

Don't just sit there watching Nigella and her sauces. Explore the planet's kitchens with JEREMY LAZELL's guide to the tastiest cookery courses

**T**wenty years ago, the idea of cooking on holiday was absurd. Food was a fag, it was the kitchen you were running away from. Then along came all those celebrity chefs, with their "anyone can do it" ethos and exotic ideas about opening up international cuisine. Since Floyd on Italy and Rick Stein's French Odyssey, a holiday isn't a holiday unless you're diving for scallops and searing them yourself on the beach. Fact is, cooking is sexy, and cook schools are popping up across the holiday planet like soufflés in a Smeg oven. Here are the tastiest.

#### MEZE, Turkey

Perched high in the pine forests, halfway between Fethiye and Kalkan, with views of the preternaturally blue Lycian coastline from pool, veranda and even bath, Yediburunlar lighthouse is reason enough to come to Turkey with a suitcase of good books and factor 15 all on its own. Next year, however, the owner and chef, Semra, is throwing two cook-school weeks (July 5-12 and August 16-23) into an already spectacular mix, teaching guests how to shop for and prepare a six-course vegetarian and fish meze feast, with just enough time factored in for *gulet* cruises and walks into the surrounding hills.

**Details** Exclusive Escapes (020 8605 3500, [www.exclusiveescapes.co.uk](http://www.exclusiveescapes.co.uk)) has seven nights, full-board, at Yediburunlar lighthouse for £950, including daily tuition, market excursions, guided hill walks, transfers and flights with BMI from Heathrow to Dalaman.

#### RUSTIC SICILIAN, Italy

There are more cookery schools in Italy than there are *funghi* in a Tuscan forest, but the Anna Tasca Lanza school, on central Sicily's Regaleali estate, is a rare black truffle in a sack of ceps. Headed by English-speaking mother-and-daughter team Anna Tasca Lanza and Fabrizia Lanza, the school teaches simple but awesomely tasty traditional Sicilian cuisine, using meat, vegetables and cheeses from the 1,000-acre estate. Guests stay in the gloriously rustic 19th-century manor house itself, with views out over Regaleali's vineyards to the Madonie hills. Laced with Tasca Lanza charisma, doused in estate wine and generously sprinkled with visits to local markets, this isn't so much a



# Lunch to go

school as a total cultural immersion. **Details** Bellini Travel (020 7602 7602, [www.bellinitravel.com](http://www.bellinitravel.com)) has five nights, full-board, at Regaleali, for £1,895, including four days' tuition, tastings from the Tasca d'Almerita cellars, and visits to local markets; seven-day car hire can be arranged for £226. The nearest airport is Palermo — 75 miles away — served by Ryanair (0871 246 0000, [www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)) and EasyJet ([www.easyjet.co.uk](http://www.easyjet.co.uk)).

#### TAPAS, Spain

You will need a basic level of Spanish to get the most from this superb tapas school, but with notes available in English and chefs increasingly used to English-speaking guests, even lingua-phobes should avoid dicing their *patatas* instead of slicing their *jamón*. Based in the town of San Sebastian, bustling queen of the Basque coastal resorts, El Txoko del Gourmet introduces amateurs and professionals alike to

the dark arts of the tapas, or, in the words of its website, "how to enhance a simple potato to obtain an unsuspected taste scum". **Details** El Txoko del Gourmet (00 34 943 422218, [www.eltxokodelgourmet.com](http://www.eltxokodelgourmet.com)) has two-day courses for £163 and five-day courses for £397. Kirker Holidays (020 7593 2288, [www.kirkerholidays.com](http://www.kirkerholidays.com)) has three nights, four-star, B&B, in San Sebastian from £650 (six nights from £896), including transfers and flights from Stansted to Bilbao with EasyJet.

#### GOURMET GETAWAY, France

Deep in the heart of Gascony, surrounded by a tapestry of maize and sunflower fields stretching uninterrupted almost as far as the Pyrenees, the 18th-century Château de Pallanne houses a school that will make your taste buds whoop and your waistline shudder. Foie gras terrine with muscat jelly, roast duck with olives, roast pigeon with armagnac and thyme — you will be

making them all. The course also includes market trips to Pau and Tarbes, as well as dinner at the Michelin three-star Les Prés d'Eugénie. Despairing livers can seek redemption with the estate's own 18-hole golf course and heated pool. **Details** Tasting Places (020 8964 5333, [www.tastingplaces.com](http://www.tastingplaces.com)) has seven nights, full-board, at Château de Pallanne for £2,100, including all tastings, tuition, excursions and transfers from Pau or Toulouse. Rail Europe (0844 848 4070, [www.raileurope.co.uk](http://www.raileurope.co.uk)) has Eurostar/ TGV returns from St Pancras to Toulouse for £109.

#### SOUKS & SPICES, Morocco

Tucked away in the Palmeraie just outside Marrakesh, Dar Liqama is a pasha's palace of a hotel, full of kilims and courtyards, antique doors and marble floors, with views of the snowcapped High Atlas that give long, lazy mint teas on the terrace a good name. Not that you will be

looking for ways to stretch out the day: there are tennis courts, swimming pools, a hammam and a spa, while a week at the superb cook school — tagines and pigeon pie, harira and almond pastries — includes visits to the souks and sights in Marrakesh, as well as lunch in a converted kasbah at the foot of Jebel Toubkal (13,671ft), the highest peak in North Africa. **Details** Best of Morocco (0845 026 4588, [www.realmorocco.com](http://www.realmorocco.com)) has seven nights, full-board, at Dar Liqama for £2,365, including daily tuition, excursions, transfers, and flights with British Airways from Gatwick to Marrakesh.

#### CAPE CUISINE, South Africa

Working with South Africa's top chefs in a variety of locations — from butchering and barbecuing impala at a tented camp on a Limpopo game reserve to cooking Cape Malay favourites such as bobotie and smooresnoek in Cape

Town — Samp & Soufflé is a roving cook school that can be booked as a one-day stopoff while you tour the country, or as a dedicated five-day residential course in its own right. Best of a tempting bunch? The five-day course in Franschoek, in the heart of wine country, with four-hour sessions every day, plus all the grape-trampling, cheese-making, fishing and herb-gathering that you can squeeze in thereafter. **Details** Samp & Soufflé (00 27 84 900 9345, [www.sampsouffle.com](http://www.sampsouffle.com)) has five nights, B&B, at Rusthof Country House, a Cape Dutch-style home in Franschoek, for £1,788, including tuition and excursions; car hire arranged from about £10 per day. Trailfinders (0845 058 5858, [www.trailfinders.com](http://www.trailfinders.com)) has fares with South African Airways from Heathrow to Cape Town from £749.

#### SCHOOL OF WOK, Thailand

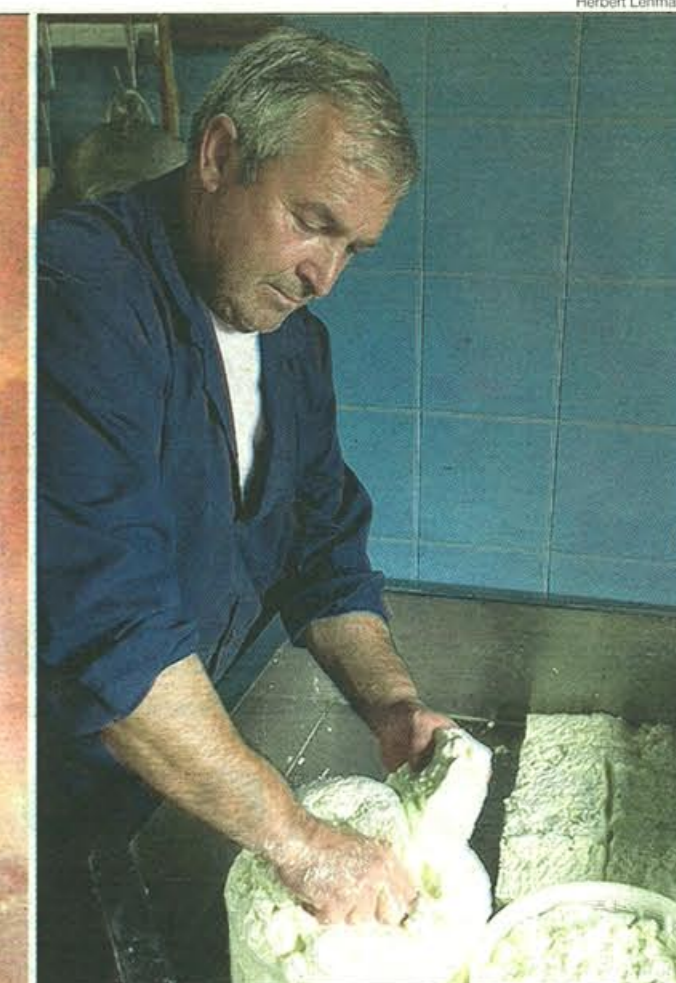
If Michelin gave out stars for the sheer infectiousness of a chef's smile,

Pitak Srichan — head chef at the Four Seasons hotel cook school in Chiang Mai — would have a galaxy of them. Almost psychotically enthusiastic (he started out as a lowly *plongeur* and seems perpetually excited to be where he is today), Srichan gives tuition that would stir the soul of even the wobbiest wokist, although the cook school itself — an open-sided, hilltop pavilion overlooking the lush, green paddy fields of Mae Rim valley — would probably do all that without him. Finishing at 2pm each day, the class allows time enough for the resort's activities, which include tennis, golf, horse-riding, kick boxing, hot-air ballooning, spa, gym and pool. **Details** Tropical Locations (0845 277 3310, [www.tropical-locations.com](http://www.tropical-locations.com)) has seven nights at the Four Seasons from £2,331, including the six-day cook school and Thai Airways flights from Heathrow to Chiang Mai, via Bangkok.

**Views of the snowcapped High Atlas give long, lazy mint teas on the terrace a good name**

#### SOUTH INDIAN VEGETARIAN, Kerala

One hour east of Cochin, The Pimenta is a grandiose name for what is effectively a family kitchen on a seven-acre spice plantation in the lush, forested foothills of Kerala's Western Ghats. With four modest bungalows, and dinners round the family dining table, this is no marble-topped, five-star Oberoi extravaganza. But what it lacks in glitz, it more than makes up for in authenticity, with classes in delicious Kerala vegetarian specialities led by the farm owner and passionate cook, Jacob Mathew, and his 67-year-old mother. Courses comprise afternoon cooking sessions, with mornings at nearby markets, temples, a cotton-weaving workshop and elephant training centre, where guests help scrub and bathe the beasts. **Details** Haritha Farm (00 91 485 226 0216, [www.harithafarms.com](http://www.harithafarms.com)) has three nights, full-board, for £363, including four days' tuition, or £727



**Total immersion: getting your hands dirty, above, making the cheese in Sicily. Students at the Moroccan spice school, left, taste the fruit of their labours**

for seven nights, full-board, including seven days' tuition. Trailfinders (0845 058 5858, [www.trailfinders.com](http://www.trailfinders.com)) has flights from Heathrow to Cochin with Etihad Airways (via Abu Dhabi) from £445; transfers to Haritha Farm cost £15 per taxi.

#### STREET FOOD, Vietnam

There are reasons aplenty to visit Hoi An — colonial architecture, bustling back lanes, great beaches at Cua Dai — but for foodies the old seaport city should mean only one thing: Trinh Diem Vy, universally known as Ms Vy. Founder of four of the best restaurants in Vietnam, the outrageously energetic Ms Vy now runs a cook school at her newest restaurant, Morning Glory. Drawing on her love of street food, remembered from childhood, courses range from 90-minute masterclasses (£4.90) in spring rolls and crispy crepes to all-day private sessions (£61.50, with discounts for more than one person), mastering signature dishes such as crispy tuna in tamarind sauce. **Details** Contact Morning Glory Cook School (00 84-510 241555, [www.hoianhospitality.com](http://www.hoianhospitality.com)) Hoi An Beach Resort (510 927040, [www.victoria-hotels-asia.com](http://www.victoria-hotels-asia.com)) has beachfront doubles from £80, B&B. Travelmood (0870 815 9400, [www.travelmood.co.uk](http://www.travelmood.co.uk)) has fares with Cathay Pacific from Heathrow to Saigon, via Hong Kong, from £500.

#### LATIN PREP, Mexico

Nearly 6,500ft up in Mexico's central highlands, Casa de Sierra Nevada is a collection of six colonial mansions — including a 16th-century archbishop's residence, the town's former customs house and more bougainvillea-strewn, fountain-littered courtyards than a