Martina. “He says that Poles drink at restaurants,” she tells me. “My boss says it’s a cold day and you must try this traditional drink.”

In this hallowed establishment with its decadent stained-glass windows, many designed by Poland’s legendary artist, the late Karol Frycz, I am introduced to nalewka. A traditional vodka-like drink infused with herbs, fruit and/or spices, the tradition was almost lost, I am told, under Soviet rule. But there has been a strong revival with people making their own and small producers putting it back on the shelves.

Ingredients that lend their flavors to nalewkas include black current, cherries, walnut, sloe berries, strawberries—in the case of the one we drink, *derén* berries, which I can’t find a translation for. At a stop two days later in another historic spot, the hilltop haven of Lanckorona, about 45 minutes by car from Krakow, we are poured a nalewka romantically flavored with rose petals.

These infusions—and even the straight vodka—typically come with the words “good for you.” Which makes it only polite to succumb, regardless of the time of day.

Back at Pod Baranem on that drizzly day, Chef Patrick tells me more about the food served with the vodka. “We have to constantly plan around the seasons,” he says. “In mushroom season we buy

foraged mushrooms and freeze them. We use 4,500 pounds of fresh foraged mushrooms a year and 700 to 900 pounds of dried mushrooms.

“At the moment we’re making plum jams. The plums are in season. We freeze fresh berries to use all year and make jams, which we can then reconstitute year-round in sauces, hot or cold.”

The berry mousse cheesecake I end my meal with is made from fresh berries. The intense berry drizzle in the velvety garnish that accompanies it is made from one of their berry jams, he says. It means they can keep this favorite on the menu all year.

Scetlak pours me what he tells me is Chef Jan’s special 14-year-old, barrel-aged, prunus padus-infused (bird cherry) vodka to accompany my cheesecake and coffee.

I have, by now, had a vodka infused with seven herbs and nuts with my wild-boar dish. The restaurant works with a hunter who provides them with venison and boar, shot during hunting season in a nearby forest.

He has also poured me a commercially produced spelt (grain) vodka. This comes with herring and salmon, both smoked on cherrywood.

I am, just to note, offered wine with my lunch. It would have been French. But why, when the option was to sip on local vodkas and nalewkas made in-house?

At Frederick Chopin Airport, when waiting to fly home from Warsaw, I spot a T-shirt in the duty-free. It says on the front: “Polska is full of difficult choices.” The difficult choices listed on the back are a range of vodkas: *Zubrówka*, *Pan Tadeusz*, *Luksusowa*, *Chopin*, *Wyborowa*. Each time I wear it, it feels like time to say “*Na zdrowie!*”



Janet and Stuart Wilson

Savoring the Rhone: River Cruise Features Wine and Food

This article is a revised and condensed version of a series of daily travel blogs published in the online magazine, All Things Cruise (allthingscruise.com).

A brisk 40-minute walk from our Barcelona hotel, which included one wrong turn, finally brought us to our restaurant in el Raval district, about 20 minutes late for our 8 p.m. reservation. We found the lights out and the door locked. A man came to the door saying they had a problem with the water and were closed, though he had reserved a table for us at a nearby sister restaurant. Due to our tardy arrival, however, that table had been taken.

After this unpromising beginning, we and our traveling companions enjoyed one of our most memorable dining experiences ever at a third tiny restaurant. We were the only tourists in the place, out of perhaps 10 tables, all full by 9:30. Our server, Martila, took perfect, motherly care of us and delivered croquettes, focaccia with smoked salmon and marinated artichokes with pepper marmalade as starters. Including our main courses of the freshest fish, the food was among the best ever, but the service and atmosphere combined to make the meal one we will long remember.

When our travel agent friend, Donna, asked if we'd be interested in a wine-themed cruise on France's Rhone River, we said, "Are you kidding? Sign us up." Our first European river cruise, it had been on our short list since we hired a self-drive barge in Burgundy 30 years ago. We do seem to favor renowned wine regions, and that's not just chance. AmaWaterways offered a beautiful, 150-passenger vessel, AmaDagio, with programs that included winery tours and tastings, onboard tastings, wine and food pairings, and informative lectures, along

with an onboard wine host, Steve Ledson, owner and winemaker at Ledson Winery & Vineyards in California's Sonoma Valley. The cruise line offered pre- and post-cruise extensions in Barcelona and Paris. We opted to visit Barcelona, but on our own.

Food is among the things we liked most about Barcelona, a remarkably livable city. A shopping tour of Mercat de la Boqueria preceded a cooking class at Barcelona Cooking. There, chef Candida Cid demonstrated proper technique and supervised students as we prepared a lunch of local dishes, including paella and an incredible butternut squash soup. A couple of fun tapas meals and dinner in a lively little restaurant in our hotel's Eixample neighborhood reinforced our assessment that Barcelona is a culinary standout.

Our other favorite things about Barcelona: the architectural masterpieces of Antoni Gaudi; our hotel, Olivia Balmes; and the city's neighborhoods and pedestrian-friendly boulevards. We walked narrow, winding streets of the Bari Gotic and el Born neighborhoods to check out the Picasso Museum; strolled the broad, bustling La Rambla; ambled along the beautiful waterfront; felt like locals wandering the avenues of Eixample; and were inspired by Sagrada Familia.

As we prepared to leave Barcelona, we were faced with an unexpected change in plans. We had purchased train tickets from Barcelona to Arles weeks before, but on our final day in

Barcelona we learned that the Celebration of Wine cruise was now departing from Lyon instead.

Mother Nature had intervened and drenched southern France, causing the Rhone River to rise dramatically. AmaWaterways staff improvised and arranged a motor coach trip to Montpellier, France, followed by a smooth and speedy TGV ride to Lyon, where we boarded our vessel by 6 p.m. Only that day had the river level dropped to the point where



Award-winning travel journalists Janet and Stuart Wilson are freelance writers and photographers. Their work has appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Preservation*, *RV Journal* and *Trailer Life*, among other publications. They are active members of Bay Area Travel Writers and the Outdoor Writers Association of California. www.wilsonstravels.com

AmaDagio could travel there, managing to slip beneath one bridge with two centimeters to spare. We sailed at midnight with a reconfigured itinerary. We would cruise downriver to Arles, then return to Lyon on the scheduled day. All planned excursions would be undertaken, though the sequence would vary.

We arrived in Le Pouzin around noon the next day. Serge Aurel, third-generation owner of a nearby truffle farm, delivered a thoroughly enjoyable educational talk, in French. With broad gestures, dramatic pauses, infectious laugh and expressive face, it almost didn't matter that few understood. We got helpful translation from our guide.

We had tasted truffles, but he explained about farming them, including selecting two varieties of oak to plant and infecting the young saplings' roots with truffle spores before planting. Even our untrained noses could easily detect the difference between winter and summer truffles. Then he introduced us to his dog, Aimee, and took us out to his grove to demonstrate Aimee's truffle-finding technique. Our excursion continued in the nearby village of Grignan, a medieval limestone confection crowned with a castle cum Renaissance palace.

Again we departed in the wee hours, arriving in Avignon for breakfast. We opted for a morning visit to Pont du Gard, the iconic, 2,000-year-old Roman aqueduct, and to the nearby village of Uzes. It was market day, so we wandered among food and craft vendors, picking up a few small gifts and a huge slice of blue cheese and black olive pizza.

That afternoon, we got a close-up view of some of Chateauneuf-du-Pape's extraordinary vineyards, which seem to grow out of fields of stones. Jerome

Quiot winery in the village of Chateauneuf-du-Pape provided an opportunity to sample the fruit of those vines.

Bellina led our tour while explaining about the 13 grape varieties traditionally planted in the appellation. We sipped a 2013 vintage white, the first white Chateauneuf-du-Pape that most of us had ever tasted. We then savored and compared two red wines. The 2011 cuvee traditional was a field blend of all 13 varieties planted together in the vineyard; the 2006 cuvee *exceptionnelle* was a blend of Grenache and Syrah. The latter proved our personal favorite.

Our evening meal featured a "Chaine des Rotisseurs" dinner, showcasing the talents of the culinary staff that helped AMA Waterways become the only cruise line admitted to the prestigious organization of chefs and restaurateurs.

Arriving in Arles the next day, we joined a coach tour to an olive oil producer and to medieval Les Baux, called the most beautiful village in France. With a population of 22, the village has more boutiques, souvenir shops and restaurants than residents. The main street winds uphill, from the gated entrance to the ruined castle above.

The olive oil producer was the real reason we signed up for this excursion. Moulin a huile du Calanquet is on a property at the base of the Alpilles (or little Alps), a small range to the east of Arles. Five varieties of olives are pressed separately to capture their individual

qualities, but some are then combined to produce a blended oil. We tasted a Salonenque oil that was soft and light, a fruity Aglandau considered good for salads, and a blend, perhaps more versatile.

Soon after we returned to the AmaDagio, she sailed north for the first time. That evening we



Tasting Chapoutier wines in l'Tain Hermitage

Janet and Stuart Wilson

enjoyed an impressive wine pairing dinner, as Steve Ledson teamed up with our vessel's talented culinary team. Ledson's Russian River Valley Pinot Noir was a perfect match for the cheese ravioli in Boletus sauce, an inspired demonstration of a proper pairing.

If anyone on board had forgotten that this cruise was "A Celebration of Wine," the next day straightened them out.

In Tournon, we disembarked for a Wine & Chocolate Tasting, walking through narrow, cobbled lanes to the Chateau. We sat around a long, U-shaped table in a stone, barrel-vaulted room, while Sommelier Christophe taught us about the region's wines. Alaine, a pastry chef and chocolatier, described the production of cocoa and chocolate while we stared longingly at three tempting chocolate candies on a tray.

We were instructed to taste the Crozes-Hermitage in our glasses, take a bite of the

raspberry-filled chocolate and follow with another sip of the wine. Then two wines from Saint-Joseph, across the Rhone from Crozes-Hermitage, were paired with a chocolate caramel and a chocolate cream. Our favorite may have been the chocolate caramel paired with the Verzier Estate wine.

After driving through the vineyards of Hermitage—the tiny appellation limited to the slopes of a single hill across the Rhone from Tournon—we had no trouble appreciating the wines of Chapoutier Estates. Our favorite was a 2008 Hermitage called Sizeranne, produced from a blend of grapes picked from several of the estate's plots. All of Chapoutier's wines are biodynamically farmed, and the ones we tasted featured labels in Braille.

Sailing from Tournon, we arrived in Vienne before breakfast and immediately fell for this historic little city about 20 miles south of Lyon. Here we enjoyed one of the best city walking tours with our guide, "Fred." He pointed out a bas-relief carving on a stone lintel in the massive Gothic church, evidence of changes made in 1531, when the king standardized the calendar. We also toured a quirky museum in a deconsecrated church, visited a remarkably preserved Roman Temple erected in 10 B.C., and gazed over the town and its Roman theater from a hilltop.

A three-hour cruise brought us into Lyon at Quai Claude Bernard. En route, we enjoyed lunch and Steve Ledson's final wine lecture on "Winemaking: Art or Science." Steve definitely comes down more on the science side of the debate, perhaps a bit more than some of his French counterparts.

Upon arrival, we took a city tram tour of Les Halles, Lyon's central covered market. The market is home to high-end vendors of cured meats, fresh meats, fish, cheese, chocolate, pastry, produce and all things culinary. They all looked perfect, and our samples confirmed the appearance. Our guide said she shopped at open-air neighborhood markets where the food was still very good and the prices rather better.

Lyon is a walkable, lively and comfortable city. We enjoyed the opportunity to explore it on our own, but it was necessary to interrupt this activity



Chef Candida Cid instructs Stu Wilson at Barcelona Cooking School.

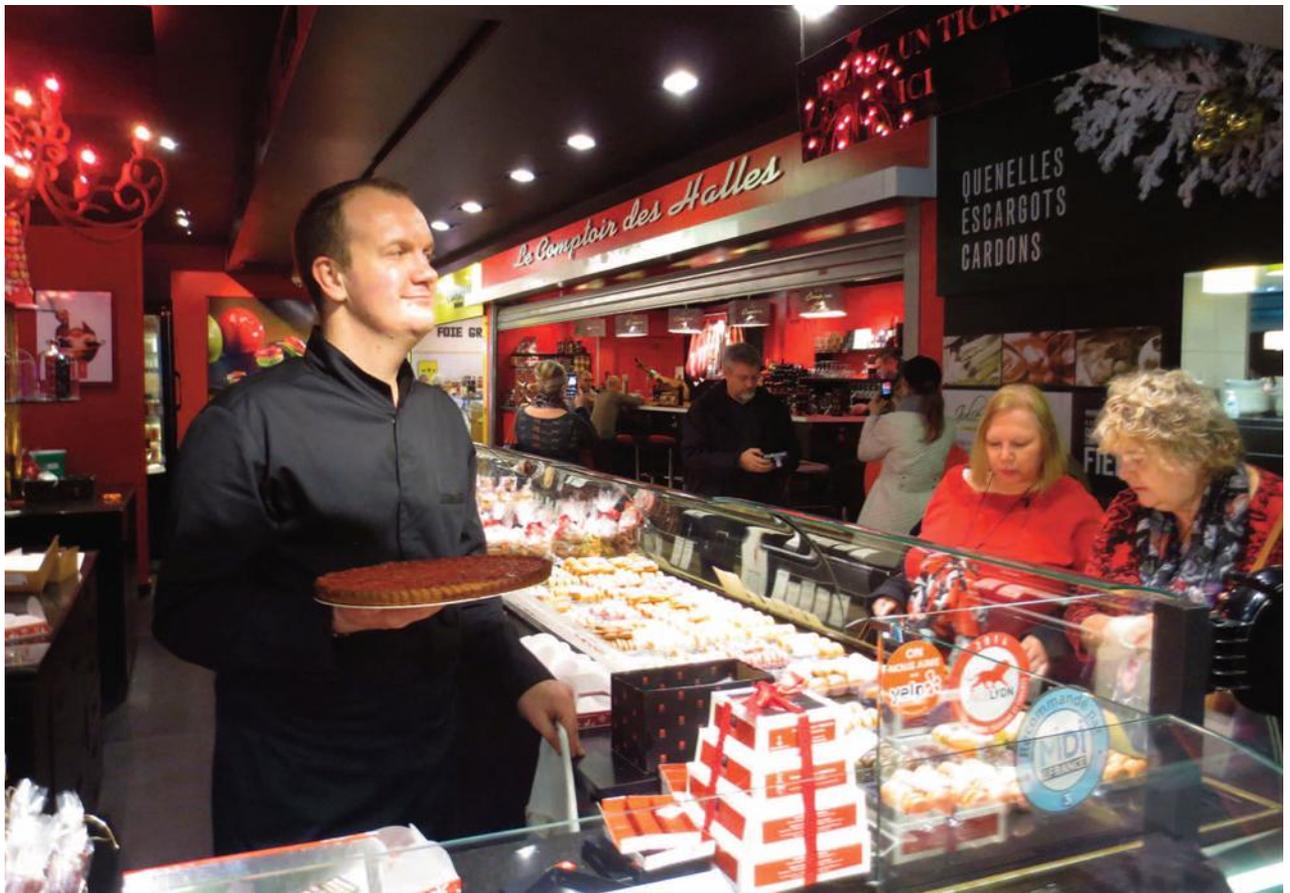


with another wine excursion. AmaDagio made a short trip down the Rhone, then up the Soane to Collonges, where coaches picked us up for a Beaujolais tour. We enjoyed trying to pronounce the name of the picturesque village of Oingt almost as much as our walking tour.

We were greeted by Jean-Jacques Paire, the 16th-generation owner, grower and winemaker of Domaine Paire, otherwise typical of the small, family-owned winegrowers and winemakers of the Beaujolais region. He taught us proper wine-tasting technique, including seeing with the eyes, smelling with the nose and, finally, tasting with the mouth, then poured one white and two reds for us,

including the just released, refreshing, fruit-forward Beaujolais Nouveaux.

We disembarked for the final time in Lyon, lingering for another day of sightseeing, riding the funicular up and down Fourviere Hill, and wandering the narrow lanes of Vieux Lyon and the bustling streets of the Presqu'île. Returning to Les Adrets, the small restaurant in Vieux Lyon where we had dined seven years earlier, we savored a meal that lived up to our highest expectations and yielded another indelible sensory memory. It seems we never want a trip to end, and that proved particularly true of this savory journey.



David Greitzer

The Great Shawarma Hunt

No, it's not a killer whale at Sea World. Known by other names like gyro or kebab, *shwarma* is sort of a sandwich. Not just any sandwich. It is *not* a Subway sandwich, the carbohydrate-laden tubes with thinly-veiled wisps of mechanically-separated, meat-flavored substances that they sell by the length, not by the taste. It is *not* a New York deli-style sandwich piled six-inches high with pastrami (although that is also wonderful). It is *not* that white-breaded PB&J with the crusts cut off that your mother used to make for you after school. Shawarma is a culinary experience like no other that invites its salivating participants to experience the closest feeling to their first kiss, learning to ride a bicycle, graduating from college, having your first child. Yes, shwarma is that good. It's practically an entity. It does have tele-portal abilities, even if it is all in the imagination.

Shwarma can be a blend of beef and lamb, just beef, just lamb, sometimes just chicken—with several Middle-Easterly spices. Occasionally the meat and spices are ground together and formed into a column surrounding a vertical rotisserie. Sometimes just layers of meat are stacked atop each other making these towers of flesh, about two feet high, look something like a medieval hunter's feast.

The Turks call it kebab, the Arabs shwarma and the Greeks gyro. Turkish guest workers living in Europe brought kebab into prominence during the 1970s. Doner kebab, which literally translates to "rotating meat" because it's roasted on a vertical spit, began making its appearance in all the major European cities: London, Berlin, Paris, Vienna. Kebab stands suddenly were competing with bratwurst vendors in Germany and fish-and-chips shops in Britain. This war over the public's palate soon met with a comfortable armistice as shwarma and kebabs found their rightful niche. They're here to stay and, in fact, are destined to cover the earth.

There are more than 1,000 kebab restaurants in Finland alone.

As the gigantic column of meat slowly turns on its spit, the outside is seared from red-hot heating elements usually located in the rear or the sides.

This helps ensure that each shaved layer is roasted to crispy perfection.

The meat is then either placed in a chubby pita-style bun (the Turkish method) or wrapped in a tortilla-like flatbread (Middle Eastern-style). It can be accompanied with fresh cucumber, tomatoes, lettuce, onions, goat cheese, tzatziki, savory yogurt and tabbouleh. "Having it your way" is the name of the game here. It can get huge and it can get messy.

Glaswegian Madeline says she makes the kebab stop a regular end-of-evening part of her pub crawls with friends. "No problem getting really good lamb kebab in Glasgow. Don't bother getting your sauce in the pita. Just ask for it over the collar on your shirt because that's where it'll end up anyway," she says, referring to the tipsy state she claims she's in when eating kebabs.

Also, in Prague at 2:30 a.m., scores of drunken teetering revelers regularly amass around a famous halal shwarma shop. At sunrise, evidence of this can be seen in the form of dozens of pigeons feasting on the savory remnants.

In Stuttgart, a half-dozen doner kebab stands line the Konigstrasse. Kebab tenders keep busy shaving meat for the Saturday night throng.

In Paris' Latin Quarter, the making and distribution of shwarma, gyros and kebabs has become as ubiquitous as a crepe cart at the Eiffel Tower. As passersby meander through the charming tiny streets and alleyways, open windows to shwarma shops allow for quick walk-up service. Shawarma and kebabs are a fast food. They are often served with fries.

The shwarma industry is so large now that pre-made meat spits and several shaving devices have streamlined the process. Vendors can buy prepared



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

columns of meat delivered fresh from their suppliers as a McDonald's might be restocked by a semi truck. The busier shwarma shops use electric meat shavers that look like blunt irons. It's just a matter of time before the franchises hit Main Street, U.S.A.

Here are a few things to know about shwarma:

- If you don't see a vertical spit, you aren't eating shwarma. Burger King occasionally tries selling microwaved gyros. Would you buy a hamburger from a shwarma shop? No. Exactly.
- Put it on a plate if possible; a spillover is inevitable. This way you can use a fork to clean it up.



Remember, the saucier the better. If the sauce isn't running down your chin you don't have enough. Just be sure to grab a handful of napkins.

- Be hungry. Shwarma is not a snack. It is a meal. Chicken's okay, but the lamb is the real thing.
 - Shwarma is best eaten right away. Cold shwarma is as unappealing as a day-old Big Mac.
 - Toss dining etiquette out the window. Eating shwarma is a sloppy, juicy sport. Miss Manners would not approve.
- So, good luck. Dive in. And pass the word on about the goodness of shwarma. The world needs less war and more shwarma.



Carole Terwilliger Meyers

Souvenir Foods of Mendocino

A version of this article appears at Carole's "Berkeley and Beyond" website.

I've made many visits to Mendocino through the years and have built up quite a shopping list of locally-made food products to purchase while I am in town. Additionally, I have some favorites from Fort Bragg (located a few miles north) and a few goodies that I stop for on the drive in or out. When you discover how delicious these items are, you might want to add a few to your own souvenir list.

Thanksgiving Coffee. Thanksgiving Coffee promotes organic, shade-grown coffee and is now in its 44th year of producing it in Fort Bragg. I discovered the coffee at the Mendocino cafe once owned by the company. Although it is now operated by someone else and is known as the Goodlife Cafe, the cafe continues to serve Thanksgiving Coffee, which remains a favorite throughout the area and beyond. Indeed, many local innkeepers have their own special blend. And everyone loves the company's work with the American Birding

Association to help save songbirds and the rainforest.

Early Bird Cashew Granola.

I love this cereal, made by Mendocino's famed Cafe Beaujolais restaurant, and I like to buy it at the source, the Brickery bakery located behind the restaurant. Sometimes they run low, so last time I was there I considered myself lucky to purchase the last two bags. I also wanted to pick up a loaf of the Brickery's fabulous dense **Austrian sunflower bread**, but was told it was sold out and to come back the next morning. When I did, the bakery and cafe were closed tight for their



Carole Terwilliger Meyers is the author of *Miles of Smiles: 101 Great Car Games & Activities*. She is also a blogger (www.travelswithcarole.blogspot.com), the founder and publisher of the Berkeley and Beyond website (www.berkeleyandbeyond.com), and a freelance contributor to the travel section of many magazines and newspapers.

Monday day off. I later stopped at Harvest Market at Mendosa's to purchase some local Bates & Schmitt organic apple juice and was pleasantly surprised by the serendipity of discovering a freshly baked loaf of the sunflower bread there. Ah, the mysteries of this town.

Mendocino Jams and Preserves. This dear shop at the end of Mendocino's main commercial street is tiny, but the prices aren't. Be prepared to splurge on the beautifully packaged jams, which you can taste before you buy. My favorite is the sour cherry and my husband's is the rhubarb marmalade. Which will yours be?

Fresh raspberry bark from Papa Bear's Chocolate Haus. The main reason I stop at Papa Bear's on Main Street is to get a fix of the exquisite



fresh raspberry bark, a delicacy made with white chocolate and fresh organic raspberries. But I am also tempted by the fudge and caramel apples. At times you can watch them work the candy on the big marble slab.

Mendocino Mustard. Made in Fort Bragg, this hot and sweet mustard is good on sausages. (The company motto is, "Put the best on your wurst.") But I also love it in egg salad sandwiches. Keep your eyes open for the tall, slender jars as you browse the shops.

Gowan's Oak Tree apples and apple juice. On the way in or out of Mendocino on Highway 128, I almost always pull over in Philo and park under a tree at the tiny Gowan's Oak Tree Fruit Stand. I'm after the homemade apple cider, both fresh and frozen, and an array of apples fresh from their orchards in season. I

purchased my last bag of apples out of season, in May, and found them disappointingly mushy but still good for pie. In season you'll also find peaches, pears and plums. Frozen apple pies are available year-round and fresh fruit popsicles are a revitalizing treat in summer.



Diane Covington-Carter

A Step Back in Time: Le Chalet de L'Aulp Dairy and Restaurant

The hairpin curves and bumpy ride up the unpaved mountain road gave new meaning to the expression “off the beaten track.” Our local friend was driving us to Le Chalet de L'Aulp Restaurant and Dairy, high up in the hills above Talloires, near Lake Annecy in the Rhone Alps region of France. Once at the top, the views, the delicious food and the unforgettable experience made the journey worthwhile.

We walked past the dairy, where the robust cows lined up to be milked, their giant bells clanking. The terrace of the restaurant overlooked rolling green hills with Lake Annecy sparkling below. Behind us, parapenters caught updrafts along the high cliffs favored by hikers and climbers.

The tradition of Reblochon and tomme cheese making has been passed down since the 13th century, the basic elements of it unchanged—cows, grass and flowers, fresh alpine air, milk, hard work and cheese.

The name Reblochon comes from the French

verb ‘reblocher,’ which means “to pinch the udder for a second time,” and was coined during the 13th century. The farmer had to pay the owner of the mountain pasture a sum based on how much milk the cows produced. So when the owner came around, the farmer would not fully milk the cows, finishing the job after the owner had left.

Four generations of the Fillon family have worked this particular piece of land. Three generations now live above the barn together all summer, their laundry flapping in the breeze as guests eat on the terrace of the restaurant. During the fall and winter months, they move their herd down to Thônes, at the base of the mountain.

Their 80 cows of the ‘Abondance’ breed, one of the three breeds allowed in the ‘Appellation d’Origine Controlee’ (AOP) of Reblochon of the Savoie region, are the most preferred, for being so well suited to the mountains and for the richness of their milk.

Their cheese carries the distinctive green casein mark of ‘Farmhouse Reblochon,’ meaning the cheese is handmade daily on the farm from the farmer’s herd only.

Le Chalet de L'Aulp, tucked up against the mountains



Diane Covington-Carter's award-winning travel stories have appeared in Reader's Digest, More and Organic Spa, among other publications. Her recent book, *Eight Months in Provence: A Junior Year Abroad, 30 Years Late* (July 2016) hit #1 in its category on Amazon, and her story, *Finding Gilbert*, appeared in *Best Women's Travel Writing 2011*. www.dianecovingtoncarter.com

The cheese-making process begins right after the morning and afternoon milkings; the cows each give about 20 liters of milk per day. The herd grazes in the high mountain meadows, on the wild grasses, herbs and flowers, the rich terroir giving Reblochon and tomme cheeses the distinctive flavor that has made them so popular. The cheeses are aged for five weeks.

The adults work all day milking, then making the cheese. In the evening, the lovely young wife takes off her rubber apron and boots and pulls a pint of beer or pours wine as she smiles and welcomes the guests for dinner. The grandparents cook in the kitchen while the grandchildren run and play outside.

Just before we sat down to dinner, we watched the cows heading out from the barn, their giant bells creating a chorus, the only sound in the still

mountain air. Louise, 6, and her brother Leo, 4, waved their small canes, helping their father direct the cows into the area where they would graze all night. In the 1950s, their grandfather had helped his father in the same way.

The dairy and the mountain are in a true partnership; the grazing has helped maintain the biodiversity of the alpine meadows, conserving fragile spaces and keeping them open, even preventing avalanches in the winter.

Back on the terrace, dinner featured the local specialty, tartiflette, a combination of potatoes, bacon, crème fraiche, onion and white wine. The dish arrived sizzling, the dairy's Reblochon cheese melted to a golden brown on the top.

A crisp green salad, crusty bread and a Sovie Apremont white wine complimented the tartiflette. For dessert, a fresh berry tart topped with fresh, rich cream from the cows rounded out the menu.

As we finished our dinner, the setting sun turned the hills in the distance a soft pink and the lake glistened below. The cows grazed on the nearby hillside, their bells clinking and chiming like snatches from some sort of ancient sacred ceremony.

This is how it had always been, the rhythm of the cows moving up the hill, the making of the cheese, the relationship between the dairy and the mountain, the passing down of something worthwhile.

We had stumbled into a precious and timeless place, real and untouched, a rare and wondrous gift. We drove back down the mountain filled with a sense of deep satisfaction and peace.



Donna Peck

Taipei: The Lost Day

This article was published in June 2016 in Celebration Traveler magazine.

When I was a child, the world rose up and greeted me from the edge of my driveway. I absorbed all I could about the empires of Asia from my family's 20-volume *Book of Knowledge*. Decades passed. When I finally traveled to Taiwan—boarding the plane at 2 a.m., then flying for 14 hours—I arrived jet-lagged and out of whack. I had traveled a day ahead of my group to get a head start on the wonders of Taipei, but sightseeing was the last thing I wanted to do.

I unlatched the hotel window and pressed my face into the narrow opening. The spire of Taipei 101 flashed silver in the sun. Its 101 floors lay buried under the dull gray haze of early morning. I didn't want to waste this architectural wonder in a foul mood, feeling like I was in the wrong time, the wrong life. The hope I carried on the plane, the hope that always travels with me to new destinations, is that my taste for life would come charging back.

After a full night's sleep, I reasoned, the city's charisma would return. The cool air caressed my face as if to say: good idea.

But from my 15-story window, I noticed the warren of rooftops behind the hotel. I could stay awake until sunset, then wake up the next morning refreshed. I grabbed my bag and left the hotel.

Breakfast at the food hall

The apartment buildings along the narrow lanes were silent and the storefronts padlocked. Huashan Market hadn't opened, but the food hall on the second floor was packed with city workers, hotel maids, taxi drivers and a scattering of tourists.

I sat down at an empty table. The assault of sounds and smells left me reeling. Behind glass, women in long white aprons and white boots worked nonstop replenishing the deep fryers and ovens. Strips of bread dough sizzled in hot oil. Thin squares of dough coated in sesame seeds baked in clay ovens. At the counter, half a dozen women in



green aprons bantered and filled orders, wrapping deep-fried doughnuts in flatbread, their hands in constant motion.

I got in line. When it was my turn, the counter lady beamed at me, asking in Chinese what I guessed to be, "What can I get for you?" Her singsong voice lifted my spirits. I forgot that I was weary to the bone and pointed to the doughnut wraps on the table behind her, saying, "One please," holding up a finger. "Yóutiáo shāobǐng," she yelled over her shoulder. "Do you want anything else?" she asked in Chinese. I shook my head.

I nibbled at the flatbread wrapper, then bit into the doughnut. How satisfying the crunch of the crispy crust, how light and airy the inside. I felt like I was drifting on a cloud.

Rush hour at the crosswalk

Back outside, I followed the street to Zhongxiao East Road and the whoosh of rush hour. It was 9

Donna Peck is the founding editor of Celebration Traveler (celebrationtraveler.com), an online magazine devoted to special-occasion trips and travel experiences. She has been published in magazines including *Global Traveler*, Cathay Pacific's *Marco Polo*, *Preservation*, *Wine Country Living*, *Coastal Living* and *San Francisco*— and was the principle author for the HarperCollins Access travel guides.



a.m. Scooters and motorcycles zigzagged across eight lanes of traffic, the drivers swerving around buses and vans, their passengers swaying, most of them talking on cell phones. The traffic light turned red. Yamahas, Hondas and Suzukis slammed to a halt like wasps hitting a wall.

The scene was as chaotic as my mental state. I was probably the only one in a one-mile radius who had no place to go. The light flashed green and the whining posse shot past. I didn't move. Taipei's boulevards are laid out on a compass. Minimal danger of getting lost, I thought. I kept wandering to stay awake, putting one foot in front of the other, staring blankly at shop windows. It was getting harder to stay out of the way of the midmorning shoppers flooding Songshan District.

A lane appeared off Fuxing South Road and swallowed me whole.

Compared to the boulevards, Taipei's back streets are so tranquil you can hear birds singing. I sat down on a bench under a leafy tree. It was 11 a.m. Narrow four-story apartment buildings surrounded the park. Clotheslines, elephant ear plants and plastic coolers jammed the balconies. Tight quarters, I thought. Voices drifted from the foot-massage parlor across the street. The business doubled as a gathering spot for neighbors who stopped in to share a pot of tea and smoke cigarettes.

Shock treatment at the foot-massage parlor

Why not, I thought. A foot massage would take the edge off my jet lag and buy me an hour in my battle

to stay awake. I got up and crossed the street. The young woman at the register took my money and motioned toward a black Naugahyde lounge. Her mother, I'm guessing, approached me with a tub of sudsy water and said in Chinese, "Soak your feet."

I felt docile, comfortable, and I closed my eyes. I awoke with a start, wincing. The masseuse pressed her thumb on the hollow beneath my ankle. "Yeow," I said, gritting my teeth and fighting the urge to jump out of the chair. She grinned and applied more pressure, then massaged pressure points along my feet and calves. What had I gotten myself into? She gestured for me to relax, cooing to me in Chinese. She inhaled slowly, deeply, gesturing for me to do the same. If I had dropped acid, this would be the bad part of the trip.

Afterward, I stood in the bright afternoon sun

feeling raw and vulnerable. Temperatures were climbing, and I noticed sweat dripping into my ears. At a sidewalk kitchen, jet burners were cranked high. Noodles in boiling kettles roiled like sea grass in a surge. Judging from the line of customers, 90-degree temperatures don't put the Taiwanese off their beef noodle soup.

Mango medicine at the ice palace

At 1 p.m., I was glued to the spot by the sight inside a shop window. A block of glistening mango ice whirled around a spindle. A young man in the black-and-white Ice Monster uniform caught the falling slivers of ice with a bowl. For the first time that day, my body wanted something more than sleep. I pushed open the door.

Holding the icy bowl in my hands, I had a mind-altering experience. The skin on my hands and face cooled as I examined the fruity, frosty mango shaved ice and mango ice cream mounded on sweet, diced mangoes. Time stopped. This icy confection surpassed any pleasure I can recall from a dessert.

The thrill lasted an hour.

I left Jianguo North Road and headed into a maze of narrow lanes. It was 3 p.m. I felt I had turned a corner in my efforts to acclimate to this new time zone. I stopped to watch a curious sight, a ceremony that was taking place at the green grocer's. Buddhist monks in saffron robes chanted, waving bundles of glowing-red incense. I drifted with the crowd closer to the musky, woody smoke. I stood at the front and inhaled the intoxicating wisps. If I were a fly, I'd nest in Confucius' beard and go to sleep.



Politics at the teahouse

I came out of the trance in front of a small wooden house on Xinsheng South Road with a vine-enclosed patio paved in cobblestones. The Japanese-style teahouse had the languid air of a previous century. I sat at a table in one of the back rooms. It was 4 p.m., and I'd lost all sense of my body clock's time. I wanted nothing more than for the day to end. I thought of the hotel bed that I had been denying myself all day. I glanced at the tea menu. I read the few paragraphs on the back. The Japanese-built Wistaria House in the 1920s was a home for high-ranking officials who ran the colonial government. Later, under martial law, wooden lockers were installed along the wall when Chiang Kai-shek's soldiers needed temporary barracks. The police stopped traffic and forced people to salute the military leader's cavalcade.

I felt weepy thinking about the Taiwanese whose freedom was withheld for 49 years. But I was really weeping for myself, without sleep for 49 hours. A Chinese woman delivered a tea tray with sweets and a glass kettle. I steeped, strained and sipped the



chrysanthemum tea, relaxing. Only a few hours until sunset and the freedom of sweet oblivion.

The next day, fully recovered, I launched into my planned agenda and something curious happened. By the end of the trip, the days had begun to blur, but I could recollect the details of the first day with piercing clarity. The sensory experiences of perfumed mango color and sizzling, icy, smoky brilliance popped into my mind. On my next trip, I thought, I'll embrace jet lag. Stay in the altered state, ride it out. Even look forward to it, convinced now that wonders lay where least expected.

John Poimiroo

California Rambling: Tea Party

This article originally appeared in the Mountain Democrat, California's oldest newspaper.

There's been a lot of talk in California about tea parties of late, but not the political kind.

Tea is experiencing growing popularity across California as the bicentennial of the War of 1812 approaches. Some claim the war's most lasting effect was to help coffee overtake tea as the national hot beverage. But today, tea rooms are proliferating, while coffeehouses are diversifying by adding more types of tea. Why, even Starbucks is removing "coffee" from its logo when it turns 40 in March.

Perhaps that's so because after water (according to the World Tea Expo), tea is the most consumed beverage in the world.

Tea parties are becoming increasingly fashionable, even in liberal San Francisco. There are at least 334 tea rooms in California, according to teamap.com, which ranks them based on diner reviews of their variety, artistry, service and food. Nearly all California's tea rooms seem to be designed in an English cottage style, with floral interiors, finger sandwiches, petit fours and lots of lace on the windows. It's a turnoff to guys who squirm uncomfortably in their girlie interiors, worried that the tea will arrive in a hand-painted cup that can only be held by thumb and index finger, or that they won't need two fists to hold their sandwich.

On a recent trip back from Yosemite, we stopped at Dori's Tea Cottage in Groveland (rated ninth by teamap.com). Before entering the tea room, my wife suggested I might be more comfortable having lunch next door at the historic Charlotte Hotel (tri-tip was the luncheon special), but it was her birthday, so I figured she'd enjoy the tea room more and, besides, I could always knock down a shot of Jack Daniels when I got home to restore my masculinity. At least that's what I told my editor, when advising him I'd be writing about tea that week.

Greg Jones, Dori's husband, must have noticed my discomfort as we entered the tea cottage. He eased me into the experience, suggesting a smoky cup of Lapsang Souchong, a tea whose leaves are

dried over pinewood smoke, conveying the manly scent of a campfire. "If you don't like it, I'll make something else for you," he reassured me. The pot arrived moments later, smelling of Camp Six. I settled back to enjoy it, and somehow the windows didn't seem so lacey.

Opening Dori's Tea Cottage, Dori explained, was the result of her lifelong passion for tea. First introduced to it by her grandmother when she was a young girl, she always drank tea—never coffee—and as she and Greg neared retirement, she looked for something to do for which she had a passion. "The tea room was a perfect choice," she said.

Dori stocks 65 types of tea. That might seem like a lot, but there are tea rooms in California with up to 85. Dori includes familiar ones—English Breakfast, Darjeeling and Earl Grey—but then continues through fruity varieties of blueberry, pomegranate, apricot, black currant and passionfruit, to spicy hot cinnamon and pumpkin spice. There are candy bar teas (chocolate, milkie way, almond joyful and peppermint patti); teas flavored with anise, licorice and vanilla; and exotic Aged Pur-erh, Dunsandle Nilgiri, Ti Kuan Yin and Silver Needle.

Despite this variety, all tea comes from the *Camellia sinensis* plant, a warm-weather evergreen. How the leaves are processed and their level of oxygen determine the resulting types of tea. Herbal teas do not come from the *Camellia sinensis* but are an infusion of leaves, roots, bark, seeds or flowers. They lack many of the unusual properties of tea, so says the Tea Association.

There are a few yellow and white varieties, but most tea falls into one of three categories: black, oolong or green. Tea was discovered accidentally around 2737 B.C. by Chinese emperor Shen-Nun, who was sitting beneath a tree waiting for his water to boil when leaves fell into his pot. America's contribution to tea drinking is that we invented iced tea; more than 80 percent of the tea consumed in the U.S. today is sold as an iced drink, the World Tea Expo tells us.

Dori is quick to encourage the idea that tea is mostly a drink to enjoy. "The challenge we face is so many still selling it as a panacea," she said, "while we are trying to shed the idea of 'tea as medicine'

John Poimiroo writes "California Rambling," a column in the *Mountain Democrat*, California's oldest newspaper. He also reports for the American Forces Radio Network (OnTravel.com) and is editor and publisher of CaliforniaFallColor.com. He has written for *Sunset* and *Westways* and is a judge of the Sunset Travel Awards.



and encourage tea drinking for enjoyment." Surely teas are comforting, and research is ongoing about its health benefits, but for tea room proprietors like Dori and Greg, drinking tea is about exploring the many styles and flavors.

Part of enjoying tea is the ritual of preparing it: heating water until the kettle whistles, spooning the right amount into a teapot infuser, then steeping the tea to perfection. The pot should be covered while the tea is brewing, and if a teabag is used, it should never be dunked. Just let it steep. Some tea leaves can be used two or three times before they are depleted. Most tea is consumed neat. Britons sometimes add a little milk and sugar to their tea—never honey or cream—though there's no right answer as to whether you add the milk before or after the tea is poured in the cup. Indisputable, however, is that coffee and tea conflict, so it's best to never serve coffee from a teapot or vice versa.



The distinctions between coffee and tea are at times humorous. Coffee is served in coffeehouses; tea in tea rooms. You read your future in tea leaves, while coffee grinds are best discarded like the past.

Coffee is thought of as being bold, tea as being civilized. Coffee is something you drink while working, whereas work stops for afternoon tea.

When we stopped for lunch at Dori's Tea Cottage, a couple of women were engaged in conversation. A gaggle of giggling girls sat nearby, celebrating a birthday with (what else?) a tea party. And then there were the two of us, returning to El Dorado

County, looking for a good place to dine and not expecting to find a trend brewing in a tea room.

To find tea rooms and tea in California, visit doristeacottage.com or teamap.com.

Jacqueline Harmon Butler

The Fire of Mount Etna

This story—winner of the International Press Award for Journalism in Sicily, the Italian International Press Award for Journalism and the I, Leonardo Award—has appeared online and in the La Sicilia newspaper (Italy).

As I stood pondering the wares of the Antico Souvenir, near the summit of Mount Etna, a hand suddenly appeared in front of me, offering a small piece of bread smeared with a greenish-colored concoction. I looked up into the smiling face of the proprietor of the shop. “Signora, piacere,” he indicated for me to taste.

I sniffed at the bread. It smelled heavenly. Then I slid my tongue over the paste. It tasted delicious. Happily, I popped the entire piece of bread into my mouth and smiled in appreciation.

The proprietor pointed to a small jar among the selection of bottled spreads displayed in front of me. “Pesto al Pistacchio di Bronte,” he read from the label.

“Yum,” I replied.

He then prepared another chunk of bread for me. This time he chose “Crema di Capperi.” The sharp bite of the capers and peperoncino were mellowed in the richness of the extra virgin olive oil.

He did not stop his preparations until I had tasted the “Pate’ di Olive Nere,” rich black olives ground to a paste with basil, peperoncino and extra virgin olive oil; the “Crema di Melanzane,” a smooth spread of eggplant; the “Pate’ di Pomodoro,” which tasted of the sun-filled countryside, laced with garlic and basil; and finally, the “Crema di Carciofi,” artichokes creamed with extra virgin olive oil.

My Italian is very limited, but I managed to understand that all these spreads were produced locally. Enrico, the shop owner, went on to explain the many uses for these little treasures. Not only could they be spread on bread or crackers, but also would become a “volcanic explosion” of flavor when added to hot pasta.

Delighted with his description, I chose a variety of the small jars.

The weather had turned surprisingly cool for Sicily in mid-April and the air had felt chilly when I boarded the tour bus earlier that morning.

Clutching my thin jacket around me, I had hoped it would warm up later. The sun streamed into the bus, however, and I quickly forgot all about being cold as we headed toward Mount Etna along the dramatic Riviera dei Ciclopi.

The area is littered with Greek mythology, and stories of gods and goddesses living along this coast abound. According to legend, Homer claimed it was here at the small Aci Trezza harbor that Polyphemus hurled rocks at the sea in a raging attempt to strike down the ships of the fleeing Ulysses, who had just blinded him.

A little farther along the coast is the town of Acireale, the largest of the seven towns that string along the eastern slope of Mount Etna. The story goes that there is a stream flowing here that, although disturbed by a series of volcanic eruptions and buried, continues to flow underground. The stream is linked by tradition to the legend of the shepherd Aci and his love for the sea nymph, Galatea. Polyphemus was in love with the nymph himself and in another one of his rages, this time of jealousy, tossed a huge boulder onto Aci, crushing the life out of him. The gods were moved by pity and turned the shepherd into the river that runs through underground caverns and pours out into the sea, where he could be united with his beloved sea nymph.

Just beyond Acireale, the bus turned away from the sea and began the long ascent up the twisting, tortured road that winds up the slope of Mount Etna. I saw masses of prickly pears; groves of oak, chestnut, hazelnut and pistachio trees; and forests of birch and pine, cut through in places by long ebony fingers of cooled lava.

Dotted here and there were vineyards, and lemon and orange groves, their lush foliage sharply contrasting with the devastation of the lava streams. Now and then the ruins of a home or church would poke up through the cooled magma. I was amazed to find small islands of trees, whose roots had somehow survived the fiery inferno, growing up through the lava beds.

Getting off the tour bus at Rifugio Sapienza, I discovered that although the sun was bright, the day hadn’t warmed up. In fact, at 10,000 feet it was a lot colder than it had been at sea level. As my group

Jacqueline Harmon Butler's stories, frequently about food, have appeared in many anthologies and international publications. She is the recipient of Italy's Golden Linchetto Prize for best foreign journalist, a Lowell Thomas Travel Journalism award for web writing and the 2016 silver award in the Travelers' Tales Solas Awards. www.jacquelineHarmonButler.com and www.FoodFlirtOnline.wordpress.com

headed toward the cable cars, I noticed that the top of Etna was entirely covered with snow and I decided not to go up there. Instead, I found a sheltered area where I had a clear view of the summit, as well as one of the more recently opened volcanic side vents. However, the mountain was quiet, and it was boring to see only small wisps of smoke trailing in the wind.

I wandered over to a string of gift shops that dotted the edge of the parking area. There was the usual array of tawdry tourist trinkets: picture postcards; black lava-rock Madonnas with blue glittery robes; black lava-rock beads strung into necklaces, bracelets and dangling from earrings and key chains; an assortment of T-shirts, cooking aprons, ashtrays and commemorative plates. I took my time looking at each item, marveling that people actually buy miniature black lava-rock volcanoes with glittery red lava flowing from their tops.

The Antico Souvenir is the last shop along the strand. Dark green bottles of extra virgin olive oil caught my eye. Enrico told me it was produced in

nearby Nicolosi as he opened a bottle and poured a small amount of oil into his hand. He then rubbed his hands together and in an amazingly short time the oil was completely absorbed. "Very special," he explained. "Extra virgin," he added with a grin.

Of course I had to add a bottle of this local delicacy to my growing stack of goodies.

Nearby was a display of "Fuoco dell' Etna"—firewater from Etna, an alcoholic beverage named after the volcano. Naturally Enrico insisted I taste it.

"Whew!" I nearly choked on the bright red liquid. My throat felt like it was on fire, and I could feel the burn all the way down into my stomach. For the first time all day I was warm. Two glistening scarlet bottles were added to my stash.

When I met my group back at the bus, they were all shivering and somewhat disappointed that Etna hadn't let out any big belches or trembles or anything really, other than the occasional, and very ordinary, puffs of smoke. They told me I hadn't missed a thing. I just smiled my secret smile because I had the glory of the produce and the fire of Etna safely packaged in the shopping bag under my seat.

Evan Erickson



Wendy VanHatten

When in Venice...Cantina Do Mori

No chairs, just a few stools. No tables, just a long wooden bar and some upturned wine barrels. Dozens of antique copper pots hang from the dark, wooden ceiling. Tour groups wander in but don't stay for even one glass. Locals stop at the same time each day and the bartender never asks what they want.

Warm and cozy, this original bacaro has been catering to tourists, the workers of the Rialto Market and even supposedly Casanova since 1462. Like so many places in Venice, it's not easy to find. Even with a map. It's down an alleyway between Ruga Vecchia, San Giovanni and Calle Arco. Got that?

It's definitely worth double checking the alleyways to find it. Or, stop and ask a shopkeeper.



Wendy VanHatten is a published author; international travel writer; food, wine and travel blogger at TravelandEscapesBlog.com; editor-in-chief of *Prime Time Living Magazine*; food, wine and travel writer for *WE Magazine*; and BATW board member. She also writes mystery novels. www.wendyvanhatten.com.

Stop in midmorning and you'll find a group of older, local men gathering here for their glass of vino. The bartender knows what each of them drinks. He even knows to pour mostly water into one guy's glass and top it off with a little wine. The men visit with each other and then with anyone who looks friendly. It doesn't matter that your Italian is not good and their English is almost nonexistent. You can still have a conversation.

Stop in the afternoon for cicchetti, crostini or salami with your glass of young white wine or

prosecco. Not sure which bar snack you want? Ask the bartender. His recommendations are right on. If it's lunchtime, try one of the tramezzini, crustless oversized sandwiches, with your glass of red wine. Chances are you'll meet the same group of men from the morning, in for their afternoon glass. They'll remember you and start the conversation where they left off.

It's just the thing to do.

Cantina Do Mori is located at Calle dei Do Mori, 429 San Polo, Venezia.



Diane LeBow

Welcome to Tenuto Seliano, Home of the Water Buffalo Baronessa!

Juicy mozzarella at every meal, friendly water buffalo grazing next door, the best preserved Greek temples in the world where the goddesses of fertility and marriage were worshiped, the lapping Mediterranean a few minutes from your room and a charming Baronessa as your host. These are some basic ingredients for a delicious Italian adventure.

Welcome to Paestum and Tenuta Seliano, a southern Italian resort on a working ranch that dates back to the 16th century, on the Italian Mediterranean coast about forty minutes south of a newly invigorated Naples. Paestum is famous for its scarlet roses and salmon-colored temples, and is the *mozzarella di bufala* capital of the world.

I first met its owner, the Baronessa Cecilia Baratta Bellelli, and an entourage of her friends on a misty autumn morning 20 years ago, when I was walking on the beach in Paestum. They came cantering along at the edge of the sea on perfectly appointed thoroughbreds. She invited me to lunch at her family's ancestral estate, and I fell in love with its uniqueness, peacefulness, superb food and, most of all, Cecilia's warmth and fascinating life.

Although she comes from generations of Italian aristocratic lineage, the Baronessa is like a female Zorba. She enjoys running her ranch as well as having interesting people around, especially Americans.

Around 600 B.C., the Greeks founded a city here called Poseidonia in honor of the god of the sea, a sanctuary in honor of the goddess Hera and a temple to the Great Goddess Demeter. The resort is in the heart of the Campania region of southern Italy. Campania comes from the phrase *compania felix*, which means "happy" or "fortunate countryside." The sun is said to shine here 230 days per year.

Vineyards abound, producing excellent local wines that accompany the superb handcrafted meals. Guests from all over the world share long tables under a shaded grape arbor outdoors, or inside in the ancestral dining hall on mornings or cooler evenings. Breakfast consists of home-baked

bread and cake, freshly squeezed orange juice, ripe peaches, and other local fruits, eggs, cereals, and steaming coffee or tea. The ranch produces many of the ingredients for the kitchen, including capers, extra virgin olive oil, vinegars, limoncello, mushrooms, eggplants, olives, peppers, and orange, fig and strawberry preserves.

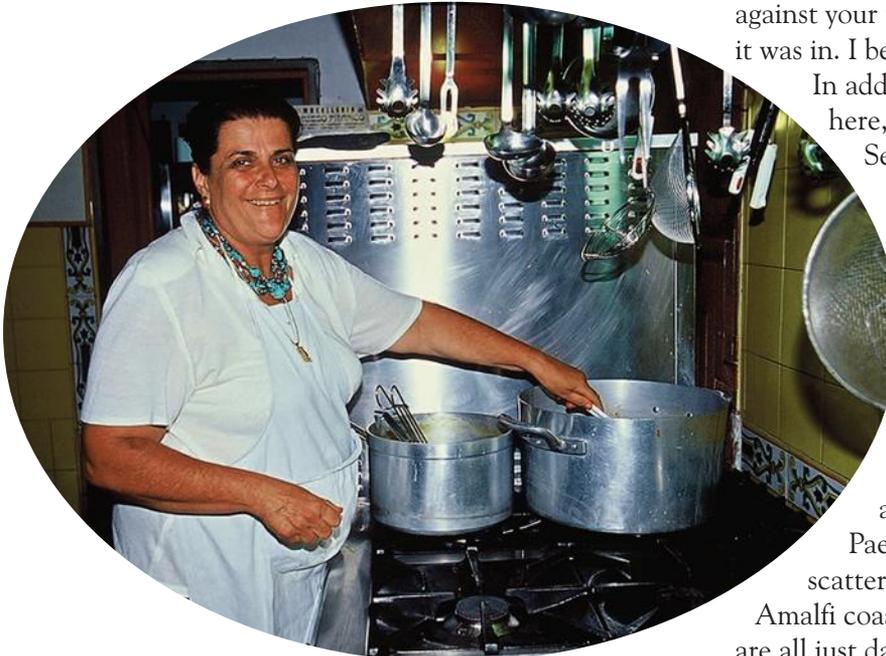
Only handmade pasta, pastries and breads are served, and endless varieties of pizza are baked in the wood oven. Of course, as this is the mozzarella capital of the world, fresh mozzarella is enjoyed at most meals as well as fresh ricotta made from water buffalo milk. Frequently the homegrown buffalo meat itself is served, prepared a variety of ways.

When Cecilia speaks of cooking, she lovingly explains how each item is selected and prepared, how to know exactly when to add it, and the precise blending, heating and timing. Finally, of course, she reaches into a pan, tastes, and most often serves you something delectable. Her 80-year-old mother added, "Cooking is one of our most important art forms." Often Cecilia is invited on cooking tours in the United States to demonstrate Campania regional foods and recipes.

Food preparation is a very special focus at the ranch. Internationally acclaimed chefs, including Alice Waters from Chez Panisse in Berkeley, have visited Cecilia to learn her recipes. Cecilia personally supervises meal preparation. Only naturally grown products from the estate are used. At times throughout the year, the Baronessa offers cooking classes. She specializes in the best of Campania and Neapolitan cooking, which includes ancient Greek and Roman influences. Some of Cecilia's special recipes include *Torta Caprese* from Capri, a heavenly almond and chocolate cake; *Pizza Rustica*, a savory ricotta pie; a dark and heady Genovese sauce specially made with hand-selected buffalo meat; and of course, *Insalata caprese*, fresh mozzarella accompanied by fresh basil, vine-ripened tomatoes and estate-bottled olive oil.

Nine-hundred doe-eyed, moist-nosed water buffalo graze peacefully in irrigated fields on the

Diane LeBow, Ph.D., is a travel writer and photojournalist; professor and lecturer; president emerita, BATW; multiple-year winner of Travelers' Tales' *Best Women's Travel Writing*; and publishes widely in print and online, covering adventures from Afghanistan, Mongolia, Iran and France to the Canadian Arctic and California cities. www.dianelebow.com



ranch, providing the fresh milk that is brought daily to Caseria Barlotti, a cheese-making cooperative. The best mozzarella comes from water buffalo, not cows, and is preferably consumed within 48 hours. It has three times the fat and one-and-a-half times more calcium and protein than the cow's milk product. The workers heat the milk to just over 100 degrees. Industrial producers pasteurize it, especially for exporting. "Pasteurizing kills the flavor," says eldest son Ettore. "You can't compare handmade mozzarella di bufala with the industrial product. They put the milk in a machine and instantly have mozzarella. We prefer it made by hand." In fact, the name comes from the word to "break away," mozzare, as the cheese makers use their hands to literally tear cheese off from the larger mass. While visiting the cooperative, I watched the skilled workers form the many sizes and shapes of the finished mozzarella, the "little mouthfuls," cardinalini or bocconcini, which are less than two ounces. A more elaborate braided form is called trecce. A woman worker pulled a fresh bocconcini out of the foaming milk and popped it into my mouth. The sweet aroma, the delicate flavors and the special squeak truly fresh mozzarella makes

against your teeth made me stop caring what form it was in. I became lost in epicurean heaven.

In addition to the culinary delights offered here, there is much more to a visit to Tenuta Seliano.

The 14 rooms, in addition to a honeymoon suite and one apartment, contain all comforts as well as fascinating antiques from the Bellelli baronage. The beautiful stone buildings with red tiled roofs and decorative wrought iron date from the 19th century. A large, well-maintained pool is just a few steps across the garden, past some of Paestum's legendary rosebushes and scatterings of Greek and Roman ruins. The Amalfi coast, Capri, Pompeii and Herculaneum are all just day trips away.

It is dawn at Tenuta Seliano. Some fluffs of down from my neighbors, the doves who live in the dove cote in the roof of our 19th-century tower room, float by the window. The soft swish-swish of irrigation sprinklers wafts in from the surrounding cornfields, which provide meals for the 900 water buffalo. A fresh sea breeze flows through the windows. I think of how this land has provided nurturance and pleasure for so many people for thousands of years and how it will continue to do so. I feel so lucky to be part of this tradition here in *compagnia felix*, this happy countryside.

www.agriturismo-seliano.it

Photographer John Montgomery is an award-winning commercial and travel photographer, television and film producer/director, and studio owner for more than 30 years. Based in San Francisco, his work appears in photography shows and in a variety of newspapers, magazines, and on the Web. www.montgomeryphotographic.com

Jim Shubin

Japan Eats

*From the photo book Japan Eats
(Destination Insights)*



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. www.destinationinsights.com & www.bookalchemist.net



Monica Conrady

Christmas Pudding: A Beloved English Tradition

*This article originally appeared in Romantic Traveling
(romantictraveling.com)*

For most people across the pond, and for Brits around the globe, Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without their Christmas pudding. It just goes with the territory—along with holly, mistletoe, carol singing and mince pies.

Christmas pudding, also known as plum pudding, is a steamed pudding usually made with suet, and crammed with dried fruit, nuts and spices. Its rich, dark appearance comes from brown sugar, black treacle and the lengthy cooking time required. The mixture is moistened with juice from citrus fruits plus a healthy dose of brandy, rum and sometimes dark beer.

In days gone by, the puddings were boiled in a pudding cloth and were round in shape. (These days they are usually cooked in basins.) They were made

on the Sunday before Advent, known as Stir-up Sunday. This did not refer to the pudding but to a collect for that Sunday in the Book of Common Prayer, which begins, "Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord..." Traditionally, all the family, but especially the children, would give the pudding a stir, making a wish while doing so, on Stir-up Sunday.

It was customary to include small silver coins and trinkets in the mixture, and lucky were those whose serving included one, as they were assured of health and wealth throughout the year. This practice has largely fallen by the wayside for reasons of safety and liability. Once turned out of its basin onto a warmed serving dish, the Christmas pudding is traditionally decorated with a sprig of holly, doused in brandy, set alight and ceremoniously brought to the table. Often the lights are dimmed as the flaming pudding is brought in, to be greeted by a hearty round of applause.



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. She has fond memories of Antarctica and other remote destinations, but London still pulls her back.

Christmas puddings have a long shelf life—probably due to all that brandy—and many families keep one to serve on some other festive occasion during the year. Whenever I've been in London in the late fall, I've made a point of picking up a couple of puddings from Marks & Spencer on Oxford Street. They have small, individual puddings—very practical for transporting in one's checked luggage. My mouth waters at the thought of them.

Should you happen to be in London in early December, check out the Great Christmas Pudding Race. Held in Covent Garden Market, it is a merry romp for charity, with folks in Christmas fancy dress running through the streets balancing a Christmas pudding on a plate.

The 36th year for the race was scheduled for December 3, 2016.

www.xmaspuddingrace.org.uk



CHRISTMAS PUDDING

Barbara L. Steinberg

A Taste of Yuba and Sutter Counties

This story originally appeared in Food & Travel Magazine.

Highways and country roads link Yuba and Sutter counties to history-rich communities. Plan your taste of Yuba-Sutter during autumn when harvests and seasonal festivals are abundant. A short drive from Sacramento, Gold Rush-era towns and multi-generational farmlands in these counties overlap in a most delicious way. From the Central Valley—California’s agricultural heartland—to the Sierra Nevada foothills, Yuba-Sutter’s proverbial plate overflows with farm-to-fork as well as cultural and outdoor-recreation delights.

Stop by Visit Yuba-Sutter’s visitor center for regional maps and brochures that include the North Yuba Grown farm trail map, a guide to farm stands, wineries and locavore shops north of Marysville. Soil, topography and climate inspire hand-crafted chardonnay, cabernet and pinot noir wines from Renaissance, Lucero and Clos Saron, and olive oils from Apollo and Athena’s Grove do the region proud. For a feast for your senses, explore local art and seasonal fare at the *crème de la crème* of food

events, the North Yuba Harvest Festival, which features more than 50 vendors.

Along Highway 99 in Sutter County, the striped awning above Stephen’s Farmhouse beckons. Farm-fresh pies and cookies, jellies and jams, pickled veggies, seasonal produce and walnuts will tempt even the most discerning foodies. Your favorite pooch will love the homemade Snicker Poodles.

Find the “Great Pumpkin” of your dreams at Bishop’s Pumpkin Farm in Wheatland. Old-fashioned hayrides and u-pick pumpkins, a historic carousel and fresh-baked cookies are just the beginning. Nearby, Salle Orchards offers more tastes of Yuba-Sutter year-round. Autumn means persimmons, pomegranates, pumpkins and 27 varieties of apples.

Drive, hike or bike the Sutter Buttes, the world’s smallest mountain range. Ancient volcanic soils and cool breezes breathe life into Cordi Winery’s grapes and award-winning wines. Bring a picnic and enjoy the view. Continue on scenic back roads to Sutter Buttes Natural & Artisan Foods. Bring an appetite for olive oils, infused vinegars, gourmet mustards



Barbara L. Steinberg's travel writing career began as publications director with *Visit California* and the California State Visitor's Guide. Recognized for her extensive knowledge of California, she is everywhere you want to be: urban and rural destinations, five-star resorts, hidden hot springs, gourmet restaurants and dives. www.AreYouThatWoman.com



and dipping sauces. Among many award-winning products, the Blood Orange Brownie Kit brought home Sofi gold at the 2015 New York Fancy Food Show. You can bring it home, too. In late November, look for the Moody's Middle Mountain Mandarins self-serve farm stand.

Lose yourself at the Sikh Festival, possibly the largest cultural event of its kind in California, a cacophony of color and aromas held the first Sunday in November. Also in November, harvested rice fields attract migrating wildlife. Along with

thousands of tundra swans, nature enthusiasts arrive to celebrate at the annual California Swan Festival. Guided tours are offered to Gray Lodge Wildlife Refuge and Sutter Buttes, privately owned land accessible only through Middle Mountain Interpretive Hikes.

Birding and hiking can be a hungry business. Yelp reviewers love AJ's Sandwiches, an easy stroll from Swan Festival central. Chow down on gourmet burgers and specialty sandwiches with a side of pesto fries. Where to taste more? The Cookie Tree and The Candy Box are sweets central in Yuba City and Marysville. GPS yourself to New Earth Market, Oregon House Grocery & Deli and The Crave. Among the scrumptious treats you'll find are J-Heier Farms blackberry jams, Sunsweet prunes, North Yuba Bread and POM pomegranates to satiate locavore retail therapy. Serving Breakfast, lunch and dinner, Dancing Tomato Caffé's mantra is farm-to-table.

With so many tasty options, Yuba-Sutter is a play-and-stay getaway. Many tasting rooms, country stores and farms are seasonal or open weekends only. Always call ahead for days and hours of operation.



Laura Deutsch

The Zen of Cooking

A version of this piece was published in Eating Well magazine.

While some women were beating egg whites, I was beating opponents in court. As an overworked public interest lawyer, the last thing I wanted to do when I dragged myself home was slice and dice and tap my toes until onions glowed translucent.

The truth was I didn't know how to cook, but after years of eating takeout, I longed for home-cooked meals. So I decided to sign up for a five-day Cooking and Meditation retreat at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center, six hours south of my home in Marin County, California. I was familiar with *The Tassajara Bread Book*—considered a bread bible in some circles—which celebrates the miracle of dough rising, the sweet fragrance of loaves baking. Plus, not only would I have a measurable goal—surely, I'd learn to cook something—it would be relaxing. The Zen monastery sits in the secluded Santa Lucia Mountains. In the natural hot springs there, I could soak away the stress of “real life,” I thought.

On the first day of our workshop, I discovered that this wasn't the how-to-cook class I had expected. At Tassajara, cooking was simply a way into Zen—a way to practice mindfulness. I went with the flow.

We began by paying attention to the tastes and textures of food. In the kitchen, we passed around bowls of carrots, broccoli and potatoes that we'd boiled, steamed, baked and broiled, digging in with our forks to compare the flavors. I had always steamed my vegetables (quick and fat-free). Now I learned that veggies are sweeter when baked or broiled rather than steamed because sugars are released in the process.

Our workshop leader made raw kale salad, squeezing the leafy greens between his hands with a bit of salt, turning the kale juicy and tender. He added honey, the juice of a lemon, garlic and green onion. After each step, he passed the plate around,

so we could taste the effect. We nodded as we munched and called out our verdicts: bitter, earthy, salty. Sweet, tart, pungent.

But the workshop wasn't just about noticing what happened to the food as we prepared it. It was also about observing our own thoughts. For example, my judging mind observed the skillful way our teacher sliced and chopped, comparing his technique to that of my struggling classmates, who hacked their way through celery and onions. During the first couple of days, I also noticed how much I thought about my work back home.

I recalled the words of Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen monk: “Take peaceful happy steps...Do not try to arrive anywhere...We always want to do things in order to get something. The practice of mindfulness is the opposite.” The man is obviously not a lawyer.

To get my mind off work, I volunteered in Tassajara's kitchen, tearing lettuce for salad. Lined up with the other volunteers at a butcher-block island, I sliced the cores out of red lettuce, tore bushels of leaves and tossed them into gallon buckets. To my surprise, this simple task was calming and taught a lesson that would serve me well in “real life”: Tear gently. Don't force. Allow.

The head of the kitchen told me, “The main thing is not the food, it's the practice. To be present. To give with generosity. To have compassion.”

Basic cooking lessons took on broader meaning. Remove the stones from the beans: take what comes into your life and make something good with it. Improvise on recipes: tune in to the tastes and create dishes that taste good to you. And so I learned secrets of cooking not found in most recipe books: slow down, trust my intuition. Pay attention and value whatever is presented to me. Cooking was as restorative as the dish itself. I was present as I added redolent rosemary to soup and bided my time as bread baked.

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

When I went home, I was determined not to lose what I had learned. Memories of fresh-baked bread and steamy bowls of homemade soup stayed with me. The law firm fed my bank account, but home-cooked meals were now feeding my soul. One night, I prepared a delicious cannellini and kale soup. I sliced the leeks, garlic and carrots mindfully, squeezed the seeds from the tomatoes, carefully

pulled the fresh kale from its ribs and thyme from its stalks and added the beans to a savory broth. I enjoyed the process, one ingredient at a time. No rush to get to the next item on my agenda. Again I remembered, cooking in the moment is as nourishing as the food. And I was in the moment.



Copyright © 2017 Bay Area Travel Writers. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced, distributed or transmitted in any manner without the prior written permission of the publisher.

All articles and photographs are copyrighted by the BATW members who created them. Reprint rights are available for most content; please contact the individual contributor or write to President@BATW.org.

Book design by Jim Shubin
jim@bookalchemist.net
www.destinationinsights.com

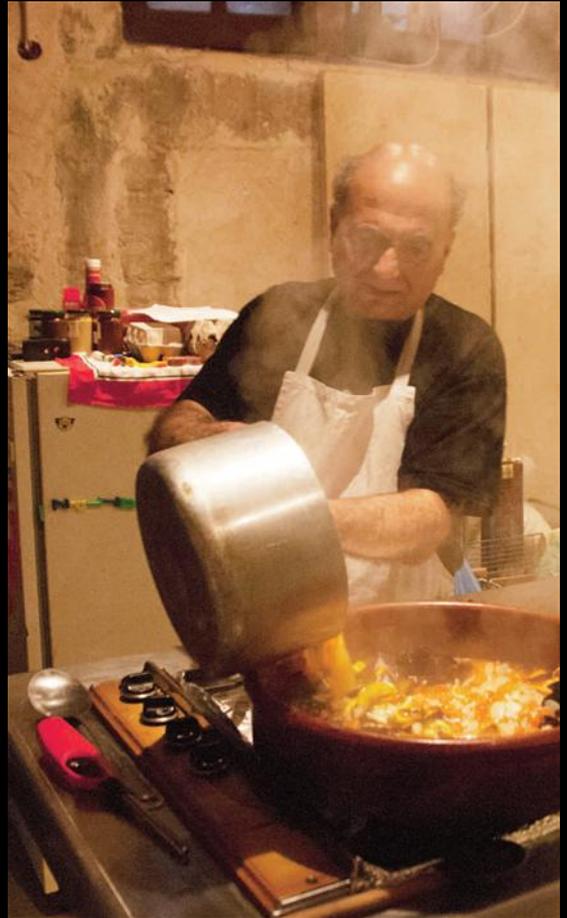
Editing and proofreading:
Bob Cooper (cooperite@comcast.net bob-cooper.com)
and Susan Alcorn (backpack45@yahoo.com)

Printed in the United States of America.

Additional copies can be purchased from www.BATW.org/publications



JIM SHUBIN



LEE FOSTER

STU WILSON ▶



DAVID GREITZER — THE HANOI BIKE SHOP — SCOTLAND

BAY AREA TRAVEL WRITERS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS



www.batw.org