

There are many reasons to travel, but more and more we see personal passions taking over in the planning of trips – in this case, culinary/food/wine. From a survey done recently, we see that these are sometimes **the** driving force behind the way we travel:

Deliberate **food** travelers (culinary activities were the key reason for trip) spend, on average, \$1,271 per trip; \$593 or 50% is spent on food-related activities. On the other hand, those considered to be deliberate **wine** travelers spend more of their overall travel budget on wine-related activities (\$950 average trip cost; \$339 or 36% spent on wine-related activities).

Here are some ways you can take your culinary interests “on the road:”

THE EPICUREAN ARMADA: Today, cruisers can have their cake and eat it too! Oceania Cruises’ newly-debuted Marina leads the epicurean armada with 10 dining venues (eight of which are inclusive) including six gourmet restaurants, and a Bon Appétit Culinary Center – the world’s first hands-on cooking school at sea (classes are priced separately & scheduled three times daily). All meals onboard are cooked to order, chef-inspired, and strive to rival the dining options on land – no easy task when you’re at sea with many awaiting you in the dining room. In 2011, Oceania’s Marina will sail the Mediterranean, Aegean, and Baltic seas from spring through fall, and the Caribbean and South America in winter. For a less expensive culinary cruise experience, try an 11-night Mediterranean, transatlantic sailing in October, featuring a network personality and including exclusive culinary demonstrations, classes, and parties, with stops in Rome, Sardinia, Palma Majorca, Lisbon, and New York, aboard the new Celebrity Silhouette (due out in July, 2011).

FOODIE ALERT: Uniworld River Cruises has a Burgundy & Provence Sunday-to-Sunday river cruise between Arles and Chalon sur Saone, an itinerary that doesn't get much more involved with great food and wine than this!!!! They serve unlimited fine wine nightly at dinner with a special wine-food pairing one night; visit the wine capital of the world - Beaune -and an open-air food market; have a cooking demo; and provide bikes for those who also wish to have a little exercise - of course, you enjoy a different port every day.

“FOODTOPIA” exists close to home as well. Asheville, NC's, vibrant and varied food scene goes far beyond typical Southern fare (though you can find that here, too), with more than 250 independent restaurants, 17 farmers' markets and 10 microbreweries. Chefs at dozens of Asheville eateries are committed to farm-to-table principles, showcasing locally-sourced (and often organic) produce, meats, fish and cheese. For a small city, Asheville has an impressive variety of cuisine too -- Mexican, Jamaican, Indian, vegetarian and traditional Southern barbecue are just a few of your options. With names like Laughing Seed, Fig Bistro, Chorizo and 12 Bones Smokehouse, you'll have your tastebuds salivating while making reservations.

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DITCH THE PLASTIC: Here's one for the eco-conscious: San Francisco International's flashy Terminal 2, which reopened last week after a major overhaul, encourages passengers to refill their own water bottles at post-security "hydration stations" dispensing city tap water from "pristine Sierra snowmelt." SFO's upgraded water fountains are the latest example of destinations and hotels targeting travelers with an eco-conscious "ditch the plastic" pitch. Chile-based Explora, which runs three upscale adventure lodges in Patagonia, the Atacama Desert and Easter Island, maintains its own water treatment and purification operations and provides guests with reusable metal flasks and filtered water, both in guest rooms and on daily excursions. And, Rock Resorts "Water on the Rocks" program, launched last year and now in effect at nine properties, stocks each guest room with two refillable glass bottles of filtered water and sells \$4 reusable bottles (BPA-free plastic or stainless steel) that can be filled at water stations around the resort. Visitors to Cinque Terra in Italy are being asked to pay one Euro for reusable metal flasks which can be filled from newly-installed public water fountains – this in light of finding itself buried in plastic, contributed by the annual influx of over 3 million visitors.

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TAKING IN CULTURE, PEOPLE & SCENERY: Combine your love of food with an opportunity to “work it off.” There are a myriad of hiking, biking & walking trips out there that allow choices of activities, lodging, itineraries and equipment to appeal to all fitness levels. Consider biking in Burgundy, hiking in Spain, or lodge-to-lodge trekking in Peru. As you recharge for the next day, luxury lodges & classic inns replace tents & lean-tos and cuisine replaces beans over a camp stove.

Connie Valimont has nearly 20 years in the travel industry, both in marketing & sales, for leisure agencies large and small in Seattle, Denver, southern CA and the Lowcountry. She calls St Petersburg, FL (and now Beaufort) "home" but has lived in all four corners of the US and traveled extensively. She can be reached at 843-368-1104 or by email at compassrose@rockettmail.com

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