

Around the World in 23 Dishes

The culinary experiences, meals, and cocktails worth traveling for.

BY NAOMI TOMKY



Eating patterns: A Japanese
tofu and vegetable soba bowl.

We travel for many reasons, but let's face it, food is often at the top of the list. According to a 2017 survey on gastronomy tourism conducted by the World Tourism Organization, 87 percent of respondents believe gastronomy is important when defining their destination's image – a statistic supported by the fact that there are dozens of Virtuoso hotels, tour operators, cruise lines, and destinations that specialize in culinary travel. A great meal is just as fulfilling as a tangible souvenir, and these 23 ingredients, dishes, and drinks represent marquee culinary experiences around the globe. Pack your bags – and save some space for your appetite too.



Bürgenstock Hotel and Alpine Spa's cheese humidor.

1. Switzerland: Fondue

Melting together the cheeses of the Swiss alpine region (hard, nutty Gruyère and firm but creamy Vacherin) with wine, garlic, and a little cherry brandy creates the hearty dip called fondue, which has a centuries-long history in the region. Modern fondue – the typical setup with the pot over an open flame – was declared the Swiss national dish in 1930.

TRY IT: Taverne 1879 at the 102-room **Bürgenstock Hotel and Alpine Spa** above Lake Lucerne serves multiple varieties of fondue, including one made with cheese from the local Buochserhorn region. Pro tip: Spring for the Champagne and truffle add-ons. • On the final night of tour operator **Insight Vacations'** seven-day group Switzerland adventure, guests bid farewell with a wine-filled fondue celebration at Le Petit Chalet in Geneva.

2. Spain: Tapas



Perhaps these Spanish snacks came from an ill thirteenth-century king who was only able to have small sips and bits, or a nineteenth-century bartender who was keeping dust out of another king's drink with a slice of ham. The origin story isn't clear, but the small, flavorful bites laid out at bars around the country are a fun way to explore Spanish gastronomy.

TRY IT: Dry, the bar at the 136-room **Hotel Maria Cristina, a Luxury Collection Hotel** in San Sebastián (a city revered for its Michelin-starred restaurants), offers individual tapas or a tasting selection of its *pintxos* – the word for tapas in the Basque region. • On **Oceania Cruises'** 12-day, Barcelona-to-Venice voyage on the 684-passenger *Sirena*, a shore excursion in Barcelona includes a guided tour to some of the city's most iconic tapas spots. *Departures: July 25 and October 11.*



Hotel Maria Cristina's bar, Dry, in San Sebastián.

3. Portugal: Bacalhau

Legend has it that the Portuguese know how to eat *bacalhau* (salted, dried cod) 365 ways – one for each day of the year. In reality, some people would say there are far more recipes, but whatever the exact number, it's hard to miss the country's pungent national dish, whether stacked high at the markets or on nearly every restaurant menu around.



TRY IT: At the Seteais Restaurant in Sintra's 30-room **Tivoli Palácio de Seteais**, *bacalhau* is served *à nossa maneira* (braised with potato confit, crispy smoked ham, and bell pepper mayonnaise). • Chefs at Adegas at the 170-room **Vila Vita Parc Resort & Spa** on the Algarve coast serve *bacalhau* two ways, including in beignets filled with sheep's cheese.



Belmond Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons' exterior.



Venison was once a regal rarity.

4. England: Venison

Britain is home to more than 1 million deer, but because of early regulations surrounding who could hunt in royal forests, venison was long a delicacy reserved for the aristocracy. The lean meat often comes adorned with the flavors of the forest from which it came – foraged mushrooms and berries, for example – giving diners a full taste of the land.

TRY IT: At Raymond Blanc's two-Michelin-starred restaurant at the 32-room **Belmond Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons** in Oxfordshire, venison loin comes roasted and served with autumn root vegetables and juniper. • Head to Ting Restaurant, inside the 202-room **Shangri-La Hotel, At the Shard, London**, where tender roe-deer venison is sourced from Wales' famed Rhug Estate and served with celeriac, blackberries, and chestnuts.

5. Belgium: Flemish Stew

Flemish stew, also called *carbonnade à la flamande* or *stoofvlees*, is a deeply rich beef dish that's been a part of the region's culinary tradition since the Middle Ages. It's a lot like beef bourguignonne, but made with Belgium's renowned beer in place of wine. It often comes with another classic Belgian cuisine: those famous fries.

TRY IT: The Bierbrasserie Cambrinus restaurant in Bruges – the capital of Belgium's **Flanders** region – specializes in beer, which includes a local Gulden Draak ale that is among the ingredients in the restaurant's Flemish stew.



6. France: Truffles

With their heady and entrancing scent, truffles are one of the world's most sought-after delicacies, and France is one of the best places to find them. Lumpy and brown, the fungi aren't very much to look at, but when shaved razor thin over pasta or eggs, they perform culinary magic.

TRY IT: Maison de la Truffe, a specialty restaurant in Paris' **Galleries Lafayette** shopping mall, offers any of its dishes with a choice of truffle type. • During a communal farm-to-table dinner at the 26-room **La Mirande** in Avignon, green lentils come in a black truffle cappuccino, graced with a nugget of foie gras.

7. France: Macarons

These bright, easily recognizable, and much-loved sandwich cookies perhaps serve as the peak of France's vaunted baking culture. They're also famously fragile and difficult to make: Two delicate cookies made from ground almonds, egg whites, and sugar are pressed together with buttercream, ganache, or jam in between.

TRY IT: Your travel advisor can work with **Découvertes**, an on-site tour connection in France, to arrange a private macaron-baking workshop with a chef in Paris. • Charter **Belmond Afloat in France's** four-passenger **Belmond Alouette** barge for a private, multiday cruise down the Canal du Midi between Carcassonne and Béziers; passengers can hop off for a prearranged patisserie workshop.



8. Ireland: Whiskey

The Irish claim to be the first people to distill whiskey in the British Isles, and at one point a quirk in the tax code prompted the creation of the country's unique and popular pot-still style of whiskey. Although today's Irish whiskey encompasses a wide range of distilling styles that go beyond the pot still, the drive to create the world's best whiskey remains.

TRY IT: During a 12-day tour of the Emerald Isle with **Adams & Butler Ireland**, a Virtuoso on-site tour connection in the country, travelers will visit County Cork's Midleton Distillery for a private tour and tasting, and leave with their own personalized bottle of whiskey. • Visit the Old Bushmills Distillery (plus *Game of Thrones* filming locations in Belfast and beyond) on an eight-day jaunt through Ireland and Northern Ireland with tour operator **Avanti Destinations**.



A tasting at the Old Bushmills Distillery in Northern Ireland.



The interior of La Taverna at Castello del Nero Hotel and Spa.

9. Italy: Pizza

Pizza's roots can be traced to Naples, Italy, and the dish brings together a few of the country's most well-known specialties: tomatoes for the sauce, the various cheeses that go on top, and the skills of the bakers who make the dough. Each region's style of pizza is different, so you'll have to try them all to pick a favorite.



TRY IT: Virtuoso advisors can work with on-site tour connection **Essence of Sicily** to set up custom adventures across the southern Italian island, where standard pies include toppings such as pecorino cheese, olive oil, and sardines. • Another on-site tour connection, **IC Bellagio**, can arrange a private crash course in pizza making with a family near Lake Como. • Sample five combinations of pizza toppings with the 5 Gusti Gourmet option at La Taverna at the 50-room **Castello del Nero Hotel and Spa** in Tuscany.

10. Italy: Ricotta

The versions of ricotta available on American grocery shelves bear only a passing resemblance to the soft, rich, and creamy version of ricotta produced in Italy. This delicate, slightly sweet cheese isn't actually cheese, however: it's a *latticino* (a by-product made from whey), and Italians use it to stuff pastas and vegetables, in sauces, and even in desserts.

TRY IT: During a cooking class at the 26-room **Relais Il Falconiere & Spa** in Tuscany, guests learn how to stuff zucchini blossoms with ricotta or make it into gnudi. • At I Carracci Restaurant in Bologna's 109-room **Grand Hotel Majestic Già Baglioni**, smoked ricotta tops an appetizer of chestnut nuggets in creamy pumpkin sauce. • Dig into *gnocchetti sardi* pasta with sheep ricotta, mackerel, and anchovy drippings at the Vespasia restaurant at the 24-room **Palazzo Seneca** in Norcia. Bonus: Dessert is a ricotta gelato.



Ricotta-topped pumpkin flan at the Grand Hotel Majestic Già Baglioni.



Chicken and octopus *peka*.

11. Croatia: Octopus “Under the Bell”

Along Croatia’s Dalmatian coast, the most famous style of cooking is called *peka*, or “under the bell,” named for the domed lid that goes on the pot before it bakes over an open fire. Inside that pot: octopus; inland recipes call for lamb or other meats.

TRY IT: Virtuoso travel advisors can work with **Calvados Club Luxury Travel – Croatia**, an on-site tour connection, to arrange private cooking lessons with local families; octopus *peka* can definitely be on the menu. • During a seven-day tour of Croatia hosted by **Exeter International**, guests can request a stop to try octopus “under the bell” at Konoba Dubrava in Dubrovnik.

12. Alaska: Dungeness Crab

The TV show *Deadliest Catch* may have made Alaska’s king crab fishermen famous, but Dungeness crab is the true local delicacy. Alaska’s chilly waters breed large and flavorful Dungeness crabs; they’re meatier and brinier than their East Coast siblings, with a hint of nuttiness that requires almost no dressing save for a little drawn butter.

TRY IT: At the cooking school at the six-cabin **Tutka Bay Lodge** near Homer, guests turned students learn their way around the Alaskan kitchen, which includes lessons in prepping Dungeness crab. • Set sail on an 11-day, Seward-to-Vancouver journey on **Windstar Cruises’** 212-passenger *Star Legend*; a Ketchikan excursion takes their own crabs, which are later enjoyed in a local restaurant. *Departures: Multiple dates, May 22 through August 20.*



The makings of a seafood feast at Tutka Bay Lodge.

13. Napa: Beet Salad



California knows a thing or two about vegetable-focused and utterly simple but incredible culinary creations. With produce this fresh, California chefs really know how to make their local vegetables shine.

One highlight: the rosy beets that are woven into salads with local cheeses and other delicacies.

TRY IT: The Grill at the 99-room **Meadowood Napa Valley** dresses a rainbow of beets from its garden with stracciatella cheese, hazelnuts, arugula, and citrus. • Lucy Restaurant at the 62-room **Bardessono Hotel and Spa** in Yountville offers its baby beets (sourced from an on-site garden) with fried goat cheese, wild arugula mousse, and garden sprouts.

14. Maine: Lobster

Maine’s cold waters and plentiful lobster supply make for a clean-tasting, beautiful white meat. Beginning in the early twentieth century, the luxury of shipping live lobster made it a sought-after delicacy in New York City and beyond, but heading straight to the source is still our favorite way to indulge.



TRY IT: Kennebunkport lobster is served with Champagne, caviar beurre blanc, gnocchi, and fennel at The White Barn Restaurant at the 27-room **White Barn Inn, Auberge Resorts Collection** in Kennebunk, Maine. • On **Holland America’s** seven-day, Montréal-to-Boston cruise on the 1,432-passenger *Zaandam*, a port call in Bar Harbor, Maine, promises an immersive culinary journey with a ride on a lobster-fishing boat, followed by an old-fashioned Maine lobster bake. *Departures: Multiple dates, May 4 through September 21.*

15. New York City: Knish

The Eastern European Jews who famously settled in NYC in the nineteenth century left a lasting mark on the city's food culture, including the kosher hot dogs of Coney Island and world-famous bagels and pastrami sandwiches. While those delicacies are available around the globe, the hearty hand pie known as a knish remains a solidly NYC staple.

TRY IT: Let a guide from tour operator **Urban Adventures** lead you around the Lower East Side on a half-day adventure that showcases the neighborhood's multi-cultural food influences (including knishes).

- Get your knish on while exploring the city on your own during an overnight port call in NYC on **Seabourn's** 12-day, Montréal-to-Miami cruise along the Atlantic Coast on the 458-passenger *Seabourn Quest*. *Departure: October 25.*



16. Mexico: Tlacoyo

Dried versions of corn flour have allowed Mexican delicacies to spread worldwide, but only in Mexico can you try treats made from freshly ground masa (dough). One of those treats is the football-shape *tlacoyo*. Crisped on a griddle and stuffed with fava beans or cheese, it's must-try street food. To complete the experience, pair it with a handmade margarita (like the one on this issue's cover).

TRY IT: **Eatwith** connects travelers with locals who host cooking classes and other culinary experiences in their homes. A dinner party in Mexico City hosted by José Ángel, for example, begins with a true Mexican *antojito* (street food): a *tlacoyo* topped with salsa and fresh cheese.

17. Saint Lucia: Fish Stew

While many Caribbean dishes are shared among the islands, Saint Lucia is well known for its own version of fish stew, made with wild-caught fish fried and set afloat on a spicy, cinnamon-tinged tomato base. In addition to the daily catch, the stew includes local vegetables such as bell and chili peppers, garlic, thyme, and onion.

TRY IT: At The Naked Fisherman at the 50-room **Cap Maison Resort & Spa**, chefs add sweet corn and taro to the curry fish stew's standard list of ingredients. • Private, en suite dinners at the 29-room **Jade Mountain** can include a Caribbean-inspired soup du jour, plus sustainably caught seafood dishes and ingredients from the resort's organic farm.



18. Peru: Ceviche

When the Spanish arrived on South America's west coast in the 1500s, they brought the bright citrus of the Mediterranean with them. Local Peruvians quickly began using it to marinate their fish, a process that lightly cooks the fish with acid rather than heat. The result: ceviche, a dish that's cool and fresh, bright and zesty, and distinctly Peruvian.



TRY IT: On a private, weeklong gastronomic tour across Peru with **Condor Travel**, travelers kick off the trip in Lima with market visits and a cooking class, where they'll learn to make ceviche. • At the 62-room **Sumaq Machu Picchu Hotel**, the Qunuq Restaurant serves trout ceviche with cream of piquillo pepper and sweet-potato chips.

19. Hong Kong: Dim Sum

Shrimp dumplings, egg tarts, and pork-stuffed buns stack up on tables around Hong Kong each day: *This* is dim sum. The Cantonese words mean "touch your heart," and it's a brunch-time staple of Hong Kong

and China's Guangdong province. Assorted small bites – steamed, fried, and baked – come to the table as part of a shared meal, accompanied by tea.



TRY IT: There's no shortage of great dim sum dining in **Hong Kong**. At the Dim Sum Library in the Central Business District, the afternoon meal gets a modern upgrade with black truffle shrimp dumplings and rice noodles roasted with Iberico pork.



Take your noodles to go in Thailand.

20. Thailand: Boat Noodles

The history of boat noodles is as rich as the dish's beef broth, with the noodles likely having been served in some form for hundreds of years by vendors paddling along Thailand's canals. Chewy rice noodles come with small servings of broth, a tradition that was believed to have been born of necessity: Too much broth and it would spill as the vendor juggled between steering the boat and serving the food.

TRY IT: During an excursion in Bangkok on **Celebrity Cruises'** 15-day, Hong Kong-to-Singapore sailing on the 2,138-passenger *Celebrity Millennium*, travelers visit the Damnoen Saduak floating market, where plenty of boats sell the noodles. Departures: December 7, 2019, and January 4 and February 15, 2020. • Head to **Bangkok's** Boat Noodle Alley, north of Victory Monument, to find some of the city's best noodle vendors.



Lamingtons from Candied Bakery.

21. Australia: Lamingtons

This Australian dessert is said to have originated as a happy accident: A maidservant to Lord Lamington accidentally dropped his favorite sponge cake into melted chocolate. Not one to waste food, Lamington suggested rolling the resulting mess in coconut so that he could eat it with his hands. The dish hasn't changed much since then, save for the occasional cream or jam filling.

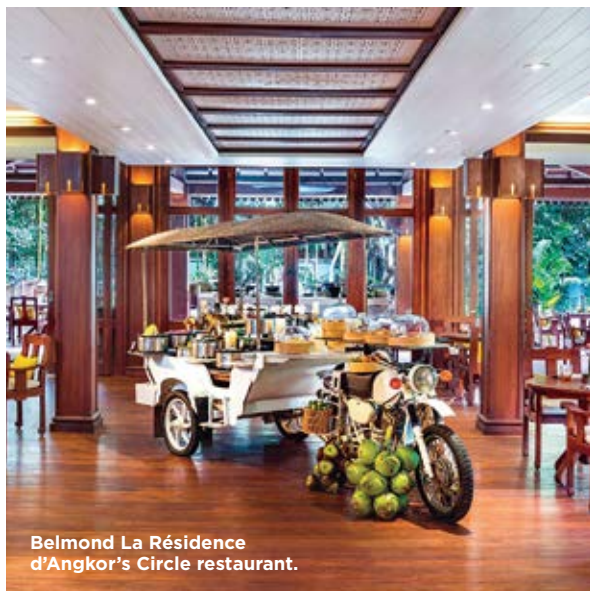
TRY IT: You can find Lamingtons throughout **Australia**, including at Melbourne's Candied Bakery, where its version begins with a generous jam filling sandwiched between two layers of delicate sponge cake, which are then coated in rich chocolate and rolled in coconut.

22. Cambodia: Fish Amok

The best-known dish of Cambodia's herb-redolent cuisine is fish *amok*, fish that has been wrapped in banana leaves and steamed. The slightly sweet curry with a custard-like consistency eschews the peppery heat of its sister dish in Thailand in favor of subtle hints of lemongrass and lime leaf. The dish arrives at the table garnished with coconut cream.

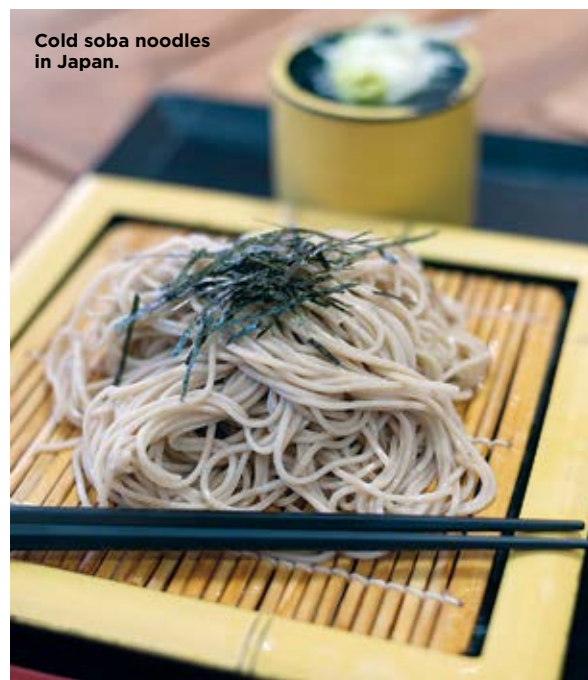


TRY IT: Circle restaurant at the 59-room **Belmond La Résidence d'Angkor** in Siem Reap is known for its creative Khmer cuisine, including a red snapper *amok* served with sautéed vegetables.



Belmond La Résidence d'Angkor's Circle restaurant.

(AMOK) JACK MALINDA/GETTY IMAGES.
(SOBA) THE EPIC MAN/GETTY IMAGES



Cold soba noodles in Japan.

23. Tokyo: Soba

While ramen seems like it could cure the common cold, Japan's lesser-known soba actually helped keep people from contracting beriberi during the Edo period. The thiamine in the thin buckwheat noodles prevents and treats the disease, and those medicinal properties led to the dish becoming a staple of Japanese cuisine. Soba is served either hot in soup or cold with a dipping sauce.

TRY IT: On the first full day of **Access Culinary Trips'** nine-day, food-themed group tour of Japan, guests learn how to make soba noodles from scratch, then eat the results for dinner.