

Cookery courses



Villa Segelato cookery school lies in the hills above Lucca in Tuscany

Have apron will travel

Real foodies don't just want to eat as the locals do, they want to cook like them too. **Rachel Wood** selects the best European breaks that allow you to do just that



IMAGE: SARAH SMITH AND JOHN TAYLOR



Flavours Holidays in Tuscany

- Four day course, £899
- Contact 0131 6257002 or visit flavoursholidays.co.uk
- Max group no: 8

Based at the Villa Segelato on the Forci estate (which produces its own olive oil, wine, cheese and honey) high in the Tuscan hills, this is the perfect introduction to *la cucina Italiana*.

Your host Simone Carone is everything you could want from an Italian cook – passionate, calm, and, best of all, willing to share his grandmother’s culinary secrets. As well as teaching you how to whip up fresh pasta, Tuscan bean soup and the most mouth-watering cheesecake, he continually encourages you, feeding you with foodie tips as you go. ‘Cook with your eyes,’ he urges.

Out of the kitchen, the gastronomic adventures continue with wine-tastings, a visit to a local cheese maker to try arguably the best parmesan in Italy and, on the last night, a trip to a nearby restaurant. It’s a lovely end to the holiday – but I for one couldn’t wait to get back into the kitchen.



Cooking at Château l’Age Baston

- Week course, from £699
- Contact +33 54 56 35 307 or visit lagebaston.com
- Max group no: 4

Despite common misconceptions, French food is not all *cordons bleus* menus and intimidating ingredients and your tutors here, self-confessed Francophiles Alex and John Waddington, are on a mission to prove this.

Their week-long course celebrates French provincial cooking and takes place in their exquisite chateau in La Rochefoucauld, near Cognac. Using local ingredients including herbs and vegetables picked from the garden, you’ll soon be rustling up homemade pâtés, matching poultry with mouth-watering seasonal sauces and dressing salads like a pro. Days are spent in the kitchen (with breaks for a swim or a game of boules), but there are trips to Cognac and the local market, too. Alex and John ask that you come armed with plenty of enthusiasm (and comfy shoes!) but you can be sure you’ll take home much, much more.



Cooking in El Priorat, Catalonia

- Four day course, £995
- Contact 08708 998 844 or visit holidayonthemenu.com
- Max group no: 6

Barcelona is well-known (not least for its excellent La Boqueria food market), but this break outside the city, in the small town of El Priorat, reveals a less-visited side of Catalonia. From a charming, privately-owned hotel originally built by her great grandfather, Alicia Artigas introduces students to the honest, yet exotic mix of Roman, Moorish, Italian and French influences that is Catalan cuisine. Using recipes handed down from her mother, you’ll learn to cook dishes including duck with turnips; pears with toasted almonds; and hazelnuts and figs served with moscatel wine.

Alicia is passionate about the food of her homeland and classes are entertaining, with a very hands-on approach. The region produces some fine wines, too, and happily, there’s plenty of opportunity to sample the local vintages during your stay.

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Santorini and the Cyclades with Rosemary Barron

- Week course, £1,650
- Contact 020 8964 5333 or visit tastingplaces.com
- Max group no: 10

Sweet tomatoes, luscious green-gold olive oil and delicious cheeses kick-started Rosemary Barron's love of Greek food over 30 years ago, and now she's sharing her passion and wisdom on the picturesque, volcanic island of Santorini. Based at Hotel Heliotos, one of the prettiest and friendliest hotels in the area, famous for its breakfasts at which flavoursome local honey is served, the break combines workshops and demonstrations at Selene, the island's most famous restaurant. Tastings with local producers – think barley bread fresh from the wood-burning oven or tiny purple white aubergines – are also included along with a good grounding in the food history and culture of the island. Don't leave without sampling the local delicacy; a sweet preserve made using sun-ripened Santorini tomatoes, served with desserts.

IMAGE ALAMY



Le Manoir's 'Garden to Plate' course

- One day course, £295
- Contact 01844 278881 or visit manoir.com
- Max group no: 10

Deep in idyllic Oxford countryside Raymond Blanc's Le Manoir Aux Quat' Saisons will transport many to foodie heaven, but this course keeps you grounded, in the nicest possible way, with lots of practical information on how to source and cook seasonal produce.

The tutor is chef and nutritionist Vladimir Niza, a protégé of the school who knows everything there is to know about preparing food and getting the best from ingredients. He'll steer you through lunch dishes including tomato and basil tart and lemon and rhubarb pie as well as demonstrating fundamental skills such as how to sharpen knives and how to make delicate sweet pastry the easy way (yes, it really is possible). And when it's time to leave, your food is packaged up for you to take home, so you can impress friends and family with some top-notch delights à la Raymond.



The Belle Isle School of Cookery, Northern Ireland

- One day course, £120
- Contact 028 6638 7231 or visit irishcookeryschool.com
- Max group no: 12

Situated on a small island in Upper Lough Erne, Northern Ireland, the Belle Isle School of Cookery offers a range of courses from four-week diplomas to one-day tasters on subjects including Fish and Seafood, Game Cookery and One-Pot Dinners.

Whatever you opt for, the focus is on the best local ingredients – so that's locally sourced venison, fresh fish from the lough, or herbs from the little garden outside the school. Go for a longer course and you have an excuse to book a room in the adjacent elegant 17th-century Belle Isle Castle and live like royalty for a day or two.

Friendly and down-to-earth chef Liz Moore is in charge, and mixes clear, informative demos with lots of hands-on practice. The cosy, yet state-of-the-art kitchen is a real boon too and the picture windows give stunning views over the Florence Court mountains beyond.