

# HUNGRY FOR ADVENTURE

*Culinary tourism, travel decisions based on food*



BY SUSAN ELY || PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED BY SAINT JACQUES, C'EST SI BON & LA FARM BAKERY

The term “Culinary Tourism” is a relatively new one, first coined in 1998 by Lucy Long, an Assistant Professor of Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University. The concept is not new, though. Remember the Spice Traders? It’s not necessary to travel the Seven Seas anymore in order to eat well, but it would make a splendid culinary tour.

These days more and more people are basing their travel decisions around food-based activities. In fact, a first-of-its-kind survey shows that 27 million people engaged in culinary or wine-related activities while traveling within the past three years. Culinary tourism isn’t limited to dining at 4 star restaurants; activities may include cooking classes, dining out, and visits to farmers markets, seeking out local vineyards or gourmet shopping. Then there’s agritourism, referring to travel in which tourists board at farms or in rural villages and experience farming up close and personal.

Here’s a look at several gastronomic experiences folks from the Triangle will be enjoying this summer.



*Travelers with the Saint Jacques annual French trip enjoy lunch at a French café.*

## SAINT JACQUES ANNUAL FRENCH TRIP FEATURING PROVENCE & COTE D'AZUR REGION JULY 29TH – AUGUST 7TH, 2007

I once described dining at Saint Jacques restaurant in North Raleigh as a pilgrimage to the very roots of gastronomy. Credit the authenticity to owner Lil Lacassagne's French roots; he's originally from Saint Jacques, Grasse, France. So it didn't surprise me when I heard about their annual trips to France. Last year it was Burgundy; this year Lacassagne wants to show off his beloved Provence.

This will be the third time the elegant Frenchman has taken a group to his homeland and this trip promises to be the best and largest ever; thirty-nine people are signed up to go. As a testimony to the growing popularity of the annual trips, this one sold out at the very first informational meeting in early January.

Even the most seasoned travelers rave about Lil's trips. Susan McLaughlin, a former restaurant reviewer for DiRoNA, a premier dining and restaurant guide, has traveled the world. Of her trip to Burgundy last summer, she says, "This trip ranks in the top three of the best trips I have ever taken." McLaughlin, who generally dislikes group trips, was the first one to sign up for this year's Provence trip.

Fellow travelers Jack and Barbara Best, who have visited France many times, credit the success of the trips to Lil's personal touch. "We never felt like we were on a tour," says Jack. On day two of last summer's Burgundy trip they told Lil and his wife Lori, "It's like having our son and daughter-in-law take us on a personal tour of their new home."

Still think you'd rather travel on your own? Best used to think that way but has changed his mind. "We had our own bus, bus driver and tour guide," he says. "We all became one happy family and nothing was done by the clock."

For a foodie, this summer's itinerary is jaw-dropping, not to mention mouth-watering. It's one thing to visit France but quite another to score reservations for even one Michelin rated restaurant, let alone four. This summer's lucky travelers will be dining at La palme d'or (2 stars), La Bastide Saint Antoine (2 stars), Louis xv, one of Alain Ducasse's 3 star restaurants and Moulin de Mougins (2 star) where they will participate in a cooking class with the chef. It helps to have connections;

Lil began his career under the guidance of Roger Verge at Moulin de Mougins and worked for several other 3 star Michelin establishments in Europe.

If you're wondering how much all this costs, you may be surprised to hear the 8 day, 7 night trip, including airfare is \$4,450 and that is all-inclusive, including gratuities. "You don't ever have to pull a nickel out of your pocket once you're there," says Sue Little. "We went four days without having to exchange our money into Euros."

Throw in a cruise in the bay at Saint Tropez, a tour of the French Riviera via small plane, a guided visit of Monaco, various wineries and a stop at Galimard Perfumerie, where you can create your own perfume and you've got yourself the trip of a lifetime. Then again, like Susan McLaughlin, you might sign up for next year's tour right on the spot. "It's amazing that Lil wants to share his vacation with people. I will continue to do the trips as long as I am physically able. It's set in stone; the first week of August each year!"



## PROVENCE, TUSCANY AND PARIS – TRAVELING TEENS

For most of us, vacation offers the chance to get out of the kitchen and enjoy someone else's cooking. Dorette Snover, owner of C'est si Bon cooking school in Chapel Hill, would disagree. Talk with her for any length of time and you'll hear the word kitchen over and over again: "For me it keeps coming back to the kitchen," "being at home in the kitchen," "finding that home in the kitchen" are phrases she repeats often.

"A lot can be gained from connecting with people and not feeling that food is a spectator sport," says Dorette. The people she connects with most often these days are teens. She started taking groups of adults on culinary tours in 2004 and added a teen trip to Provence in 2005. Tuscany was added in 2006. This summer there will be a total of five teen trips, including a fabulous gourmet tour of Paris.

Her cooking school has held teen classes for years, so it was a natural transition to begin taking "our next chefs" as she calls

them, to the birthplaces of these substantial cuisines. "We are very simpatico with kids and teens and it is rewarding to be with them as they make these discoveries," says Dorette.

Many of her students have gone on to culinary careers, including her son, Eric, who is training as a sushi chef in Beaver Creek, Colorado. She says their motivations don't come from wanting to be famous, a la The Food Network, but because they find the work meaningful and want to explore their passion.

This summer students from all over the United States will join her for an "unplugged" week where they can connect with another culture and cuisine. "We ask them to be 'in the moment,'" says Dorette, "and to connect on a real and not virtual basis." For one week, iPods will be silent, laptops and MySpace left behind. "We are not watching downloaded movies," Dorette tells them. "This experience here, this is the movie of your life."



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*Opposite : A teen learns the secrets of breadmaking during a trip to Europe with C'est si Bon.*

*Above: A teen group traveling with C'est si Bon enjoys a meal they have prepared themselves.*

*Right: Teens practice piping their own truffles at a French chocolatier.*



It's a movie they will undoubtedly replay over and over in their minds. From open air markets, to visits to the beekeeper and baker, chocolatier and cheesemaker and cooking classes in the heart of Paris, the teens will be immersed in the tastes and aromas of Italy and France.

In Tuscany, students will stay at the agriturismo farm Poggio Tre Lune, situated on a hill overlooking the woods of Vallombrosa. Vineyards, olives groves and gardens are a short walk away. There will be plenty of hands-on work in the kitchen, with classes taught by Chef Paolo Raspini, whose restaurant, Cantina Petrarca, is located in an ancient restored cellar from the 1500's. There will be time to play as well; day trips to the sea and horseback rides in the country.

In Provence, Madeleine and Erick Vedel's Association Cuisine Et Tradition will serve as home base from which students will visit the largest outdoor market in France, attend a chocolate class with Joel Durand and take an early morning trek to the bakery. The Mediterranean Sea is just half an hour away, so there will be a strong emphasis on seafood.

As for the Paris trip, well, eat your hearts out, parents. Breakfast will begin with café and croissant, then a visit to the legendary ovens of La Poilane. The hungry travelers will take in the sights and aromas at the Market Les Halles, lunch at Pied De Cochon as well as the dazzling display of food stalls in Rue de Moufftarde and of course, a trip to the Louvre.

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919.862.2770

*For dinner reservations or to receive notification of wine dinners and trips to France*

### C'EST SI BON COOKING SCHOOL

[www.cestsibon.net](http://www.cestsibon.net)  
1002 Brace Lane  
Chapel Hill, NC 27516  
919.942.6550

*For information on classes and teen trips*

### LA FARM BAKERY

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*For info on classes and to purchase; also available locally at Whole Foods*

### CAPRI FLAVORS

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### LEFT BEHIND?

At this point, the enthusiasm for your annual hot dog-laden 4th of July beach trip could be starting to wane a bit, so we've rounded up a few food-related activities for you right here in the Triangle. After all, North Carolina was recently cited in the top five state destinations for wine and culinary tourism.

Why travel to France to learn how to bake bread when we have a Master Baker right here in the Triangle? When Lionel Vatinet, owner of La Farm Bakery graduated from the prestigious Compagnons du Devoir Guild in France, he made a commitment to teach the art and science of bread baking. To that end, he has trained bakers from all over the world and now you can take advantage of his expertise by signing up for a class. Learn how to make Le Pain Francais or "country bread." If you thought you knew how to knead bread, think again; Lionel's signature kneading technique will make your bread baking skills "rise" to a new level! At the Italian Bread class you'll learn how to make your own focaccia and ciabatta and for desserts to die for, simply sign up for the Death by Chocolate menu. Learn why weather is the challenge of the baker, why Lionel says to think of yeast as a human being and how, when kneading, your hand is your memory.

Cooking classes in Tuscany may not be in the budget, but non gridi - don't cry; join Titina Cosentino Vuotto, owner of Capri Flavors in Morrisville, on a culinary tour with her spring schedule of cooking classes. Cook and taste the flavors of Capri, Rome, Sardinia and Sicily. Titina teaches a full meal from appetizer through dessert in each class.

Grand Asian Market in Cary is a quick fix for those longing for a stroll through the food stalls of Asia. Even if you don't cook Asian, it's worth the trip; you won't believe what you'll find! 30,000 sq. ft. filled with thousands of products, many you've probably never seen nor heard of or have been unable to find elsewhere. Grab some gailan (Chinese broccoli)



*Above : Master baker Lionel Vatinet of La Farm Bakery in Cary shapes baguettes and places them on a couche to rest before baking them in a European hearth oven.*



*Right: The Grand Asian Market in Cary offers the freshness and feel of an Asian market without the 12-hour flight.*

then head over to the meat department where you'll find goat meat and Chinese sausages. The seafood department has live aquariums filled with a variety of fish. Sea cucumber and shark fin are also available. For a taste of Asia, the Joy Luck Club Restaurant and Andy's Asian Bakery are both located within the market.

Finally, if you just can't get that trip to France out of your mind, join Lil Lacassagne for one of his monthly wine dinners; each month he will introduce you to the foods and culture of a different region of France. As the waiter pours your wine and you take the first bite of your Coquilles St. Jacques, the restaurant's namesake dish, close your eyes and breathe deep; you're in Provence. ◆



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