

A TOUCH OF CLASS

If you want to get a real flavour of a country's cuisine, what better way to do it than with the help of experts at a local cookery school? In the first of our three-part series, we travel to exotic and faraway places in search of the cream of the world's culinary courses

Walkerswood Cookery Classes Jamaica

Walkerswood Caribbean Foods is considered Jamaica's top brand of seasonings and sauces. Executive chef Dennis McIntosh offers cookery classes twice a week, Wednesdays and Fridays, in the demonstration kitchen at Walkerswood in St Ann. The courses will give you a basic knowledge of Jamaican ingredients, Caribbean recipes and the island's cooking style. Each three-hour class covers how to make a three-course meal, and shows how to identify, choose and prepare local fruit and vegetables, as well as making traditional sauces, Jamaican jerk and other grilled meats. Chef McIntosh also offers advanced courses, which take traditional dishes and give them a modern twist. He is also happy to create courses to suit individual requests. At the end of the course everyone takes away a goodie bag, which includes apron, Walkerswood sauces and *Walkerswood Caribbean Kitchen* cookery book. Judy Bastyra
Price: A half-day session costs £44; booking essential.
Details: Walkerswood Caribbean Foods, St Ann, Jamaica (00 1 876 917 2318; walkerswood.com).

Tante Marie's Cooking Vacations San Francisco, USA

Tante Marie is a world-class centre of culinary training, where the emphasis is firmly on simplicity and building confidence in the kitchen. As well as offering professional training, culminating in the internationally recognised Tante Marie diploma, the school welcomes those interested in shorter courses, including week-long cooking holidays. You will learn about seasonality, ingredients, chefs, and the great winemakers that help make California a top culinary destination. You'll also spend a day in the wine country and have supper at the Michelin-starred Chez Panisse Restaurant and Café. The aim is to teach techniques that will enable you to cook well wherever you live. Dishes include warm goat's cheese tart, tender chive pancakes with applewood smoked bacon, grilled double-cut pork chops with grilled persimmons, and Pinot Noir sorbet with white-pepper shortbread cookies. Students cook and prepare lunch, and in the afternoon watch a demonstration in preparation for the following morning's cookery action. Chris Howat
Price: One-week course £486 (accommodation not included).
Details: Tante Marie's Cooking School, San Francisco, California (00 1 415 788 6699; tantemarie.com).

Relish Culinary School California, USA

Learn about food and wine in one of the school's many cookery classes and on its artisan food and wine tours. There is plenty of sampling and slurping as you get to visit some of the best food locations in the Sonoma Valley. As well as advice and tips, you'll get hands-on experience – for instance, at the Downtown Bakery and Creamery, you'll be making rustic fruit tarts, while at the kitchens of restaurant Santi, you'll learn how to make seasonal Italian dishes. The beauty of Relish is that you not only visit wineries, but go behind the scenes at local farms, restaurants and private homes to learn about local dishes. Relish offers courses to suit all tastes, from cooking Thai suppers to fish workshops, all taught by leading professionals, writers and experts. A great opportunity to indulge all your senses and brush up on your wine and food matching skills. Andy Howes
Price: Day or evening courses range from £26-£57 per person. Multi-day courses are also available.
Details: Relish Culinary School, Healdsburg, California (00 1 707 431 9999; relishculinary.com).

Red Bridge Cooking School Vietnam

In a country where cookery schools are popping up all over the place, Red Bridge must be one of the best appointed. It is situated in the town of Hoi An, a UNESCO world heritage site. Half-day courses at the school start with a tour, doubling up as a shopping trip to the riverside market for ingredients. The school's kitchen and garden are also on the river, which ensures a cooling breeze all day (Vietnam is seriously muggy). At your individual stove you will learn how to make local delicacies such as banh cuon (rice pancakes), aubergine and lemon grass hotpot and squid with pineapple. But the best thing is the staff – they're a mine of information; for example, did you know planting lemon grass near the kitchen door will keep snakes out, or that it is rude to say 'yum yum' in Vietnam because it means 'I'm horny?' Tom Norrington-Davies
Price: Morning cooking tour £8 per person, including boat trip from Hoi An to the cooking school and lunch.
Details: Red Bridge Restaurant and Cooking School, Hoi An, Vietnam (00 84 510 933222; visithoian.com/redbridge.html).



TOP LEFT AND RIGHT: LEARNING AND DINING AL FRESCO AT RELISH IN CALIFORNIA. ABOVE LEFT, LEFT AND BELOW: BY THE RIVER AT RED BRIDGE IN VIETNAM





MOST SCHOOLS SPECIALISE IN USING FRESH LOCAL INGREDIENTS. LEFT: CREOLE COOKING SCHOOL IN COSTA RICA. BELOW AND BOTTOM: THAI HOUSE GIVES A REAL FLAVOUR OF THE COUNTRY

cookery schools

A Cook's Tour South Africa

If you want to combine cookery and sightseeing, head to Cape Town and its wine country for this sumptuous two-week Taste of South Africa tour. You'll arrive at the Constantia Uitsig Country Estate, home of top restaurant La Colombe, where the head chef Frank Dangereux will take your first morning lesson. A lunch prepared with Cass Abrahams, 'Queen of Cape Malay cuisine', follows, along with visits to other great restaurants and wine estates over the next few days. There's a chance to tour Cape Town before heading off to the winelands of Franschoek, where you will enjoy the Huguenots' hospitality at the beautiful Relais and Châteaux Le Quartier Français. There's a tour of the three valleys of Franschoek and visits to the Boekenhootskloof wine estate for tasting and a meeting with its winemaker. Gentleman farmer and philosopher Julian Melk entertains the group at his Kersfontein family estate and gives you an insight into how things used to be, then it's off to the Tanda Tula Safari Camp for a three-day safari in the Kruger National Park. Andy Howes

Price: £3,003 per person, including tours and transfers, meals and accommodation; excluding international air fare.

Details: A Cook's Tour (00 27 800 726 6388; acookstour.com).

The Thai House Cooking School Thailand

This school not only offers three fun-filled days of learning the secrets of Thai cooking, but gives you the opportunity to stay in a traditional 150-year-old teak Thai family house, surrounded by fruit trees. Thai House is the home of Pip Fargrajang and her family, who have opened their home to visitors keen to master the art of Thai cuisine or simply to experience living the Thai way. The wing-shaped roof structure is inspired by the temples; it is thought that these wings help waft the inhabitants to heaven. Thai House is 45 minutes (22km) from the centre of Bangkok; transport by boat and road is included in the price. Lessons are in English in the open-air kitchen, and include lectures, preparation of ingredients, hands-on demonstrations and time for discussion and eating. The maximum class size is ten people per session, and in addition to one-day classes there are two- or three-day classes. Judy Bastyra

Price: One-day course £53 per person, two-day course £135 per person (including one night's accommodation) and three-day course £250 per person (including two nights' accommodation).

Details: The Thai House, Amphoe Bangyai, Nonthaburi, Thailand (00 11 66 2 997 5161; thaihouse.co.th).

Creole Cooking School Costa Rica

As trips to exotic destinations become more popular and responsible travel is ever more important, the Costa Rica Creole Cooking School combines both with a top-class culinary experience. The school is run from the Inn at Coyote Mountain, a traditional hacienda in a private nature preserve with breathtaking views over the Pacific Ocean. Set high in the Tilarán mountains, 60km north of capital San José, the focus is on educating visitors about the culinary history of the Americas. The course consists of three days of hands-on instruction from the authors of the Trout Point Lodge Cookbook: Creole Cuisine from New Orleans to Nova Scotia, and includes preparation of a variety of Latin-Creole fare, including empanadas, rice dishes and traditional 'tico' tamales. You will help prepare four-course meals and learn about tropical ingredients from nearby farms and the inn's own gardens. There are also opportunities to visit local markets and coffee plantations, as well as tours to the active Arenal Volcano and guided orchid safaris. Chris Howat

Price: Three-day course £382 per person (price includes accommodation and meals).

Details: Creole Cooking School, Inn at Coyote Mountain, near San Ramon, Costa Rica (00 506 383 05 44; cerrocoyote.com).

BEST OF THE REST



ABOVE: EXPLORE SYDNEY'S FOOD SCENE. ABOVE RIGHT: JAMAICAN JERK AND OTHER SPECIALITIES AT WALKERSWOOD

Seafood in Sydney Australia

Take one celebrity chef host, Sydney Pemberton – the respected author of *From Water to Table* and regular guest chef on Aussie food shows – and mix her with the fantastic range and variety of seafood, farmers' produce and speciality products in Sydney, and you have a winning cookery-school experience. Arranged as morning courses, Sydney shows you around the city's best produce markets, from seafood to fruit and vegetables. You'll visit the daily auction at the seafood market and find out about the merits of exotic fish such as barramundi and garfish from the local traders, and tour speciality delis to learn about bush tomatoes and other local treats. It's an inspiring start to the day before you get into the kitchen to cook dishes such as grilled garfish with panzanella salad, barbecued ling fish in banana leaves and Asian-style seafood salad with rice noodles and green papaya, all under Sydney's expert guidance. Andy Howes

Price: Three-day course £299 per person, one-day course £149 per person (supplements for two or less people, accommodation not included).

Details: Seafood in Sydney (08708 998844; holidayonthemenu.com).



CuisinArt Resort and Spa, Anguilla, West Indies

Excellent culinary experiences and demonstrations. Students harvest some of the ingredients in the resort's organic farm. Masterclasses feature a three-course luncheon with wine and cost £39 per person. (00 1 264 498 2000; cuisinartresort.com).

Ki Tao Cuisine, Queenstown, New Zealand

Ki Tao, or 'the art of cooking from Aotearoa', puts a particular emphasis on the cuisine of New Zealand and the wonderful produce of central Otago, in the south of South Island. A two-hour class with a visit to the fish market costs £27. (00 64 03 442 7116; cuisinequeenstown.com).

Trout Point Lodge, Nova Scotia, Canada

A cookery course focused on Cajun and Creole seafood recipes, housed in a luxurious lodge in the middle of the scenic Tobetic Wilderness Area, around three hours' drive from capital Halifax. Activities include wild-mushroom hunting and visits to a local oyster farm and smokehouse. Three-day course from £290. (00 1 902 482-8360; troutpoint.com).

Blue Elephant Cookery School, Bangkok, Thailand

Royal Thai cuisine classes in a century-old mansion. Course includes a visit to Bang Rak local market, with an introduction to typical Thai products and advice on buying the ingredients. One-day course from £118. (00 66 2 673 9353; blueelephant.com).

Jane Butel, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, USA

Jane Butel, a charismatic teacher and TV star, will introduce you to the wonders of south-western cuisine and the New Mexican specialities, such as tortillas and various salsas. A week-long class (with afternoon free to explore Santa Fe and its region) costs around £1,400 (00 1 505 243 2622; janebutel.com).

Chopsticks Cooking Centre, Hong Kong

Customised gourmet tours include a demonstration lesson and market visits, as well as restaurant kitchen visits and dining in local eateries. The accent here is on healthy, low oil cooking, Chinese regional dishes, dim sum and vegetable carvings. From £30 (00 852 2336 8433; cauyeung@netvigator.com).

A Week in Tropical Goa, India

The course uses the fabulous local produce to introduce the delights of Goan specialities and also India's varied regional cooking. You'll be shown the fundamental techniques of Indian cooking, including the correct use of spices, in a magnificent kitchen overlooking the Mandovi River. A week-long course costs £579 (08708 998844; holidayonthemenu.com).