

Mastering the art of French cooking

What better way to spend a holiday in France than to learn to cook like a chef in the French countryside?



Happy cooks toasting to their fruits of labour in the kitchen. PHOTO: THE INTERNATIONAL KITCHEN

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Imagine waking up to the smell of coffee, the buttery loveliness of a warm pain au chocolat from the friendly village baker, and the sound of birdsong. You then spend the rest of the morning exploring the delights of a local market before heading back to the historic chateau that is your home for the week.

After a lunch made with fresh, seasonal ingredients, and some leisure time (a walk in the nearby woods or a visit to the winery perhaps?), you head for the kitchen in the afternoon to learn the finer points of French cuisine.

This is followed by an aperitif or two in the garden before sitting down to a delicious dinner derived from the fruits of your labour earlier in the afternoon.

If that sounds inviting, you're not alone. Retiree Judy Lim, who has spent a week at the French Dining School under the tutelage of Chef Poul Jensen at Kerrouet House, certainly agrees.

"What I enjoyed most was the hands-on experience as many cooking classes are merely demonstrations," she said.

"I got involved in everything — from preparing stocks and sauces, plating the dish, pairing wines to selecting the cheeses that follow the meal. Best of all, we got to eat what we had prepared with our own hands."

If you are inspired by Judy to cook and eat your way through France, here are some places to explore.

SEAFOOD ON THE COAST

Kerrouet House, Kerrouet, Brittany

Renowned for its seafood, the north-west of France is a gourmand's dream. Learn



The lovely cottage of Kerrouet House. PHOTO: KERROUET HOUSE



Cooking schools in France typically use seasonal produce (even edible flowers) that is grown in their gardens. PHOTO: THE INTERNATIONAL KITCHEN

how to prepare langoustines and mussels at Kerrouet House. And if you so desire, stay in the 16th-century Chateau de la Touche (those on a budget can choose to stay in a local village gite instead).

Outside of class, you'll learn to forage for wild mushrooms, go for guided forest walks, or visit local markets and vineyards. The classes are small, friendly and run by Chef Poul Jensen, who loves to share the secrets gleaned from decades of experience at Michelin-starred restaurants. All the meals and wine are included at very reasonable prices, plus you'll get champagne and certificates at the end of the course.

The five-day course starts at €995 (S\$1,474) per person. Menus and schedules can be customised upon request.

www.frenchdiningschool.com

IN THE HEART OF PROVENCE

Chateau de Berne, Lorgues, Provence

The sprawling Chateau de Berne, a winery that dates back to 1750, is the perfect place to learn about French food and wine in a luxurious setting.

The hands-on classes are held under



Chateau de Bern's lavender field is a calming sight. PHOTO: THE INTERNATIONAL KITCHEN



Start your morning by exploring a local French market. PHOTO: THINKSTOCK

Travel Tips

Not everyone wants to spend a whole week slaving over a hot stove while on holiday. But if you'd still like to live out your Julie & Julia movie fantasy, why not combine a few days of sight-seeing along with a day or two of cooking classes? Here are some options.

● La Cuisine Paris

If you are pressed for time, classes at La Cuisine range from only two to four hours in length, which makes it easy to fit into a quick weekend in Paris. Learn practical tips and tricks for various French classics, including crepes, souffles, macarons and baguettes. Prices start at €65.

lacuisineparis.com

● Ferrandi (French School of Culinary Arts)

While most courses here are designed for professionals, the three-day Introduction

to the Macaron course (€900) is designed for beginner cooks and provides plenty of hands-on learning.

www.ferrandi-paris.fr

● Le Cordon Bleu

Short gourmet master classes range from two hours to two days in length. Choose from a wide variety of topics that include bread making, wine pairing or regional specialities. Prices start at €48.

www.cordonbleu.edu

● On Rue Tatin

Join award-winning journalist and cook Susan Loomis on a Paris market tour (US\$140) for an insider's look at French cuisine. Foodies won't want to miss Truffle Weekend in Perigord (US\$2,300), which includes a truffle hunt, cooking classes, meals and accommodation.

onruetatin.com

olive trees or inside the wine cellar; where Chef Jeremy Czaplicki demonstrates the alchemy of turning simple, local ingredients into delectable dishes with complex flavours.

The afternoons are spent exploring the region, and include visits to local wine cellars, the famous Lorgues market,

an olive-oil mill and ceramic museum.

If you wish, you can also enjoy a relaxing massage at the in-house spa or a refreshing dip in the outdoor pool. The five-day course starts at S\$2,500 per person. Shorter courses are available on request.

www.theinternationalkitchen.com