

# WORLD'S BEST RESTAURANTS 2026

Metin Ar



**ISBN: 978-625-6718-12-8**

Ağustos 2024

Bu eserin bütün hakları saklıdır. Yayınevinden ve yazardan izin almadan kısmen veya tamamen alıntı yapılamaz, hiçbir şekilde kopya edilemez, çoğaltılamaz ve yayımlanamaz.

Yazardan Direkt – Türkiye

Yazardan Direkt Elektronik İletişim Tanıtım Paz. ve Tic. Ltd. Şti

Altın-tepe mah. İstasyon Yolu sok. No: 3/1

Maltepe / İstanbul

Tel: 0216 3011213

Sertifika No:47456

Baskı ve Cilt

Meteksan Matbaacılık ve Teknik Sanayi Ticaret Anonim Şirketi

Beytepe Köy Yolu No:3 Bilkent/ANKARA

Sertifika no: 4651

# WORLD'S BEST RESTAURANTS 2026



**Metin Ar**

*This book is dedicated to  
MY DEAR DAUGHTER ESRA AR*

# INDEX

<a href="#"><u>MY TOP 15 RESTAURANTS .....</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>1</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>ALBA .....</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>12</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>AMALFI COAST .....</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>16</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>AMSTERDAM .....</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>20</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>ATHENS.....</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>25</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>BANGKOK .....</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>40</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>BARCELONA .....</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>46</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>BERLIN .....</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>54</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>BODRUM.....</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>57</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>BOLOGNA.....</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>59</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>BORDEAUX .....</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>62</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>CAPE TOWN .....</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>68</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>CAPRI .....</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>79</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>ÇEŞME/URLA/ALAÇATI.....</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>81</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>COPENHAGEN .....</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>83</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>FLORENCE.....</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>87</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>HAVANA .....</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>91</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>HONG KONG .....</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>96</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>ISTANBUL.....</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>98</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>KYOTO .....</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>108</u></a>

<u>LONDON .....</u>	<u>110</u>
<u>MACAU .....</u>	<u>120</u>
<u>MADRID .....</u>	<u>122</u>
<u>MELBOURNE.....</u>	<u>132</u>
<u>MEXICO CITY .....</u>	<u>138</u>
<u>MILAN .....</u>	<u>144</u>
<u>MODENA.....</u>	<u>150</u>
<u>NEW YORK MANHATTAN .....</u>	<u>151</u>
<u>NICE AND RIVIERA .....</u>	<u>157</u>
<u>OSAKA .....</u>	<u>165</u>
<u>PARIS.....</u>	<u>167</u>
<u>RIO .....</u>	<u>177</u>
<u>ROME.....</u>	<u>182</u>
<u>SAN FRANCISCO.....</u>	<u>185</u>
<u>SAN SEBASTIAN.....</u>	<u>195</u>
<u>SÃO PAULO .....</u>	<u>200</u>
<u>SEATTLE.....</u>	<u>205</u>
<u>SYDNEY.....</u>	<u>209</u>
<u>TAORMINA.....</u>	<u>221</u>
<u>VERONA.....</u>	<u>225</u>
<u>VIENNA .....</u>	<u>229</u>
<u>ABOUT THE AUTHOR .....</u>	<u>230</u>

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank my dear friend Reha Tanör for planting the idea for this undertaking in my mind. I thank Stefan Martens and Süveyda Çil for their perfect editing. I thank Şule Şantarlı for the time and effort she put into helping to prepare the original text. I am grateful to Cosmo and Amazon for publishing the book globally.

Metin Ar

**[metin@metinar.com](mailto:metin@metinar.com)**

# INTRODUCTION

I had been posting my restaurant reviews to a blog. I decided to convert the content into a book and publish it with Amazon in print and kindle formats. As I update the book continuously, readers will always have the opportunity to peruse the latest current version. There are about 200 restaurant recommendations in this book. All positive ones from over 40 cities on 5 continents. If I don't like a restaurant, I prefer not to write about it. So, the restaurants in the book are selected among many more visited. They include a wide range from street food to pizza shops to fine dining spots. The reasons behind each and every recommendation are given with tips about the place.

Metin Ar

*World's Best Restaurants 2026*





## MY TOP 15 RESTAURANTS

### *ARZAK (San Sebastian/ Spain)*

Paquita Arzak established Arzak in the 1960s, eventually bringing her son Juan Mari Arzak on board to work in the kitchen. Now 70, Juan Mari runs the show today, along with his daughter. Arzak got its first Michelin star in 1974, its second in 1978 and the third in 1989, making it the first three-star restaurant in Spain. When Ferran Adria became famous 10 years ago, everybody lined up to criticize him for serving 30 to 40 portions. Juan Mari, however, called up Ferran and asked to see what he was doing. After observing Ferran's work, Juan Mari said he had learned a lot from El Bulli's master and duly invited him to come to San Sebastian. Soon, the two gastronomic titans became close friends, traveling to different places around the world together and trying different food. Their close friendship notwithstanding, they have different styles and tastes. Arzak has two gastronomical menus, both of which mainly have meat – perhaps too much meat – instead of fish. I managed to get half portions for each of the courses, which allowed me to try 10 portions that actually amounted to two starters, the main course,

and a dessert. Now, normally, restaurants with three Michelin stars don't allow you to mix and match like this, as they see it as beyond them, but Arzak isn't so snooty as to not offer such an option to its diners.

## ***ATELIER CRENN (San Francisco/USA)***

San Francisco's best restaurant is Atelier Crenn. They serve just 20 people, but a full 10 people are in the kitchen cooking! And when you add in the wait staff and people behind the bar, there's a restaurant employee for every customer. Atelier Crenn, which has three Michelin stars, is located on the left side of an apartment building's entrance. Bar Crenn occupies the other side of the entrance. On the bar side, the menu is restricted to wine and champagne; they offer small plates of food as well, mind you, although it's wider than the wine and champagne on offer at the adjacent restaurant. Atelier Crenn is the abode of the French-born Dominique Crenn, who became an inspiration to women chefs everywhere after becoming the first and, so far, the only woman to acquire three Michelin stars in the United States — a fantastic achievement in a male-dominated environment. After beginning her career in San Francisco in 1988, Crenn opted to open Atelier Crenn in 2011. In no time at all, she earned herself a Michelin star, along with a second one in short order. In 2018, Crenn grabbed another Michelin star — only to be hit by breast cancer soon thereafter. It goes without saying that I wish Crenn, who is currently focusing on her treatment, the speediest of recoveries. As for the restaurant, the system that Crenn has instituted at the restaurant and bar works like such clockwork that even if she's not there, things still come off without a hitch.

## ***ATTICA (Melbourne/Australia)***

It's well-nigh impossible to find a seat at this Australian restaurant, which is among the cream of the crop near the top of the world's top 50 list. In the end, we managed, although it wasn't under the most ideal of circumstances: We had to be there at 6 p.m. – not my most preferred time – and out by 8:30 p.m. Attica has a set menu for all; the only possible alteration is to choose fish if you don't eat meat. Nonetheless, we reckoned that it would be impossible to come all the way to Melbourne and not go to Attica. The prices truly are astronomical, but the food was out of this world. It was the best meal I had in Melbourne. We had a 12-course menu, 10 of which we really enjoyed. I had no complaints because I opted to go meat-free, although my guests did not. Ultimately, that meant they had to dine out on fried ants (probably for the first and last time), which were consumed a lot in Australia. If you're not interested in ingesting delicacies like this, it's a good idea to say so.

## ***BLUE HILL (New York/USA)***

Blue Hill is about 50 minutes out of town by cab in Stone Barns at a ranch that was, interestingly, built by Rockefeller. Here, they grow all kinds of organic vegetables and raise pigs, chickens, and small cows. I don't generally deign to eat eggs, but I definitely did here. Everything looks good, smells nice, and tastes even better, probably because of the fodder they use. All the meals, apart from the fish, are prepared with the freshest of ingredients that are produced right on the farm. Blue Hill's chef, Dan Barber, has been in charge of the kitchen since day one. You can enjoy a dinner at Blue Hill six days a week, while there is

also an additional lunch service on Saturdays and Sundays. This being the United States, dinner begins as early as 5:30 p.m., so I recommend you make a reservation for as early in the evening as possible. More than that, try and go an hour early because it's a lot of fun to spend time both in the town and on the farm. And don't be tardy about planning your trip to Blue Hill either: Reservations are a big problem at the restaurant, but if you send an email at least five or six weeks in advance and are flexible about time, you'll get results. A spacious and calm place with 10-meter-high ceilings, Blue Hill can host 50 people. Thankfully, the tables are spread out from one another, allowing you to chat comfortably. Blue Hill also has a splendid wine menu, which has offerings from all over the world at a good price. At your typical fine restaurant, the wines are priced at a wholesale price multiplied by around four; at Blue Hill, however, they only multiply this price by two, even though it's a top restaurant. More than that, you can order wines by the glass, giving you the opportunity to taste a different wine for every dish if you plan to try five or six different things. On top of that, all the waiters at Blue Hill are very knowledgeable about food and wine. And while most New York restaurants typically have a high circulation in terms of waiters, almost all of Blue Hill's wait staff have been there since the opening. Barber was selected as the best chef in New York by an independent jury a couple of years ago, while Time also declared him one of the 100 most influential people in the USA. Barber might be influential, but the farmers he sources his food from are even more influential – at least in terms of what makes it onto his menu. “I don't decide what to cook that day; farmers do. I form my menus according to the products farmers pick and shape personal menus in line with our guests' requests.”

## ***CANLIS (Seattle/USA)***

Blue Acre might be the place for seafood, but Canlis is Seattle's best restaurant, hands down – in fact, it might even be one of the United States' five best restaurants. Michelin doesn't yet have any ratings for Seattle, but when it expands there, I'm fairly certain Canlis will be getting three stars. Likewise, Canlis isn't on the list of the world's 50 best restaurants, which is a shame because it should be in the top 10. Canlis opened 52 years ago in a large villa constructed by an architect with vision. It also knows a thing or two about retaining its staff; our waitress, for instance, told us she had been working at Canlis for 33 years. At Canlis, you create your four-plate tasting menu, which you can enjoy alongside some wine from the restaurant's well-stocked and reasonably-priced cellar. And if you're at a loss for what to order, the sommelier is a master of his craft. Canlis' bread and butter service is also excellent, but alas, it doesn't have a lunch service. Unsurprisingly, it's also difficult to find a reservation. So when you're planning your trip to Seattle, make a reservation early, preferably for an earlier hour, as that will allow you to see the view of the city by both day and night. Canlis is open every night except Sundays.

## ***DINNER (London/England)***

Heston Blumenthal launched Dinner By Heston inside the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in London. The system at Dinner by Heston is different than that of the Fat Duck, as Blumenthal continues to serve a 17-course menu at his first location. For Dinner By Heston, it appears that he has employed his own right-hand person, Ashley Palmer, as executive chef. About 10- 12 chefs cook in a tiny glass room that resembles an aquarium; it

might make the cooks feel like they're in a fishbowl, but it allows you to watch your food being prepared. Another great thing is that all of the dishes here are drawn from the cuisine of Medieval England. The menu includes the history of the dish, as well as further elaborate information about how it was cooked. Dinner By Heston has a simpler menu compared to the Fat Duck, but the beauty of this place is that it is open every single day, including Sundays. What's more, it has a great view of Hyde Park.

### ***DISFRUTAR (Barcelona/Spain)***

Disfrutar is a restaurant belonging to three young, former employees of El Bulli: Mateu Casañas, Oriol Castro, and Eduard Xatruch. The trio earned their first Michelin star in no time at all, but arrogance is nowhere to be seen when you take a look at the restaurant. Disfrutar has three different menus with 12, 18 and 25 courses. More than that, the staff can all rapidly shift gears from meat to fish. There are options to dine at either the table or at the bar, but I'm one of those who prefers the latter so that I'm able to watch as the meals are prepared and even chat with the chefs at times. I generally find the bar section quite interactive and fun, but, of course, it depends on the restaurant. In my opinion, Disfrutar reflects the Ferran Adria School better than any of its rivals. Unsurprisingly, Disfrutar is always full, so I'd advise you to make a reservation ahead of time – even a couple of months ahead of time. Nevertheless, you might have luck if you try and book for lunchtime. Disfrutar separates the evening service into two sessions. The first service begins at around 7 p.m., while the second commences at around 9.30 p.m. But given that this is night-owl Spain, the second service typically draws more people – meaning that if you're more of an early bird, you might not have that many problems booking reservations for 7 p.m.

## ***EL CELLER DE CAN ROCA (Girona/ Spain)***

A place with three Michelin stars, Can Roca is located about an hour northeast of Barcelona in beautiful Girona. Can Roca serves up the classic fare. It's also a fraternal affair: Joan Roca is the chef, Joseph Roca is the sommelier, and Jordi Roca, the youngest brother, is the pastry chef. The restaurant, which has a capacity for about 60 or 70 people, is in a very nice and modern building with pleasing architecture. They have an option for an à la carte menu, but I would suggest trying the 12-portion menu, which is accompanied by very suitable and affordable wine. It's probably best to go there for lunch – a meal there is a five-and-a-half-hour event (I, for one, went for lunch at 1 p.m. and only managed to leave at 6:30 p.m.), so that's something to consider if you don't want to finish dinner after midnight and then wonder how you're ever going to get to sleep.

## ***LE BERNARDIN (New York/USA)***

One of the first places that come to mind when you say food and New York is Le Bernardin. Gilbert and Mathilde Le Coze opened the famous fish restaurant first in Paris in 1972 before raising the curtain on the second branch in New York 14 years later. Gilbert, who was also the chef, passed away shortly after the opening, giving way to Eric Ripert, one of his associates. Although the cuisine is French in origin, it is quite Americanized today. In my opinion, Le Bernardin is the best fish restaurant in New York – everyone should eat there at least once. If you go there for lunch, you can have a beautiful fish menu in a very comfortable environment for a lower price than usual. Normally, I don't like the service of three-Michelin- star restaurants

because of their attitude, but Le Bernardin is one such restaurant with three Michelin stars that has great service. Try to make reservations a week in advance. However, you may walk in to eat at the bar section, which has a more limited but great menu.

### ***MIRAZUR (Nice/France)***

France saves some of its best for last: Mirazur, the world's best restaurant, is located in Menton, the last town on the Riviera before you hit Italy. Heading up the restaurant is an Argentine chef, Mauro Colagreco, who cooks very French dishes. If you want ironed cotton tablecloth like me, they'll immediately bring one to you. If you don't, you can eat at a wooden table as if you're at a casual place. And naturally, given its location on the Riviera, it has an unreal view. Mirazur will be in our next edition too, but without a ranking number next to it, as now it is included in the "best of the best" list. It serves two menus; I suggest the longer menu coupled with a good cellar-temperature red "Bourgogne" from the extraordinary wine list. The sommelier is highly qualified to be able to assist you in finding a gem.

### ***NOMA (Copenhagen/Denmark)***

Noma came back to the list at the number two position at its new location after two years of absence from the scene during the construction. Rene Redzepi gets most of his ingredients from Denmark, only procuring some of his fish from further afield, like Greenland and Iceland. Noma still has just two Michelin stars, but it perhaps deserves a third one soon. I guess

it will rise up to the number one position in 50 best lists again in 2020, as it was there when it was in its old location. Located in a stone building, Noma boasts high ceilings and a fair degree of comfort. I had long wished to visit Noma in its new place again but constantly failed to find a chance to book. But thanks to the intervention of a common friend, I was able to make a reservation for a Saturday night. And let me tell you, I couldn't be happier to fly there for a day. It is not as moderately priced as it was in the previous location; if you accompany your meal with wine pairing too, you might have to part with 500 euros for the whole affair per person.

### ***OSTERIA FRANCESCANA (Modena/ Italy)***

A place with three Michelin stars for many years, Osteria Francescana in Modena finally earned its rightful place as the best restaurant in the world in 2016 and in 2018 and is now in the “best of the best” list forever. The restaurant's capacity, however, is as small as its reputation is big. The Osteria has one dining room for 10 people, as well as another one for 20 people – ultimately meaning it's difficult to find a place at one of the individual tables. If you do snag a place at this paragon of modern Italian cuisine, may I suggest you try the gastronomical menu? But if you're pressed for time, try three or four dishes. The dishes are served in small, non-fusion portions. Francescana goes for the minimal in its decoration with plain colorful walls. The restaurant is located in an alley, which can cause problems, especially as the area is closed to traffic on the weekends, meaning you might need to stretch your legs a bit if you're arriving by car on Saturday or Sunday.

## ***PIAZZA DUOMO (Alba/Italy)***

Listed as high as the 15th best restaurant of 2017, Piazza Duomo is not only Alba's most famous restaurant, but it is also one of the most expensive restaurants in Italy. Alba is a paradise of truffles. White truffles, which are more valuable than black truffles, are the star of the region. For this reason, I'd recommend you visit Alba in the fall when white truffles are in season. Piazza Duomo is open throughout the year, but if you go to the restaurant sometime between October and December, you'll get the chance to taste the unique white truffle. A place with three Michelin stars, Piazza Duomo, is located on the second floor of a building right in front of the city's main church. They have an à la carte menu, but I recommend the tasting menu.

## ***PUJOL (Mexico City/Mexico)***

Pujol is my most favorite Mexican restaurant in the world because I love Mexican street food, and Pujol serves real street food in the healthiest and refined way with a twist, perfect service, and a great wine list. It has a very relaxing restaurant setting with a lovely bar in the garden. I enjoy it more there than some of the restaurants in the top ten. Very difficult to reserve it is, with two set menus; vegetarian and pescatarian. Next time I'm in Mexico City, I'll reserve two days in a row to enjoy both menus.

## ***STEIRERECK (Vienna/Austria)***

Located inside a city park in Vienna, Steirereck is, the world's 10<sup>th</sup> best restaurant. The couple that runs the place doesn't open on weekends, so you'll need to make reservations in advance. Steirereck offers a great view of the surrounding park thanks to its floor-to-ceiling windows, making you feel like you're eating in the center of a garden full of beautiful flowers and trees. Steirereck has a tasting menu that you can order for either lunch or dinner. The restaurant can prepare the menu, one of which is fish-based and the other meat-based, depending on your preferences. One useful thing about Steirereck is that they bring cards written in both English and German explaining the dishes – it's a great idea given that many waiters outside the United States have less than fluent English. And to enhance the experience, they provide a small stand on the table so that you can read as you eat. You can even take the card with you if you're interested in saving the recipe...

[Back to TOP](#)



## **ALBA**

There are mushrooms, and then there are mushrooms. Deemed one of the world's most valuable edible fungi, "white truffles" are found in a few areas of the world, one of which is Alba, a small town in Italy's Piedmont region that's south of Milan. On this front, the word "found" is more than apt, for the white truffle defies cultivation, making it more like a precious metal than a crop. Every year, truffle lovers descend on Alba, a town that I've had the pleasure of visiting seven times in the past. It's a place I love, so let me share some of my previous experiences with you. You can visit Alba from the beginning of September until January, but the best move is to plan your visit for autumn, particularly in November — that's when the town hosts its annual White Truffle Fair to coincide with the abundance of truffles. Beware, though, that accommodation fills up fast, so it's best to book ahead, particularly if you're planning on seeing the town over the weekend amid the rest of the world's truffle lovers. But if you're too late to visit during the height of truffle season, consider March or April, when Alba is also lovely.

## ***LA CIAU DEL TORNAVENTO***

La Ciau Del Tornavento has a menu that offers a wide range of truffle dishes. It also boasts a spectacular wine cellar, which allows patrons to enjoy almost every class and taste of Italian and French wines. What makes La Ciau a special treat — particularly for lunch — is its mesmerizing view from atop a hill. If you choose to have a pleasant meal at the restaurant, give my regards to the grand chef Maurilio, who also doubles as the owner of this fine establishment.

## ***PIAZZA DUOMO***

One of the town's most famous and exclusive restaurants is Piazza Duomo. It's not only Alba's most famous restaurant, it's also one of the most expensive restaurants in Italy. Listed as the world's 29th best restaurant in 2019, it also has three Michelin stars. Piazza Duomo is located on the second floor of a building right in front of the city's main church. The service might be a bit slow, but there are so many surprising appetizers that you're likely to spend at least three hours dining. They have an à la carte menu, but I recommend the gastronomical one. Piazza Duomo is open throughout the year, but if you go to the restaurant sometime between October and December, you'll get the chance to taste the unique white truffle menu.

## ***VILLA D'AMELIA***

Villa d'Amelia is the best choice for accommodation, although it also features an excellent restaurant for dinner. In autumn, they have great Porcini dishes and superb white truffle risotto.

## ***TRUFFLE DISHES***

In the mood for something with truffles? Then here's a pair of simple recipes. If you want to save a bit and opt for cheaper truffles, allow me to recommend summer truffles, which are available between June and September. Before you start, though, make sure you're ready with a special truffle shaver. Truffles pair best with eggs, which blend well with the fungi's intense flavor and aroma. Break an egg in a saucepan and heat it up until the white of the egg is well done, but the yolk is still rare. Before serving, sprinkle on good-quality salt. Repeat the process for everyone who's eating. Once the eggs are on the table, everyone can take the shaver and grate the truffle onto their eggs. Accompany this simple but excellent meal with some freshly baked bread. If you have more guests coming, you can, alternatively, beat 10 eggs and add them to a pan that has been greased with a bit of real truffle oil. But don't leave it on for too long, as there's no need for the omelet to be well-done. To add to the aroma, you can add a couple of drops of truffle oil to the plates before serving. Like the straight egg option before, shave black or white truffles onto the omelet before eating – doing so at the table will intensify the flavor and smell. Cook some fresh pasta or spaghetti lightly for two or three minutes, whisking it in real truffle oil. Remove the pasta from the heat, allowing everyone to add their own truffle shavings. If the white truffle's cost of 2000 to 4000 euros a kilo is a bit too rich for your blood, summer truffles cost more inexpensive at 300 euros. The flavor of black truffles is not as intense as the white, but the lower costs mean there will be more shavings to go around for your meal. Once you've shaved the truffles so much that you can't grate them anymore, you can put the leftovers in a jar and add some butter. Keep the jar in the deep freezer so that you can enjoy

them whenever you want – after all, that's what Alba restaurants do when truffles are out of season. Or you may put them in virgin olive oil and create your own real truffle oil.

[Back to TOP](#)



## **AMALFI COAST**

If you're still at a loss about where to spend vacation next year, look no further than southern Italy's Amalfi coast and the Island of Capri – the perfect place for a week-long getaway. If you're interested in a one-week sojourn on the Amalfi Coast and Capri, let me tell you a bit about my trip to the area. But right off the bat, a caveat emptor: It's not a particularly budget-friendly holiday, but you could always cut down on the length of your stay; it's totally up to you! It might be busy, but the best time to take a trip is July or August when the weather is unlikely to throw up any nasty surprises. All you have to do is go, relax and enjoy the sun. A trip to Amalfi isn't the cheapest vacation, but there are some ways to lighten the burden on your wallet. For one, there's no need to insist that your hotel room has a sea view – there will be plenty of chances to soak in the sea, and foregoing a view from your room will certainly save you from overspending. After arriving in Naples by plane, grab a taxi – there's no reason to rent a car, as a cab will be more than enough to reach your destination. Take the road to Ravello, a town situated in the hills. The trip, which you should take without entering Naples proper or the coastal road, takes about 55 minutes using highways and other roads. From the 350-meter-high Ravello, you can survey all that is before you, including Amalfi, Positano, and Capri. There are plenty of hotels in this small town, but only two hotels – Palazzo Avino and Hotel Caruso – that are really worthy of a night's stay. We stayed in

the town for a night last time, enjoying a meal at Palazzo Avino and sleeping at Hotel Caruso.

## ***ROSSELLINI'S***

Palazzo Avino's restaurant, Rossellini's, boasts a fantastic selection of wines and a well-regarded menu. You can select something to eat from the à la carte menu, but if you are dedicated to food, then plan to come to Rossellini's at 8:30 p.m., open a nice bottle of wine, and let yourself go with the flow of the menu until 11 p.m.

## ***RAVELLO MUSIC FESTIVAL***

The Ravello Music Festival starts in June and runs until mid-September, offering concerts every Friday and Saturday and, occasionally, on weekdays. You'll have a chance to sample the performances by different musicians each time; sometimes, it might be an orchestra, and sometimes, it might just be a soloist. Alternatively, you could go for a quick dinner and watch a Saturday night concert at the Ravello Music Festival from a terrace with a sea view. A word to the wise, though: The concert can be popular, so book a seat for the performance when you reserve your hotel room. Otherwise, you might find yourself stuck in the back rows or, worse, without any seat at all. Because the concert starts at 9:30 p.m., it's best to plan to eat at 7 and finish by 9 to make it to the performance on time. In such a case, may I recommend selecting your meal from the à la carte menu. After that, sit back and enjoy the sunset – but things will be even better if your concert under the stars also features a full moon!

On my last trip to Ravello, I hadn't booked a seat at the concert and, what's more, I hadn't even eaten lunch. As such, I abandoned myself to the joys of Rossellini's gastronomic menu and delicious wine. During one of my previous visits, however, I did get the chance to watch the concert and the mesmerizing view. Needless to say, it was wonderful in every sense of the word.

## ***SANTA CATARINA***

The next day, head for a sightseeing tour of Ravello, including the local museum, if you so desire. Soon, however, the time will come to decide whether to head for Amalfi or Positano, two charming towns on the Amalfi Coast. If you choose Amalfi, you can stay at Santa Caterina – a place whose food is so exquisite you need never eat anywhere else in town, including lunch (provided that you make sure you have a light lunch, of course). Santa Caterina is a newly restored, luxurious hotel in a historical building on a cliff above the sea. The hotel has two elevators inside the mountain that whisk you down to the sea, where you can find sun beds, beach umbrellas, and waiter service. Although the coast here does not have any sandy beach, there is a beautifully located pier.

## ***SAN PIETRO DI POSITANO***

If you opt for Positano instead, I suggest you try the Hotel San Pietro di Positano. After some breakfast, a chance to catch up on reading under an umbrella, a swim, a sailing trip with the hotel's boat, and light lunch, prepare for dinner at 7 p.m. in the

hotel's restaurant, a location that sports a Michelin star and a great service team. The founder's grandchildren run the hotel, while the waiters are veterans who have been working at the establishment since the age of 20. Everybody at the restaurant treats you as if you were staying at their very house. The food and the wine are remarkable, but most importantly, they never try to take advantage of their customers – something that doesn't necessarily ring true for many seaside establishments around the world.

[Back to TOP](#)



## AMSTERDAM

Amsterdam is one of the most beautiful cities in the world, but it might soon be adding another feather to its cap – namely, that of becoming a gastronomical getaway. It's all thanks to double taxation agreements that have prompted many umbrella companies to set up shop here. If you're paying taxes in the Netherlands, you're not obliged to pay taxes in your home country as per the terms of the double taxation agreements. Nevertheless, companies engaged in such a practice can still get caught in their own country if the latter says you're running an inactive company to avoid taxes. To prevent this, many companies hold executive board meetings in Amsterdam once a year. Ergo, I have been going to Amsterdam for four years to attend the executive board meeting of an international company. The meetings usually last two days, but if you add the travel time, I end up getting a four-day trip to Amsterdam. All senior executives have to attend the meetings, which bring together around 40-50 people – all of whom have to be reimbursed for accommodation and dining. And with some companies organizing two executive board meetings a year, there are plenty of high-powered and hungry business leaders in the city of canals all the time. Cue a new trend, in which many beautiful restaurants have started to open up over the past decade to satisfy businesspeople coming for meetings. It all means that Amsterdam's restaurant scene – as well as the prices – has

become richer. It's a similar story in London, New York, and Dubai, where executives appointed from other countries lose the habit of eating at home and start dining out over the three to five years they spend away from home, sometimes on their dime, and sometime on their company's. Moreover, these companies host many guests as well. In any case, Amsterdam is now mentioned in the same breath as this trio – although there are sure to be more additions to the list due to Brexit, as many banks and finance companies relocate from London to elsewhere in Europe. And it wasn't just business people from around the world that were descending on Amsterdam, but restaurateurs as well. To cater to the increased demand, many came to open new restaurants, while Dutch chefs also made their way back home to open new places. In short, Amsterdam has become a city of attraction. Beyond that, good hotels have started to rent out their own restaurants, which is the reason why Amsterdam's hotel restaurants don't have that cold and negative atmosphere shared by most such eateries. Each one is owned by a chef, meaning ambitious and hardworking chefs are in abundance in the city. Over the past couple of years, I've had the chance to visit about 40 restaurants in Amsterdam. Of these, five are really worth the mention. Some of these eateries are expensive, and some are not. Naturally, the prices rise as the number of Michelin stars rises. So let me run the rule over them, always proceeding in alphabetical order. Amsterdam is great for a wide variety of fresh seafood. When you're in town, I suggest you try the clams as well. This delicious shellfish isn't particularly popular in Turkey, where it's imported as frozen food in fairly small quantities. In Amsterdam, however, they are huge! Besides, they're fresh every day, cooked in an oven in its shell, and served with sauce on the side.

## ***BRIDGES***

As its name suggests, Bridges is a restaurant in a neighborhood with many bridges. It's a nice place by the canal that gives you the opportunity to watch Amsterdam's little boats pass by as you take it all in from the window. They also have a standard tasting menu, which is both economical and appealing, given that you never get a chance to try more than three different things when you order from the main menu. Nevertheless, I wouldn't recommend the tasting menu at Bridges. After all, the dishes on the main menu are beautifully designed, like paintings. If you're not eating alone, you can order a number of different dishes with friends and feel as if you're eating in an art gallery. Bridges also has a good wine menu. If possible, make a reservation for a table by the window. Who can pass up fresh, warm bread? It's easy to lose oneself in a little bit of butter, olive oil, and fresh, warm bread, but if you dig into that before the actual meal arrives, you'll hardly have any appetite for when the actual meal arrives.

## ***CIEL BLEU***

Ciel Bleu is an authentic French restaurant located on the rooftop of a Japanese hotel somewhat outside the city center. The French chef, who sports two Michelin stars, has prepared a fantastic menu – particularly the tasting menu – for the place. The sea bass, for one, is presented wonderfully here. The restaurant doesn't have a canal view like the previous restaurants, but you can see the beautiful lights of the city in the distance. The Chinese and Japanese restaurants located in the same hotel also have a Michelin star each – giving the hotel four

Michelin stars The Chinese and Japanese restaurants, however, have no view and no light.

## ***RIJKS***

Rijks is located inside the peerless Rijksmuseum. If you're planning to make a reservation, keep in mind that there are two restaurants inside the museum. One is the Rijks café, which serves good food during the museum's visiting hours, and the other is the Rijks Restaurant, which has a Michelin star and is the place I want to recommend. You can access the restaurant, which has separate working hours, from the outside. You might not consider doing it elsewhere, but go and order five dishes at the Rijks since the portions are very small. Their cheese plates are delicious as well, so if you're a person who loves cheese as much as I do, you can order three dishes, a cheese plate and a cheese soufflé prepared with slightly sweet cheese. The restaurant serves lunch and dinner, and the non- too-expensive prices for both are the same.

## ***AMSTEL***

Located inside the Amstel Hotel, Amstel is a wonderful restaurant. Amstel Hotel is built on top of a canal, which gives Amstel a beautiful view of the wooden boats that pass by every now and then – in fact, your feet are almost below sea level since the restaurant is downstairs. Its watery address even allows you to arrive in style by boat if you so desire. The chef appears to change over time, but the

menu largely stays the same. The place isn't particularly crowded at lunchtime, and they even have a separate – and cheaper lunch menu..

## ***VERMEER***

Like Amstel, Vermeer is inside a hotel in central Amsterdam, although it also has an entrance of its own. This place has two Michelin star. Vermeer is my favorite restaurant in Amsterdam. If I were to go to Amsterdam for a day, I'd opt for Vermeer – after all, its scallop dish is delicious.

[Back to TOP](#)



## ATHENS

We shall start with Athens first and then go to the Athens Riviera.

### ***ESTIATORIO MILOS***

The original Estiatorio Milos in Athens opened many years ago beneath the Hilton Hotel — a beautiful, high-ceilinged restaurant. Over time, Milos expanded to various cities around the world, including New York, London, Montreal, Miami, Las Vegas, and Los Cabos. Known for its white tablecloths and sharply dressed servers, Milos also offered an extensive list of ouzo and wines. The display of fresh fish on ice, the cold and hot appetizers, and the desserts made it a truly enjoyable place. The Athens location closed during the pandemic, and later the Hilton went into renovation. Milos then reopened nearby, this time as part of a small boutique hotel. The interior design resembles the old one, but it is a slightly smaller venue. The bar, previously integrated into the restaurant, now has its own separate area. I used to frequent the original Milos and considered it the best fish restaurant in Athens. Unfortunately, I can't say the same about the new location. It's now a place popular with businesspeople during lunch and a mix of tourists and locals in the evening. If

you're staying in central Athens, you can easily walk there and still enjoy a very good meal. In restaurants like this, I believe it's best to choose one of two dining styles: either opt for a light meal — one or two salads followed by a grilled fish — or go heavy on the appetizers and skip the fish entirely. Doing both feels excessive. And of course, there's always room for dessert or ice cream. Among their most famous dishes is the salt-crusted sea bass, but it's not particularly exceptional. If you're unsure of what to order, consider larger fish like grouper, white grouper . grouper or dentex (trancha) either in portions or whole depending on your party size.

## ***HERVE***

Opened two years ago, Herve is listed in the Michelin Guide but has not yet earned a star. I actually went there assuming it had a star and was very surprised to learn otherwise — in fact, I was convinced it might be awarded a second star within a year or two. I still believe it will definitely earn its first star soon. Herve offers a 16-course tasting menu, with each dish served in two or three bites. The cuisine is international and includes meat, fish, and poultry. If you have any dietary restrictions, they can accommodate that if you inform them in advance. It's a small restaurant with a capacity of about 35–40 guests, though it's not always fully occupied. The tasting menu is very filling and each course has a distinct character. The restaurant was founded by three chefs, one of whom is also the sommelier. As a result, the wine list is extensive and reasonably priced. Many wines are also available by the glass. The kitchen is flanked on both sides by bar seating, reminiscent of a sushi bar, accommodating around 15 guests. The garden area has seating for another 15, and the indoor space includes a table for 5–6 people. Many guests, myself included, prefer eating at the bar, as it allows for direct interaction with the chefs and the opportunity to watch the food being

prepared. The chefs also explain each dish they serve. There is no bread or olive oil service, and the entire experience lasts around three hours. There's no view, but if you want a pre-dinner drink, their cocktails are excellent. The restaurant has no sign. When you make a reservation, you receive a digital access code. Upon arrival, you enter this code into a keypad to unlock the door — only those with the code can enter. Closed on Sundays and Mondays, Herve is a must-visit fine dining restaurant.

## ***THE ZILLERS***

Another excellent restaurant in central Athens is The Zillers. One of the few Michelin-starred restaurants in Greece, The Zillers is located on the rooftop of a boutique hotel bearing the same name. The restaurant offers both indoor and outdoor seating, and one of its main attractions is the breathtaking view of the Acropolis in all its majesty. The sight becomes even more stunning when it's illuminated in the evening. The restaurant also overlooks Athens' largest cathedral, which is fronted by a magnificent square. If you lean slightly over the terrace railing, you get a clear view of this grand public space. During major Orthodox religious holidays, elaborate ceremonies are held in the cathedral that continue onto the square. Following these events, all church bells in the city ring for about five minutes, and although I personally don't care for fireworks, they are often part of the celebration — creating a unique and memorable atmosphere. The building was originally the residence of a German architect named Ziller. It was later purchased and converted into a boutique hotel, with the rooftop opening as a restaurant under the same name. During the day, it serves coffee and tea, and after 7:00 PM, it transitions to dinner service. The restaurant holds one Michelin star, and its head chef Pavlos Kiriakis gained experience in well-known restaurants across the

U.S. and Europe. He creates refined Mediterranean and Greek dishes. Once a month, he invites a chef friend from another country for a special collaborative event known as the “Four Hands Dinner,” which has become one of the restaurant’s signature experiences. There are two tasting menu options at Zillers — a short and a long version — each with wine pairing options. If you’re in Athens, I highly recommend having an evening meal here and sitting on the terrace to enjoy the extraordinary view.

## ***TRAVOLTA***

Though not listed in the Michelin Guide, Travolta is a seafood restaurant well worth visiting. Located in the center of Athens, it is a modest yet charming place with wooden tables. Except for Friday and Saturday evenings, it’s usually not too difficult to get a table. The cuisine is heavily focused on mezes and seafood. While you can order fish, there’s such a wide variety of small dishes that you’ll likely be full before even getting to that point. Their signature dish is smoked eel. Travolta stands out for offering dishes with flavor combinations you don’t typically encounter elsewhere.

## ***SOIL***

One of Athens’ Michelin-starred restaurants is Soil, where the head chef is Tasos Mantis. In fact, one could say the restaurant is more like a 1.5-star venue, as in addition to its Michelin star, it has also been awarded a Green Star for its commitment to sustainability. Located within walking distance of the Olympic Stadium, Soil serves Greek cuisine with Northern European

influences. The restaurant grows its own vegetables, herbs, and greens on a private farm, and incorporates edible flowers into its presentation. The farm is tended by the chef's father, adding a personal touch to the operation. At the end of the meal, guests are gifted a small bouquet of herbs used in that day's dishes — a charming and memorable gesture. The team at Soil takes great pride in their farm-to-table approach: "We grow the vegetables and herbs we cook with ourselves. Nothing gets lost in transport. We harvest in the morning, and cook the same day — no unnecessary energy use, no waste." This level of commitment to sustainability and freshness is central to Soil's philosophy, and it would not be surprising to see the restaurant receive its second Michelin star in the near future.

## ***RIVIERA***

Everyone knows Athens, but not the Athens Riviera so much. The Athens Riviera, which offers good opportunities, especially between May and November, is an area that leaves a great impression on me in every sense. Beautiful and natural beaches, delicious food, calmness, and sublime nature, in addition to the absence of traffic, make for a wonderful holiday. Starting from the Port of Piraeus, where a Poseidon temple is located, and stretching all the way through Cape Sounion, The Athens Riviera consists of a 65 km long coastline. If you start from Port of Piraeus by car and follow the coast, you can cover this winding road in an hour and a half. You can swim at every point and eat good food along this route. If it's not July or August, you won't encounter traffic. Magnificent views are guaranteed. After you leave Piraeus, residential areas start to leave their places for beaches. The Athens Riviera is a very nice summer holiday option. I will talk about the first 25 km part of the 65 km coastline, where people from Athens come to eat and have fun.

The remaining 40 km of the coastline is for those having a longer holiday in one of the many summer residences. The first important place in the Riviera is Glayfada, followed by Voula, Vouliagmeni, Vari, and Varkiza. If you're someone who likes to eat, being on the Riviera will give you pure joy as you'll be able to taste delicious dishes with different presentations and tastes.

## ***DOURAMBEIS***

Dourambeis, located on the west of our route, is a seafood restaurant founded in 1932 the very near Microlimano. It's still run by the same family who found it. The second and third generations of the family work together to run the place now. Unlike other restaurants in the region, Dourambeis is not located by the sea; in fact, it doesn't even have a view of the sea. However, it's well known by the locals, and although it's a big restaurant, it's packed most of the time, especially on the weekends. Dourambeis has an open-air terrace as well as a closed area. Their wine and ouzo menus are rich. Two things about this place particularly caught my attention. The first one was the special oven in the kitchen, and the second was the low quality of its service and its waiters. A waiter, by its meaning, is the person that waits for you at your table. They are supposed to stay at a distance from the table to give privacy, but they're always in your eyesight. They don't serve but always observe if you need anything at any given moment. When you raise your head to ask for something, they come closer and ask what you need. Then, they go inside for a few seconds, convey your need to the server, and the server brings your ask. According to a British tradition, there's a runner that complements the waiter and the server. The runner cleans up the table. If there's a sommelier, they take your wine order and do your refills. These four roles, waiter, server, runner, and sommelier, make up a good restaurant service,

which in these times are very rare to encounter. At Dourambeis, the waiting system does not function well. The most important aspect of Dourambeis is its kitchen. I've never seen anything quite like it, and neither have they anywhere else. There's a stove in the kitchen that is 4 meters long and one meter high, and its body part is made up of several layers of metal. On top of it, there is a thick volcanic rock. A fire, provided by natural gas, enters the furnace from several places, and a temperature of 2000 degrees Celsius is created inside. This heats the volcanic rock to cook food. An attendant carefully opens the covers of the stove and checks the fire. The temperature on the surface of the stove is not the same everywhere, something they specifically regulate. A few chefs cook fish and other seafood on this stove. There are also old-style hand-held wire grills, some of which reach one meter in diameter. If a sea bass that weighs 6 kilos will be cooked, they cut the fish in half into two fillets, one on the bone, put it on the stove, and cook on the volcanic rock. Small grills are used if they're going to cook two or three shrimps. The juices coming out of the cooked ingredients flow over the volcanic rock with an inviting sound, and the beautiful smell of the food spreads around. I think this technique makes a difference in taste. In Dourambeis, it's possible to come across flavors you haven't tasted before. I tried a small monk fish grill here that I haven't tried elsewhere before. They place 10 small monk fish with bones, each about the size of a shrimp, on the stove and cook shortly without adding anything else. The result is delicious. There are also different shrimp styles, freshwater crayfish, and other Aegean fishes that are cooked with this style. Another nicety about this place is the tomatoes on top of a huge table at the entrance. These tomatoes, which they grow themselves, taste so delicious that I got the taste of an August tomato in November. Before you start your dishes, they bring you some of these tomatoes along with some salad. They prepare your meal while you're busy with your salad. You have the risk of being full

early if you get your hands on the bread, so it is better to stick with the salad.

## ***VAROULKO***

In my opinion, Varoulko is the most refined seafood restaurant in Greece. Holding a Michelin star, Varoulko is located in Mikrolimano, an area similar to Tarabya in Istanbul. It's a charming place with a row of cafés and restaurants right by the sea, and a small marina filled with little boats just in front. I usually prefer to visit restaurants around lunchtime or mid-afternoon, around 15:30. During my time in Athens, this restaurant was typically open in the evenings, and since I didn't want to sit indoors, I avoided making a reservation. One day, when I called to book, they informed me that the season was approaching summer and they had started taking reservations from 13:00 onwards. The garden wasn't open yet, but they managed to set up a table for me on the balcony. I had a meal at a white tablecloth-covered table with excellent service, consisting of dishes that could be found at any good fish restaurant — but each one was delicious and subtly refined with attention to presentation. The portions were neither large nor small, but just right. What truly set this place apart was the efficiency of their service system — the waiter, server, and runner coordination was exceptional. And of course, there was also a sommelier. The owner and chef of the restaurant is Lefteris Lazarou, whose father worked in ship kitchens. From a young age, Lazarou worked alongside his father, traveling to many countries and learning about different cuisines. Working in cruise ship kitchens became his greatest training ground. He brought all that experience, along with his personal culinary perspective, to Varoulko, which he opened in 1987, and has developed into the restaurant it is today.

## ***DELTA***

Located about 15 minutes by car from central Athens and heading toward the sea, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center is a place Athenians hold dear. Funded by one of Greece's most prominent shipping magnates, Stavros Niarchos, the center includes a large park, cafés, and several cultural institutions. It houses the Greek National Library and the National Opera House, both designed in a modern architectural style. The vast fountain pool, areas for children to skate and cycle, bakeries offering a variety of savory pastries, and cafés serving snacks like crepes, salads, and pizza make it an ideal spot for families. The restaurant Delta is located on the 5th floor of one of the center's buildings. It accommodates around 60 guests for dinner and just as many at the bar, and it offers panoramic views. Several things impressed me here, and I'll share them in order. To start with, Delta has two Michelin stars and a green star for sustainability. The fruits, vegetables, and herbs used in their dishes come from their own farm. The restaurant opened only a year ago, yet earned its stars within a few months. The cuisine is created by two equally recognized chefs, Thanos Feskos and Georgios Papazacharias. I'm certain that Delta will achieve its third star within the next year. They offer a 14-course tasting menu, with each course being no more than three bites. The cuisine is international but with their own unique interpretation. We visited as a party of two. I opted for the pescetarian menu with no gluten, while my friend requested a lactose-free pescetarian menu, and also mentioned an almond allergy. Soon after, they brought out a fluffy bread that we couldn't believe was gluten-free, along with both olive oil and a butter-like spread (which was not butter). In fact, the bread was one of the courses on the tasting menu, but had been specially adapted to meet our dietary restrictions. We liked the bread so much that we asked if

we could take some home. They said they had only prepared the two we ate, but if we visited again, they might be able to make extras. On our next visit, they remembered this request and surprised us with two beautifully packaged loaves to take home. Another standout aspect of Delta is that the chefs design the menu daily based on guests' dietary needs, allergies, and preferences — almost everyone receives a customized menu. I was also impressed by the service staff's attitude. On both visits, the same female server attended to us. She knelt to eye level while taking our orders, which made communication easier and more personal — something I really appreciated. She had clearly tasted every dish in its various forms — vegan, vegetarian, seafood, and meat — and was able to explain each one thoroughly. The food runner who brought our dishes also answered every question in detail. The waiter-server-runner system worked seamlessly, exactly as it should in a fine dining restaurant. At green star restaurants, environmentally conscious choices often mean no tablecloths — and Delta follows this rule. But the lack of linen was more than made up for by the outstanding food. Each dish was served on a uniquely designed plate. The first course was a sandwich with caviar — a round piece of bread topped with a non-dairy cream-like base, caviar, and edible flower petals. Just two bites — but a real explosion of flavor. Even during our second visit when we chose the vegetarian menu, I asked them to include this dish again as a small indulgence. As the season changes, so does the produce — and so Delta changes its main menu every three months. I'm already excited about what I'll get to try on my next visit to Athens. When making a reservation, you inform them of your dietary preferences, and the restaurant tailors the tasting menu accordingly.

## ***PAPAIOANNOU***

If you want to cook fish and preserve its juice, you must follow the 4 cm rule at 200 degrees Celsius. Let's say you bought 2 kilos of seabass. Keeping one-half bony, divide it into halves, creating two fillets. Don't get the scales out. Pour a little bit of olive oil on the oven tray and place the fish fillets skin side up. At the thickest point of the fish, insert a toothpick until it reaches the bottom. Measure the depth of the fish using the toothpick and multiply the centimeters by 4. This will tell you how many minutes the fish should be cooked at 200 degrees Celsius in a turbo oven. So, if the thickness is 3 cm, the cooking time is 12 minutes. This is the way they cook fish at this fine restaurant. With great sea views and efficient service, you will enjoy many local starter dishes before your fish.

## ***ITHAKI***

Ithaki is a restaurant with several chefs from different cultures because there are great Japanese, French and Italian dishes on the menu. Greek dishes are fusion versions of classical dishes. As you may know, there's feta cheese in Greek Salad. Some restaurants grate it, some add it to the salad in a single piece, and some serve it by dividing the cheese into small pieces. In Ithaki, however, they've made a foam out of feta cheese. This restaurant is located by the sea and has comfortable armchairs. They have an extensive wine and drinks menu. It's a bit more expensive than the other restaurants in the area. You can find all kinds of fresh fish in this place, and they're delicious. They have different interpretations of cooking fresh fish and vegetables. I really like their cauliflower tempura with white truffles grated on top. Sea bass also has fresh black truffles. This restaurant, open since 28 years and getting better every year under the leadership of

Ms Karamanli , they can serve up to 140 people at a time, is close to the Four Seasons Hotel.

## ***MATSUHISA***

Matsuhisa is the name of the founder of world-famous Nobu restaurants. Matsuhisa Nobu lived in Peru for many years and learned the cuisine well. Then, he created a fusion of Japanese and Peruvian cuisines. In 1987, he opened a restaurant with his first name in Los Angeles and became very successful. The famous actor Robert de Niro, who loves this restaurant, offers Matsuhisa to open a new place together, and the first branch of Nobu opens in New York, this time using the chef's surname. Matsuhisa Nobu wants Nobu to be a different brand and keeps running his original Matsuhisa too. You can see Matsuhisa branches in a couple of places around the world, and one of them is located in the garden of the Four Seasons Hotel in Athens. Located on a peninsula, the hotel overlooks a wonderful bay. I think it's one of the best Four Seasons hotels on the seaside. Matsuhisa has no affiliations with the hotel. It's a high-quality restaurant that faces west, allowing you to watch the sunset. Matsuhisa Nobu has brought his right-hand chef to Athens, practically channeling all his power here. Don't come to Athens Riviera and think you should not eat Japanese food. Definitely spend an evening at Matsuhisa's beautiful bar sometime between May and October, watch the sunset and taste the great food.

## ***PELAGOS***

Pelagos is a Michelin-starred restaurant located inside the Four Seasons Hotel in Athens, with a capacity to serve around 100 to 120 guests. The head chef, Luca Piscazzi, along with two

other chefs, are Italian, but the restaurant offers an international menu. Guests can choose between two tasting menus, one short and one long. During the ordering process, you're asked to indicate your dietary preferences — vegan, vegetarian, or pescetarian — as well as any lactose or gluten sensitivities, or food allergies. The kitchen then prepares the dishes accordingly. The restaurant's signature dish is a cold pasta: a small portion of spaghetti topped generously with black caviar, served in a chilled sauce. It's a two-bite dish but packed with luxurious flavor. Chef Luca Piscazzi has spent significant time on Greek islands, becoming well-versed in their local culinary traditions. His focus is on highlighting the rich flavors, aromas, and textures of the ingredients he uses, while also ensuring that guests can recognize and appreciate what's on their plate. The plating style at Pelagos is distinctive — far from classic — and reflects a unique artistic interpretation for each dish. Being located by the sea with a view of the sunset, Pelagos offers a stunning setting, making it an excellent choice especially for dinner.

## ***BARBOUNAKI***

This is a sister restaurant of Papaioannou equally good, simpler and less expensive. You get the same tomatoes, the salad and a similar fish selection by the kilo. No cotton table clothes, not exactly on the water but has a great sea view. They have the same eel with a better side salad and most importantly a great Greek fava which you cannot get in the sister restaurant. There are many branches; my choice is the one near the Four Seasons hotel on the Astir Peninsula.

## ***BLUE FISH***

Because the riviera's coastline is fairly jagged, some restaurants look to the west, and some look to the east. The ones that look west offer you peerless views of the sunset. Those that look east, however, can offer you a great glimpse of a full moon rise when it's that time of the month. Blue Fish is on the water and has a sunset view. In addition to the very Greek starter dishes, the way they serve fresh line-caught fish here is rather unusual. Say you are a party of four. You may choose a fish of around 3 kg from their display on the ice. They separate the fish into three different parts. They slightly boil the head and take the flesh off the bones, including the cheeks and mix it into a Greek-style pasta dish and serve as the first course. Then, they take a whole fillet off the bone, divide it into big chunks, and serve them seared with a special sauce as the second starter. Then, they grill the remaining fillet on the bone juicy and serve it on the bone as the main course with some virgin olive oil sauce. All these courses are combined with a perfect "baby" spinach salad on the side. It is advisable to start with this 4-course bonanza and be patient to order the small Greek dishes later, depending on the appetite left. For the desert, do not order anything but cross the street to an ice cream parlor called "Bufalo Gelato" to eat a custom-made ice cream plate with fresh fruits and nuts of your choice on top of the buffalo milk or vegan ice cream of your choice. The only down side is you will never enjoy other ice cream plates anywhere else anymore.

## ***AKTI***

Akti is a nice fish restaurant by the sea. It's also located in Vouliagmeni, close to the Blue Fish, and serves Greek cuisine

along with international dishes. It has three different areas: closed, open, and semi-open. Open space is ideal. Business people go to Akti for lunch, and people from the area fill the place in the evenings. It has its own beach. A Greek friend of mine had taken me there for lunch before, and I left very pleased then, so I went a couple of times with other friends again. We made reservations for 9 p.m. and when we arrived, the place was almost empty. People started to come in around 10 PM when we were halfway through our dinner. After 10 PM, the place became very crowded very quickly, and a DJ performance began. Everyone seemed to have a lot of fun; apparently, after midnight, the place turned into a Greek-style all-hands-in-the-air kind of party. They also do happy hour dining with a DJ from 4 pm on weekends.

[Back to TOP](#)



## **BANGKOK**

It's a city with ugly architecture, clogged traffic, sweltering heat that averages about 30 degrees a year, abrupt rainstorms, and almost unbearable humidity, but that doesn't stop millions of tourists from coming every year. These problems aside, Bangkok is a city full of color – particularly if you're coming from a Western country. But that's not the only thing that Thailand – one of Southeast Asia's most popular destinations has to offer. The country is a tropical paradise with tourist magnets like Phi Phi Island, Phuket, and Pattaya. This being the tropics, humidity is ever-present, and rain is never far away. But even if the monsoon rains might come suddenly (particularly between May and October), downpours are typically over before you know it. The best thing to do is just get used to it and avoid letting it get you down – although you can reduce your chances of getting caught in a rainstorm by booking your holiday between November and February when there's no monsoon. And you'll certainly have plenty of tourist company while in Bangkok – to the extent that it seems visitors must have decided that they haven't been to Asia unless they've been to the Thai capital alongside Hong Kong and Singapore. In Bangkok, you're sure to find accommodation and food options that fit your budget, as well as good transport options to Thailand's famous beaches, allowing you to plan a lengthy getaway. Bangkok is a shopping paradise. If you're into shopping, you'll find famous brands here at a fraction of the cost back home – perhaps because

of tax breaks and because you can buy brand products in their original stores. And then there are the city's phenomenal restaurants, which make Bangkok a magnet for all of Asia. Of course, it's difficult to overstate just how famous Thai cuisine is. In Bangkok, street food is king; if you love food that brings together the contrasts between spicy, hot, sweet and sour, then Thai cuisine is for you. As a bonus, there's also plenty of seafood. But leaving aside the street food, I want to take you on a journey to five restaurants – some of which serve up food that carries traces of local cuisine and others that offer dishes from around the globe.

## **GAGGAN**

This is an Indian restaurant run by the Kolkata chef Gaggan Anand, but it would be difficult for someone unfamiliar with the country's cuisine to figure that out. I went to Gaggan with a connoisseur of Indian food who raved about the restaurant, noting, "It's a fantastic place for Indian restaurant fusion." I, too, enjoyed most of the dishes there. We ordered a 24-course Indian menu that featured portions of about two mouthfuls each. For years, Gaggan has been on the list of the world's 50 best restaurants – rising to the dizzying heights of fourth. What's more, the restaurant has also entered the Michelin Guide, gaining one star; that's just a way of saying it's a restaurant whose high standards have been confirmed by more than a few measurements. Of course, the prices are accordingly quite high. But long story short, if you're in Bangkok, you just have to try Gaggan's food. But while the food was superb, one can't say the same for the wine; take your bottle with you. Gaggan offers two servings at 6 and 9:30 each night; they also request that diners arrive promptly for their sittings, as there's no place for you to

wait if you arrive late. Heeding this advice, we arrived bang on time and sat down at our table. First, they asked if we had any allergies and then began the service – a 2.5-hour affair in which one of our 24 dishes came up about every 10 minutes, meaning we managed to enjoy the delightful menu without being overwhelmed. Now, in general, the Thais don't speak great English, but Gaggan's wait staff spoke fluent English, allowing us to understand just what we were eating. Gaggan is popular with well-heeled foreign visitors in Bangkok, so it's always a chore to find a table in the perennially full restaurant. And as you know, wherever you go in the world, the more stars a restaurant gains, the more its prices go up. In the end, a trip to the two-Michelin-star Gaggan might be an expensive affair, but if you want to try fusion Indian food, it's the place to do it.

## ***NAHM***

The Como Metropolitan Hotel is a veritable oasis in a bad part of town. I really loved this hotel, an architectural gem, to the extent that I resolved to stay there the next time I'm in Bangkok. And on this island of tranquility, there's also a great restaurant, Nahm, a true Thai affair also has a Michelin star. They can accommodate you if you tell them that you don't want your food to be too spicy. What's more, they also have very good service. We went to Nahm on the day we were flying out of Thailand, enjoying a delicious meal and excellent wine from 6:30 to 8 p.m. before heading to the airport. And as far as I'm concerned, we paid more than a reasonable bill for that wonderful food, service, and wine. If you're in Bangkok, make sure you go to Nahm and sample its food and atmosphere. And if you can, stay in the hotel upstairs.

## ***SÜHRING***

Sühring has grown from an exciting entrant into the global fine-dining conversation into one of the world's true culinary institutions, now holding three Michelin stars while continuing to appear among The World's 50 Best Restaurants. Set in a warmly decorated villa in Bangkok, the restaurant is the creation of identical German twins Thomas and Mathias Sühring, whose cuisine blends classical European foundations with delicate Thai influences and modern global technique. What once felt like a rising star has matured into a benchmark for precision, balance, and quiet elegance. The rhythm of the meal is one of Sühring's great strengths: no course shouted, yet each lingered. The option to order wine by the glass encouraged exploration, makes the evening feel conversational rather than ceremonial. Today, with the weight of three Michelin stars behind it, Sühring feels less like a discovery and more like a landmark. Yet what is most impressive is that the soul of the experience has not changed. It remains a place where technical mastery supports — rather than overshadows — pleasure, and where a meal unfolds like a well-told story, lingering gently in memory long after the table is cleared.

## ***SEEN***

Located on the roof of the Avani Hotel, Seen is a bar and restaurant that offers commanding views of Bangkok (hint: it's

great at sunset). At one time, Seen had entered the list of the world's top 100 restaurants, but it's since slipped out of the list. Nevertheless, it has an exquisite fusion menu featuring a mix of European and global cuisine. You can choose either a set or an à la carte menu – both of which are well-priced. The wine list also has international wines, and you can order them either by glass or bottle. Tourists especially love coming here, meaning it's often tough to find a place to sit. So if you are planning to come, make sure you make a reservation at least 10 days in advance. And because Thailand is a hot country, it's probably a better idea to opt for cooked fish rather than raw variety.

## ***DAMNOEN SADUAK***

Bangkok also has a river, the Chao Phraya, but it's now turned an ugly shade of gray. Around an hour from town, in a place that doesn't have much settlement, there's a floating market on the Chao Phraya called Damnoen Saduak. For a foreigner, it's an original place bursting with color. If you'd like, you can join a tour of the market, or you can rent a boat and tour about. Normally, a day trip to the market from Bangkok should take about three hours, but our trip took all day due to a sudden downpour, meaning that we spent 4 hours on the road trying to get to a place that we were planning to tour for just a couple of hours. The market starts with a collection of shacks along the shoreline. Here, you can find both unique food (like roasted grasshoppers and noodles) and unique gifts (like silk shawls and handmade wooden products). For the entire length of the river, you can shop from these shacks without having to leave the comfort of your boat. After a while, the river widens, and you come across hundreds of boats like your own, all of which are located close to the shoreline. These boats sell any number of

fast-food options, including potatoes, fruit, seafood, and the like. Naturally, you can also shop directly from these boats, again, without having to leave your boat – of course, however, it's not exactly a place that accepts credit cards. In the end, however, it's a highly commercialized touristic show. Cast an eye on those plying the waters around you, and you'll struggle to see a local face. Originally, it was a market designed for Thais, but it's become increasingly touristy over time; whereas there used to be 20 boats, they're now 200, most of which are for tourists. Nevertheless, it's a one-of-a-kind place. Given that I had traveled all that way, I bought papaya. They gave us a spoon, as well as half a papaya each, and we duly fulfilled the ritual of dumping the seeds into the river.

[Back to TOP](#)



## **BARCELONA**

Several years ago, world-famous chef Ferran Adria's restaurant El Bulli was a roaring success. Many chefs downed their tools to rush and learn about his understanding of molecular cuisine. Ferran, an intriguing personality and a gastronomic genius, has long since drawn the curtains on El Bulli, but those who have worked with him or adopted his ways now dominate the restaurant scene in Barcelona. Ferran's understanding of molecular cuisine, the école he pioneered, Salvador Dali's influence on him, and his attempts to adapt the great surrealist style of art to his cuisine. And then, of course, there is his masterpiece, El Bulli, which was named restaurant of the year several times. A week before El Bulli closed its doors for good, I dined there and wrote about my experience. At El Bulli, upward of 60-70 chefs worked with him, but just a few received a wage; that's because chefs from around the world interned, so to say, just so that they could learn from his unique style. Because Ferran didn't know a word of English, he only selected applicants who spoke Spanish in the beginning. The selection process continued like this for a while until people advised him to change his approach: "Spanish is your criteria in selecting chefs, but you're losing brilliant chefs because of it! We'll handle the translation – just put the Spanish-only prerequisite aside." That talk changed things, as Ferran subsequently began to accept English-speaking chefs at El Bulli. Just imagine:

Important chefs who were famous at home were applying to work alongside Ferran Adria as an assistant at El Bulli. Chefs who were accepted would leave everything behind and work as apprentices for six months. And because they were only apprentices, they might have just spent half a year peeling potatoes! Nevertheless, all the chefs did what-ever it took in exchange for a piece of Ferran's wisdom. This part of the story is quite familiar to anyone who is fond of tasting dishes from talented chefs in famous restaurants around the world. The really interesting story, however, began after Ferran closed El Bulli! In recent times, Ferran's co-workers and other chefs who have matured at his school have started opening restaurants in Barcelona that reflect his under-standing of cuisine. Some chefs have taken this step on their own, while some have formed teams to open the doors of new restaurants where they work their magic. The only appropriate way to describe what these young chefs have been doing is to say they've been "rocking" the city for the past three or four years, having had the chance to combine their passion for cooking with the privilege of being Ferran's student. Continuing the greater master's legacy, these talented chefs have been leading a new trend; some chefs cook exactly like Ferran, while others have interpreted the chef d'écôle with their own touch. However, they all have one thing in common: the ability to "surprise." Most of the dishes come in small portions, but Ferran will let you in on a little secret as to why it's more than fine to have portions that can be devoured in just two bites: "You'll admire the first bite, try the second and get bored by the third." With portions as small as this, menus can run as high as 20 or even 40 dishes. With the movement in Barcelona catching my attention, I visited some marvelous restaurants to get a better taste of their dishes. Below, you can read about my experiences at some restaurants, most of which are from Ferran's écôle; some of these belong to Ferran's students. If you ever find

yourself at one of these restaurants, please let me know what you think. Some of the places belonging to “Ferran’s Kids,” as we may call them, are organized like a bar, while others have traditional table settings. Anyway, as you sit at a stool in the former, you receive small portions of food from a man speaking broken English who tells you about the dish in front of you. Some other places, meanwhile, write the ingredients and the recipes on a piece of paper, re-counting the story of a two-bite dish at great length. But whatever they do, all the places always do their job with gusto.

## ***DISFRUTAR***

Disfrutar’s trajectory is one of the most remarkable in modern gastronomy. Founded by former El Bulli chefs Mateu Casañas, Oriol Castro, and Eduard Xatruch, the restaurant has evolved from a promising inheritor of the Adrià spirit into a global leader in its own right, earning three Michelin stars and ultimately rising to No. 1 on The World’s 50 Best Restaurants list. What began as the work of three young chefs with impeccable pedigree has become a defining voice of contemporary creative cuisine. At the time of our visits, Disfrutar was already attracting serious attention, offering tasting menus of 12, 18, and 25 courses. Today, those menus remain the framework for a dining experience that balances technical innovation with unmistakable joy. The staff — all with a strong command of English — guide guests through each dish with clarity and enthusiasm, explaining textures, techniques, and ideas without ever slipping into pretense. We generally chose to sit at the bar, a vantage point that turns dinner into theatre. From there, we could watch the choreography of the kitchen, plates assembled with tweezers and intuition in equal measure, and occasionally exchange a few words with the chefs as dishes landed. The atmosphere was lively but never chaotic —

interactive, curious, and deeply engaged. It is this spirit that distinguishes Disfrutar from many of its imitators: for all the avant-garde technique, there is warmth, humor, and a genuine desire to delight. The reservations are difficult; they are essential. Lunch can be marginally easier to secure, but whichever service you attend, you should plan to spend several hours. Time, here, is part of the ingredient list. The meal unfolds in waves — playful, cerebral, and beautiful — each course building on the last without repetition.

Disfrutar embodies the Ferran Adrià school of imagination, but it has long since stepped out of its mentor's shadow. It stands today not as a tribute, but as a destination — a restaurant that helped redefine what modern fine dining could be, and then kept going until it reached the very top of the world.

## ***DOS PALILLOS***

Dos Palillos is a fusion of Japanese, Vietnamese, Chinese, Thai and Spanish cuisine that seats just 25 people. Albert Raurich, who worked with Ferran Adria, designed the restaurant with a three-cornered sushi bar, while the fourth corner opens up to the kitchen, where you can observe the preparation of your dish, every step of the way. Meals are prepared at both the bar and the kitchen, although it is mandatory to sit at the bar to eat. À la carte and other menu choices are available at the restaurant. So, what does a fusion of Asian and Spanish cuisine produce? For one, dishes with raw meat and fish are cooked rare. Dos Palillos also has an extensive wine list of Spanish and international offerings that are all priced reasonably.

## ***LASARTE***

Probably Barcelona's most expensive restaurant, Lasarte, has

little connection to Ferran Adria apart from the fact that they use some of his styles in their dishes. The owner of the place is Martin Berasategui, a chef who also owns a restaurant with three Michelin stars in San Sebastian. As you would expect, Lasarte is influenced by Basque cuisine, and the dishes are as delicious as they are at Berasategui's restaurant in San Sebastian. The famous chef is not currently at Lasarte – which has two Michelin stars – but he is most certainly the mastermind behind the food. The dishes include fruits and flowers, and even a bit of butter. Berasategui's restaurant in San Sebastian even has toothbrushes and toothpaste in the bathrooms – a detail which I really liked and a detail that has been replicated by Lasarte. The place, mind you, is expensive, as is the wide-ranging wine menu. Still, if you want to reward yourself or let go for a day, Lasarte is the place to dine. Though the restaurant is huge, Lasarte only has room for 20 people to sit – the result of a decision to provide a comfortable place for diners to chat and create a place with less interaction between the tables.

Ultimately, its snow-white, unwrinkled napkins and ironed and clean tablecloths stand out – not to mention the waiters who are always eager to help whenever you lift your head up from your dish... In short, everything is perfect...

## ***HOJA SANTA***

There are two chefs in the kitchen of Hoja Santa: Albert Adrià and Paco Méndez. Hoja Santa is not a frequently visited place in town, meaning it's easier to find a place during lunchtime. Nevertheless, the restaurant is pretty crowded at noon on Friday and Saturday. Hoja Santa blends Mexican and Spanish cuisine in a fusion of the former with Ferran Adria's style, although that doesn't mean that the dishes are out-of-this-world spicy, as you might expect from Mexican cuisine. Still, beans

are in abundant two sessions at Spanish supply. Again, the portions are small, while there are also little “surprises.” You can dine either at the bar or at the table.

## ***CINC SENTITS***

Number seven on the list is Cinc Sentits. It might not be from the Ferran Adria School, but it operates according to a similar style. Owned by Jordi and Amelia Artal, “Cinc Sentits” means “five senses” – so it’s no surprise that they use senses like smelling and hearing in most of their dishes. Perhaps readers will remember: I mentioned a similar presentation while writing about my experiences at the Fat Duck. At the latter, they create an atmosphere according to what you order. For example, as you’re eating seafood, the establishment’s iPod plays wave sounds as a spray dispenses the freshening smell of the sea. It all means it’s not just your taste but other senses as well that get addressed. The difference at Cinc Sentits, though, is that they create this atmosphere for almost every dish.

## ***MOMENTS***

Moments, located in the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, is a Ferran Adria restaurant. The luxurious restaurant is owned by Ferran’s brother. Moments is a chic, centrally located, and tremendously expensive restaurant. They offer menus of four or five portions. Unsurprisingly, given that it is located in the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, Moments has turned itself into a hotel restaurant, in contrast to the other restaurant owned by Ferran’s brother, Tickets, which is more like a tapas bar. Like some of the others on this list, it’s easier to score a place for lunch at Moments.

## ***ABAC***

Every dish at Abac packs a surprise. I think chef Jordi Cruz, however, went a bit overboard on the surprise element, as the desire to give customers the unexpected got in the way of taste. Because of that, it's not at the top of my personal list. Abac, where all the meals are a theater in itself, is located in a hotel a little outside of the city. Its wine menu, meanwhile, is very broad at a reasonable cost. I might not be that impressed by the dishes, but the theater of it all is worth a look.

## ***PASSADIS DEL PEP***

I think you'll have difficulties finding this restaurant which is hidden behind a narrow "passadis". Please go there with a good taxi driver who knows the place; ask the driver before. This is a very classical real old time non-fusion Catalan restaurant with white cotton table clothes and waiters as old as the restaurant. Great values in the wine list, maybe because they were bought 20 years ago. Green peppers fried in olive oil, baby squids, langoustine, all kinds and sizes of shrimps, and other kinds of seafood starters are amazing. Order a bottle of Dom Perignon and go for all of them, skipping the grilled fresh fish if you are full, and finish with a Catalan desert with the last glasses of your Champagne. Buen apetito!

## ***TAPAS 24***

Tapas 24 is a tapas bar owned by another chef from the Ferran Adria School, Carles Abellan. Unlike a lot of places on the list,

it opens at 9 a.m. and closes at midnight, meaning you can even have breakfast at Tapas 24 (something I certainly enjoy). With a different menu every hour, Tapas 24 allows you to taste crazy dishes that you wouldn't normally find at a traditional tapas bar, like Russian black caviar with fresh avocado or black Spanish truffle eggs. All these interesting combinations are prepared with the tapas spirit. The biggest plus is that there are places to sit outdoors – where it's a good idea to eat outdoors under the shadow of an umbrella protecting you from the hot Barcelona sun... If you want to eat indoors, you have to go down a couple of stairs to the bar.

## ***VINITUS***

Vinitus is one of the top three tapas places in Barcelona. It's open from 11:30 to 11:30, with always a line in front of it. If you are one or two people only, you may skip the line if you accept to eat at the food bar; and the bar is even better to see all the food either ready or being prepared. I can survive very happily lunching and dining in these three places only in Barcelona and at very down-to-earth costs. Please leave some appetite for a tapas-sized desert or two.

## ***CIUDAD CONTAL***

This place dates back at least 50 years and is very classical in food style. Sit at the bar and watch the tapas prepared. Try the warm dishes more than the cold-ready ones. If you come at peak hours, you don't have a chance. If you are hungry at midnight, they are open until 1:30 am.

[Back to TOP](#)



## **BERLIN**

I was lucky enough to explore the city a couple of times with a Berliner and got a chance to sit down for a meal or two in some very interesting restaurants. And thanks to my Berliner guide, I got a peek at the places frequented by the German capital's residents. There are plenty of places with great-tasting food, making the city really lucky in this regard. Berlin might be a big city, but it's eminently walkable and bikeable – something to keep in mind when you need to burn off some calories after eating just a bit too much. Below is a list of some of my favorite restaurants in the city, organized, as always, in alphabetical order.

### ***ADNAN***

Managed by a Berlin-based Turk, Adnan is one of the best restaurants in the city. Although the restaurant is not in a good location, you'll be glad you went because Adnan's Italian fare is delectable. The place serves almost all the Italian specialties, including pizza, macaroni, salad, meat, and fish. Adnan is full at lunch, and the bar is even crowded at dinner. There's a bonus as well: You can find both white and black truffles when they're in season.

## ***BORCHARDT***

Borchardt is a restaurant that mostly specializes in fish but also serves meat. A favorite of Berlin's high society, Borchardt is a place in which tables are at a premium. As a solution, they hit upon the rule of requiring all diners to leave within two hours of arrival. Borchardt does not take great consideration of its décor – it looks like the walls have not been painted for years, and it seems like the furnishings haven't been renovated in a coon's age – but it doesn't seem to be a problem for them. On the contrary, Berliners consider this a specialty: You can run a restaurant for 20 or 30 years without doing any renovations – they just reckon that a place's value increases as it gets older.

## ***FISCHERS FRITZ***

A fish restaurant with two Michelin stars located inside the Regent Hotel, Fischers Fritz serves dinner (fish and vegetables only) in a comfortable and high-ceilinged space in the company of nice piano music. All the serving staff, as well as the piano player, are women – something that makes for a better serving, in my opinion. You needn't worry about finding a place for either lunch or dinner, however, because the restaurant is fairly expensive, in contrast to most eateries in Berlin. Fischers Fritz will especially lighten your wallet, but “quality is remembered long after the price is forgotten.”

## ***THE GRAND***

I have been to Berlin many times before, but I only discovered the Grand, thanks to my Berliner guide. The Grand is a meat-heavy restaurant, but it also serves fish and salads. The restaurant serves Japanese Kobe steak, as well as other carnivores' favorites from around the world. A favorite stomping ground of high society, the Grand is another restaurant with its own rules. The Grand is largely off the tourist trail, but that doesn't mean it's not packed with Berliners – all of which means it's a good idea to make reservations ahead of time.

## ***KADEWE***

Kaufhaus des Westens, better known as KaDeWe, is a famous department store in Berlin and a wonderful place to have a quick and delectable meal. The upper floors of this multistoried mall are reserved for shopping and food, where you can dine at small restaurants with almost any kind of food from anywhere in the world. The very top floor, meanwhile, is home to a big restaurant with an open buffet and mesmerizing views of the city. It's probably my second favorite place in all of Berlin. I generally opt for oysters, prawns, caviar, and lobster – all prepared right in front of you – with the company of a glass of Dom Perignon or two. After all of that, you'll probably need a good walk to lose those calories.

[Back to TOP](#)



## **BODRUM**

Bodrum is the Turkish version of St Tropez of France, full of many local small restaurants and international restaurants like Nobu, Zuma, Hakkasan, and Papermoon, and hotels like Mandarin Oriental, Kempinski operational, and Four Seasons to come soon. After the pandemic in the summer of 2022, it was visited a lot by affluent international guests from all countries of Europe and Russia too. There are many restaurants popping up in summer from Istanbul, and other European capitals, and some good local restaurants open all year around. However, my mention will be *Zai* in central Bodrum.

### ***ZAI***

*Zai* is not a restaurant only. It is a big plot of olive trees with two restaurants, a Cafe, a pastry and bread shop, a whiskey bar, a gin bar, a beer bar, an art gallery, an open-air theater used for jazz and other concerts, movies, talks and panel discussions, a library and an open-air museum of many sculptures and other artwork by prominent artists. It is open every day from nine in the morning to midnight, except Mondays. Overall, it is an oasis of a well-designed architectural beauty in crowded Bodrum, with always nice and low-volume background music mixing well with the sounds of the birds around. You may take your

book to read it there during the day with coffee or some wine and have some pastry or a pizza when you feel like it. Or, you may come for a proper dinner to continue with a jazz concert in the summer months. Zai evolves each year to get better.

[Back to TOP](#)



## **BOLOGNA**

I've been to the city famous for its rain a number of times, but each time, I was on my way somewhere else. One trip, I finally got the chance to give Bologna my full, undivided attention. Lo and behold, it has some great restaurants that you'd do well to look up if you're ever in the neighborhood. Until now, I've always visited Bologna while transferring to Florence because there are no direct flights to the famous Tuscan city. Bologna is just 90 minutes by car from Florence, while its train station, located very close to the local airport, offers good connections to Modena and Venice. Indeed, I had traveled through Bologna to Modena to dine at Osteria Francescana, one of the world's 50 best restaurants. The brief sojourn in Bologna left an impression, and I always thought that I might return to the city someday. Now I have finally visited the city – and I must say I was pleased with my trip. For these kinds of short trips, however, I would recommend steering clear of one strong meal after another. If I eat a nice, big meal for lunch, then I generally opt for a light dinner – it's just something that's good for health. More than that, I believe that eating big meals in quick succession takes away from the pleasure you get out of a meal. But while you're making your dinner plans, keep in mind that most restaurants are closed on Sunday evenings! They call Bologna “The Red City” because most of the city's buildings are made of red brick. One of the things that left the biggest

impression on me was the fact that almost all of the city's buildings have arcades. With so much rain, these arcades which were mandated by the city authorities long ago on account of the continual deluge from the sky – help you walk for miles without getting a single drop on your head, meaning your sightseeing or shopping can proceed uninterrupted. The arcades are four or five meters wide, providing a great canopy for the pedestrian zone below. Around 85 percent of the buildings in central Bologna have these arcades, although the newer ones are not as nice as the old ones. The arcaded pedestrian ways run for about 12 kilometers, six kilometers of which are closed to vehicle traffic. That means you'll only get wet when you cross the road. For now, it's on to the restaurants!

## ***I PORTICI***

The hotel I'm recommending in Bologna is I Portici, whose restaurant I also appreciate. I Portici, which has around 40 rooms, is located in an area that is open to vehicular traffic – being able to park right in front of the hotel's door naturally saves you from the trouble of dragging your suitcase down a long road. The former owner of the building loved music so much that he built a concert salon for 300-400 people that is topped off with a high ceiling. Today, the old concert salon is used as a restaurant, but that doesn't mean that music has stopped, as there is a piano on the stage where musicians perform every day. I like rooms with high ceilings, so the 8-meter-high ceilings – complete with beautiful frescoes – in the restaurant were positively dazzling. And one last note: The restaurant at I Portici has a Michelin star.

## ***BITONE ENOTECA***

Ristorante Bitone Enoteca is owned by Cesare, who is like a youngster in his 70s. He's still cooking and has put together an amazing menu. Everything is perfect, from the wine list to the truffle menu. When I went to dine, they had a truffle the size of a fist; that's not to say that they taste any different than small truffles, although ones as big as this are difficult to find. Restaurants usually opt to serve small truffles since they are more economical, but chef Cesare spares no expense, choosing instead to use big truffles, which, when trimmed, add to the beauty and visual pleasure of the meal. After all, the presentation of a dish is as important as its taste. Interestingly enough, though, the size of the truffles didn't inflate the bill at all. We went there as two people and ordered pasta with four kinds of truffle, hoping to try each and everyone that had the precious fungus. Chef Cesare, however, had another recipe in mind that we just couldn't keep ourselves from ordering. That's why, in the end, we shared five different pasta dishes with truffles.

## ***AL CAMBIO***

Al Cambio is located 15 minutes from the city center. Boasting a Michelin star, Al Cambio is a restaurant with a gastronomic menu that you just have to try. The menu consists of seven or eight courses, all of which are wonderful. The list features both meat and fish; I chose the latter and liked it a lot. Meanwhile, I brought my own wine to the restaurant, thinking I wouldn't be able to find good wine – not only did they allow me to do this, but also they didn't even add any corkage charges. Furthermore, they had a very good wine list.

[Back to TOP](#)



## **BORDEAUX**

I hadn't been to Bordeaux in a very long time. On my first visit, the city seemed tired, lifeless, and far from its former grandeur. But in the years since, a major urban restoration has brought new energy. Many run-down areas have been revived, and I now believe Bordeaux is worth visiting not only for its châteaux but also for the city itself. If I had written this 20 years ago, I would have described Bordeaux as “lifeless, dusty and dirty, a once-grand city long forgotten.” I probably would've said, “Come here just for the châteaux.” But today's Bordeaux, thanks to former French Prime Minister Alain Juppé's two-decade-long commitment as mayor, has been beautifully restored and renewed. Juppé led efforts that turned Bordeaux into one of the world's largest UNESCO heritage zones. In twenty years, he cleaned the blackened facades of medieval churches, baroque buildings, and Art Nouveau houses, while breathing new life into cafés, luxury nightlife, and even the old port districts, which have become vibrant destinations. A creative energy now radiates from new restaurants and contemporary art venues. The famous grapes still ripen just outside the city in iconic vineyards. There's much to see in the city itself: the Esplanade des Quinconces, one of Europe's largest squares, and the Quartier des Chartrons with its cobbled streets and elegant architecture. The Basilica of Saint-Michel is another landmark—its bell tower, the tallest in southern France, was started in the 14th century and completed nearly 200

years later. To explore the city, start by hopping on the sleek, modern tram system. A great first stop is the Bassins à Flot, a former industrial port area now cleaned up and filled with innovative galleries. Seafood lovers will be in heaven—Bordeaux offers some of the best oysters, scallops, and shrimp, always fresh and well-prepared.

## ***LE GABRIEL***

Le Gabriel sits by the riverside and has a touch of magic in the kitchen, thanks to chef François Adamski, who holds both a Bocuse d'Or and Meilleur Ouvrier de France title, and a Michelin star. This elegant all-white restaurant earned its first Michelin star within its first year—I'm sure a second one is on the way. The menu is a refined take on French cuisine with Mediterranean and Basque influences. If you choose the tasting menu, you'll be asked to indicate whether you prefer fish or meat when booking. Sourcing is key at Le Gabriel: the fish and oysters come from the nearby Atlantic coast, and the lamb and veal from pasture-raised animals in surrounding villages. The lamb is served in three different styles—grilled, roasted, and sautéed. Desserts are equally elaborate, and the wine list is extensive, featuring bottles from nearby châteaux with very reasonable markups.

## ***MAISON NOUVELLE***

Maison Nouvelle is located in a beautiful stone building in the Chartrons market square. This is the latest restaurant from celebrity chef Philippe Etchebest, known from French television. Guests are welcomed as if into a friend's home—the restaurant's name translates to “New Home.” Etchebest is devoted to

sourcing the finest local ingredients and creating exceptional seasonal tasting menus. You'll find original dishes like mushroom-stuffed ravioli and sautéed foie gras, along with some exquisite vegetarian options. Welcome to your new home.

## ***LA TABLE DE PAVIE***

Located in Saint-Émilion, La Table de Pavie is a two-Michelin-starred restaurant run by chef Yannick Alléno. Housed in a former monastery that once gave shelter to pilgrims, it combines regional flair with Alléno's signature sauces and finely balanced creations. Don't miss the magnificent "pigeon soufflé." Naturally, the meal is paired with outstanding Saint-Émilion wines for an unforgettable experience.

## ***THE CHÂTEAUX***

There are thousands of châteaux in Bordeaux. While the word may conjure up visions of grand historic castles, here it refers to vineyard estates with their own wine-making techniques. The most famous classification of Bordeaux wines dates back to 1855, and it remains highly relevant today. This system was created for the 1855 Exposition Universelle in Paris at the request of Napoleon III. The Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce asked brokers to rank the best wines, and within two weeks they produced a list based almost entirely on price. The result was 58 châteaux divided into five quality tiers. At the top was Château Lafite. Nearly all the classified estates were in the Médoc region, except for Château Haut-Brion in Pessac-Léognan. Despite the assumption that there's only been one change since then, in reality there have been a few: Château Cantemerle was added in

1856, Château Pichon was split into two, and Château Léoville into three. The biggest change was Château Mouton Rothschild's promotion from second to first growth in 1973, thanks to the relentless campaigning of Baron Philippe de Rothschild. Today, the classification includes 5 first-growths, 14 second, 14 third, 10 fourth, and 18 fifth-growth estates. Unlike Saint-Émilion, the classification remains fixed even if vineyard plots are sold or expanded. There's also an unofficial group called the "super seconds," estates widely considered to produce wines as good as the first-growths. These include:

- Châteaux Pichon Baron
- Pichon Comtesse
- Lynch-Bages
- Léoville Las Cases
- Léoville Barton
- Ducru-Beaucaillou
- Cos d'Estournel
- Montrose
- Palmer
- Pontet-Canet
- La Mission Haut-Brion

The 1855 system also included 21 Sauternes and Barsac sweet white wine producers—9 first growths and 11 second growths. Château d'Yquem stands alone as the sole "Premier Cru Supérieur." Out of the 6,000+ estates within an hour's drive of the city, here are six to highlight:

## ***CHÂTEAU LE PIN***

A tiny estate in Pomerol producing one of the world's most expensive red wines. Sold in 1979 by Madame Laubie to Belgian Jacques Thienpont, Le Pin was named after a lone pine tree and originally made wine in a farmhouse basement. Only 600–700 cases are produced annually from 100% Merlot grapes. No wine was made in 2003 due to a heatwave.

## ***VIEUX CHÂTEAU CERTAN***

Also in Pomerol and owned by the Thienpont family since 1924. It spans 14 hectares, planted with 60% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Franc, and 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, producing around 5,000 cases a year.

## ***CHÂTEAU SMITH HAUT LAFITTE***

Dating back to 1365 and now owned by the Cathiard family, this 67-hectare estate produces red and white wines. Varietals include Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillon, and Sauvignon Gris. They also produce second wines such as Les Hauts de Smith and Le Petit Haut Lafite.

## ***CHÂTEAU LYNCH-BAGES***

A fifth-growth in Pauillac, owned by the Cazes family. With 220 acres of vines, the blend is mostly Cabernet Sauvignon with Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Petit Verdot. Produces 25,000 cases

of its main wine annually, as well as two second wines: Echo and Pauillac de Lynch-Bages.

## ***CHÂTEAU PAVIE***

Located in Saint-Émilion and owned by Gérard Perse since 1998, who transformed the estate with major renovations and the help of wine consultant Michel Rolland. The vineyard was upgraded to “Premier Grand Cru Classé A” in 2012, joining the elite few at the top of the Saint-Émilion classification.

## ***CHÂTEAU MARQUIS DE TERME***

A fourth-growth Margaux estate with a tasting room and a restaurant open on Saturdays. Its history dates back to the 18th century and it was part of the original Rauzan estate before being divided.

### ***A TIP: HIRE A GUIDE***

Bordeaux is full of surprises. If you're unfamiliar with the city, hiring a local guide—even for just two hours—can be a great way to make sure you don't miss anything. I had a fantastic experience with Bruno Beurrier, a native Bordeaux guide who also offers wine tours in Saint-Émilion.

Contact: +33 6 70 37 74 66

[Back to TOP](#)



## CAPE TOWN

Cape Town is ideal as a nice, warm get away during the North Hemisphere's cold winter months. In South Africa, the time between January and March are the best days of summer. For a summer resort to be nice for me, the moisture level should be near zero and Cape Town, with its warm, dry, and breezy weather, fulfills my expectations. Since Cape Town has a rather warm climate, its white wines are more successful than others. There are more than a hundred wineries that can be visited within an hour or two away from Cape Town. Firstly, I would like to talk about the ones I liked among the wineries I saw. There are many places in the Stellenbosh area that serve as both hotels and restaurants. It's possible to tour the entire region in two days. If you want to stay for a few nights, very nice hotels are also available.

### ***KEN FORRESTER***

Ken Forrester is located in an area around 45 minutes from Cape Town. This place has been awarded by WWF for being one of the most organic and environmentally friendly wineries in the world. Ken Forrester himself is always there. He even greets customers from time to time. Everyone working is very knowledgeable about wine and grapes. The history of the place

dates way back. In the 1700s, it used to be a winery called Zandberg. It changed hands in the 1800s and was bought by the Forrester family in 1993. A winemaker himself, Ken Forrester, changed the grape profile in the area and planted new grape seeds. He eventually concentrated on Chenin Blanc, a white wine grape that is very suitable to South Africa and rarely found anywhere else. Although Forrester planted many other grapes in its vineyards, most of the product consists of Chenin Blanc. I've tried many wines in South Africa, and red wines aren't very notable, but white wines are really good. Ken Forrester is considered as one of the best brands in the world when it comes to Chenin Blanc. Like Babylonstoren, pesticides and fertilizers aren't used here; everything's organic. However, they add sulfur as a preserver to some of their wines. The higher the quality and hygiene of the wine, the less sulfur has to be put in. But if 100 thousand bottles of wine are produced in a factory, it's not very possible to check the hygiene of each bottle. As a result, they usually add sulfur quite generously to prevent it from spoiling. This is also the reason behind the terrible headaches some of the wines cause. If several thousand bottles of wine are produced, though, it's more possible to pay attention to hygiene, and therefore less sulfur can be added. In Ken Forrester, the amount of sulfur used is very reasonable. Other than the wine, they have some really nice cheese they purchase from a cheese farm. It's possible to feel full with cheese plates served during wine testing. One of the interesting facts about this place is that they make a type of wine that is not very common in other parts of the world. Wines are usually made from grapes of the same year. However, Ken Forrester mixes grapes from three different years while making its Chenin Blanc. That's why there is no year written on the bottles. There's also no sulfur in these wines. This method is also used in the making of some champagnes. Drink these wines

as soon as you can and take good care of them to prevent them from deteriorating. The champagnes Ken Forrester makes with this method live 10 years.

## ***JORDAN ESTATE***

Jordan Estate, the winery with the largest variety of wines in the region, was established 300 years ago. It was bought by its current owners, Gary and Kathy Jordan, in 1982. The couple worked in Napa Valley, California, for two years and transferred their know-how to the Jordan Estate. It's a beautiful place with the buildings around, its winery, cafe, wine shop, and tasting menu. They brought systems suitable for the Bourgogne method in production. They're using a different technique for red wines, and they have industrialized this technique. There's a small hotel, two restaurants, and a bakery within Jordan Estate. Kathy Jordan established a foundation in 2012 and started to provide funds and opportunities to women who want to take part in wine production around the world. This ambition is reflected in their business as there are many women working in the estate. Approximately 700 thousand bottles are produced here annually, half of which is white and the other half are red. They use every kind of grape that grows on the soil here. Jordan Estate is very pleasurable to visit and drink good wine. You can see the wines from here in many places around the world, including Turkey.

## ***DEMOGEZON***

Even if the wines aren't incredibly good, Demogezon is a really nice winery with beautiful architecture. Their production per year reaches several thousand bottles. The owner's residence is located on the southern slope of a hill about 400 meters above the vineyards. The winery is located at the bottom of the hill. The interesting thing is that there are speakers playing classical music all over that huge vineyard. The same sound system is also in the winery and the tasting area. The owner of Demogezon created this unusual system thinking that some classical music pieces have a good effect on the grapes and increase their quality. He even has a playlist that visitors can buy as a CD. Service quality is good, and the wine-tasting ritual is great. The view and music are incredible, and the wine is okay. But overall, Demogezon is a great experience. It is very enjoyable to walk among the vineyards while listening to classical music. I'm not sure if music has any positive impact on the grapes, but it certainly had an impact on me.

## ***GLENELLY***

I think this is the most important place to go among all the wineries. Glenelly is a well-established place that was founded in 1682. It was bought in 2003 by May-Eliane de Lencquesaing, owner of the very famous Pauillac winery Château Pichon Longueville Comtesse de Lalande. She was 78 when she left her castle, vineyard, and winery in France and moved to Cape Town for Glenelly. De Lencquesaing also brought her winemaker along with her to apply the French winemaking techniques here. Her main focus has been Glenelly for the past 20 years. Wine is pumped somewhere as it is produced. This procedure creates a

mechanical effect that has a negative impact on the wine. For the last 50 years, vertical systems have been installed across the world, which allows the gravitational force to do all the work rather than relying on horizontal systems. In these vertical systems, wine automatically flows to the lower floor when the process is completed. And when the process on the lower floor is done, it moves one floor more with the help of gravity. May-Elaine de Lencquesaing is the one who brought this technique to South Africa from France. There are very few wineries in South Africa that make very good red wine, and Glenelly is one of them. Reds make up the majority of Glenelly's wine production. I recommend visiting Glenelly to taste their red wines. They serve French dishes as well as local cuisine in their restaurant. When I learned that May-Elaine de Lencquesaing has the largest glass collection in Europe and that she brought some of the pieces to South Africa and, on top of it all, opened a glass museum in Glenelly, I wanted to visit this museum on site too. The museum isn't a large space; it's the size of a restaurant. An experienced lady is the curator of the museum, and she leads the tour that lasts 1.5 hours. Showcasing glass objects from various periods and cultures, the oldest of which is dated before the common era, the museum is truly beautiful. It's impossible to leave the museum unimpressed as the curator lady so elaborately tells the history of glass.

## ***GRAFF***

Graff is a very famous winery and hotel owned by a famous diamond merchant from the Netherlands. Wines are in line with South African standards, but the restaurant and hotel are something else. It's a boutique hotel with 10 rooms - but don't be fooled by the number and think it's a small space; each room

is a 200 m<sup>2</sup> suite, and each suite has its own 200 m<sup>2</sup> garden. It gets better; each garden includes an exclusive swimming pool for the people staying in the room. These gardens are surrounded by tall trees and create privacy. Five of the rooms overlook a cliff with a view of vineyards. When the sliding doors of the rooms open, the spacious room becomes one with the garden and takes the visitor's breath away. Even so, you can jump into your exclusive pool by taking two steps from your bed. Everything here is designed thoughtfully with the guests' comfort and pleasure in mind. A little while after you settle into your room, an attendant with a huge tray knocks on your door. He brings treats like a fruit platter and champagne in an ice bucket and asks when he can come back with more treats. The next time he visits, he brings white wine to the ice bucket along with canapes. Graff also has an incredible restaurant, but you need to make reservations well in advance. It serves international cuisine with an a la carte menu. It's a beautiful place with a view of vineyards stretching for kilometers. The wine list consists of wines that they produce themselves. The most attractive part of Grass is the luxurious personal service and atmosphere.

## ***BABYLONSTOREN***

Babylonstoren is a farm of about 100 acres, almost all of which are farmed. They grow vegetables and grapes, all organically. No pesticides and fertilizers are used. Thus, there are no preservers like sulfur in their wines. They organically raise animals too. The only thing that they don't raise is fish; they buy it. In a restaurant for 20-30 people, where it is very difficult to find a place, they serve meals consisting of products grown on the farm. The last time I visited Cape Town, I made reservations a month prior and had the chance to eat at

Babylonstoren. However, this time around, I couldn't go as they were full. They only sell the organic wine they make on the farm. Babylonstoren is an interesting place with all its organic produce. Wines are light, not spectacular, but good. Organic wine is different. Some get better as it ages, while some deteriorate. You never know. So if you ever get your hands on organic wine, try to consume it early. The place also has a 20-room hotel made up of wooden houses in a garden, resembling a campground. These studio-type houses are 100 m<sup>2</sup>, but are designed in an extremely simple way. The "All organic" principle is also adopted in the pool as well which I find very interesting. No preservatives are used in the water, it's all covered with seaweed, but people still enjoy swimming in it. Food is incredible at Babylonstoren, so overall it offers a very good experience to people visiting the region. Wineries that are built in the middle of vineyards, like Babylonstoren are the best because grapes need to be processed quickly without being damaged. To avoid any incidents, the distance between the grape collected and the winery should be very short. Otherwise, the grape loses its potency. That's where "wine making begins from the soil" comes from.

## ***HARBOUR HOUSE***

Harbour House looks very much like many fish restaurants by the sea. There are several huge blackboards on which they have written the meals of the day and their prices. Two waiters carry one of the blackboards to your table and help you order. But the best part is, the waiter will definitely tell you which of the fish is fresh, which is frozen. Fish is bought fresh every day in Harbour House, but the fish that weren't served that day are frozen to save for the following days. This information is not

written on the blackboard, but they definitely do tell you. They even have their own name for the frozen fish, “freshly frozen.” Fish are delicious as they’re caught in the open sea. Crayfish, insects, lobster, and shrimp are in abundance and thus on the menu. They serve plenty of salad, which makes it an ideal restaurant for me. You can try everything at Harbour House, particularly grilled fish. You can also find a wine menu with South African wines. Harbour House is located in a very popular area called Waterfront, but they also have a branch in Kalk Bay which you can visit if you have time. Kalk Bay is 45 minutes away from the city and is located in an area right after you pass the Cape of Good Hope.

## ***NOBU***

You can find a Nobu in many parts of the globe, including Istanbul. I went to many of them, but as I’ve probably pointed out before, my favorite ones are the ones in Cape Town and Malibu. They have a very satisfactory wine menu that includes famous wines from South Africa. The food, seating arrangement, and atmosphere are exquisite. I really like eating morina fish here. Named Black Cod on the menu, this dish is cooked on a leaf and served with a slightly sweet sauce. Hand rolls with crispy seaweed, warm rice, and cold fish are delicious. You can also dine outdoors. The hotel bar that’s right next to the restaurant turns into a very popular meeting spot at night. I recommend grabbing some appetizers at the hotel bar and moving to Nobu for dinner. If you don’t want to leave the wonderful bar, you can also try convincing Nobu to serve you at the bar.

## ***FYN***

FYN is a new restaurant opened by three partners. One of the partners is a chef, one is a sommelier, and the other is the restaurant manager. The menu mostly consists of French cuisine but they've created a fusion with South African dishes. The architecture is impressive with its high ceilings and comfortable sofas. They have different menus for pescatarians, vegetarians, and vegans. These 10-15 course menus change according to day and season. You can also do wine tasting in addition to the menu. However, my advice would be to choose a wine from the wine menu instead of going for the tasting experience because tasting menus offered in such restaurants usually consist of below-average wines. On the flip side, FYN has an extensive wine menu with very expensive wines, mostly from South African wineries.

## ***CHEFS WAREHOUSE***

One of the newest restaurants in Cape Town is Chefs Warehouse. There are 5 restaurants under the same name with different concepts across the city. Liam Tomlin, the owner of the Chefs Warehouses, opened his first restaurant in Sydney in 1997 which became very successful. So successful that it wins one of the biggest restaurant awards there. He moved to South Africa in 2003 and opened the first Chefs Warehouse in 2010. In time, he turns the restaurant into the kind of place that serves tapas-style. Meanwhile, he raises his own chefs and brings each one to manage the new places he's opening. There's only one rule: although all the chefs are trained in the same way, they're completely free to do whatever they want with the Chefs Warehouse they're appointed at. Ingredients are bought by the

HQ, so the quality remains across all Chefs Warehouse branches. These 5 restaurants carry the same name, but essentially, they're all very different from one another. Each chef offers a style to their customers. The maximum capacity for each restaurant is 30 people. I went to one of the most important Chefs Warehouses, Maison, and left very satisfied. Maison is located in the winery region and is a 45-minute drive from the city. It's a rustic place with wooden tables. The top of the dining area is covered, but the walls are open, overlooking a wide garden. A huge, black wild boar stands in the garden. It's almost like a mascot. The boar hangs out in the garden, eats, and even joins you at your table. I'll admit that it's startling at first, but you get used to it. Here, too, you can select your dish from the menu prepared according to your eating practice. Menus are prepared daily, considering the ingredients. I like this because it's very attractive to know that each time I visit, I'll eat something different.

## ***CATHERINAS***

I'd like to recommend one more restaurant, especially for golf enthusiasts: Catherina's at Steenberg. Serving a menu focused on fish, the restaurant is located on a golf course 20 minutes from town. If you like playing golf and care about what you eat, it's definitely worth a try.

## ***LAST WORD***

There are two places to visit touristically in Cape Town. One is Boulder Beach with African penguins, and the other is Cape of Good Hope, the southernmost tip of the African continent.

Both are around 45 minutes away from Cape Town. African penguins, which are about 50 cm in height, are a species that live only in the southern waters of Africa. You can see thousands of them in this bay. They go out to the sea, disappear for 3-5 months and then come back. The male and female of these monogamous penguins take turns protecting the egg. I would definitely recommend it as it is a very fun and informative trip. Cape of Good Hope faces the Atlantic on one side and the Indian Ocean on the other. The Atlantic side is cold and wavy. It's not preferred for swimming but attracts surfers. The Indian Ocean side is warmer, thus more suitable for swimming, but there's a danger of sharks. People swim here in the summer months when some protective measures are taken. This place is a must-see spot. You can visit both of these places by staying at Cape Town, but you can also stay at a small hotel in Long Beach called Last Word. It only has 6 rooms, accompanied by a beautiful restaurant. This hotel restaurant, which can accommodate a maximum of 15 people, is really nice. The restaurant serves dishes from the local cuisine and mainly consists of fresh seafood bought from the nearby fishing villages. It's very close to both of the tourist spots I mentioned. Rooms have a terrific view of the ocean. You can walk along the beach that stretches for kilometers, inhale the smell of seaweed and ride a bike. Better yet, watching the sunset and the moonrise is quite enjoyable at Last Word.

[Back to TOP](#)



## CAPRI

Hotels in Positano and Capri have private speed boats that can take you directly to Capri. And if you're in the mood to indulge yourself to some luxury, board the boat; that way, you can dive into the waters of Capri as soon as you arrive while the hotel bothers with your luggage to your room. Beyond the Hotel San Pietro, however, I wouldn't recommend any other restaurants in Positano. Even if you fail to find accommodation at the San Pietro, enjoying a meal is a must, especially the risotto or macaroni with seafood, grilled fish, and a light dessert. Soon, though, it's time to move on again. As you head for Capri, plan to stay at least four nights.

### *L'OLIVO & IL RICCIO*

Hotel Capri Palace has a two-star restaurant called L'Olivo, which is a great choice for breakfasts and dinners. They serve phenomenal wine, including some top Italians. The best thing about the hotel is that it is located at the highest point of the island, giving it panoramic views. Luckily, however, it takes just five minutes to get to the Capri Palace's beach club, Il Riccio ("sea urchin"), with transport provided by the hotel. As a hotel guest, a sunbed and umbrella will automatically be reserved for your use – which is a good thing, given that many people come

from outside the hotel for a swim and the fare on offer. Il Riccio's food is sea-heavy – in fact, it's the only thing on the menu other than freshly made pastas. By all means, eat lunch here, but I suggest you avoid filling up on food too much during the day, lest you lose your appetite for dinner at L'Olivo. Il Riccio has a chamber of sin – a room full of delicious chocolates and desserts. The chamber of sin also serves fruit, but when you see the desserts, you can't possibly think about anything else. Entry costs a little, but it's up to you as to how to exit: The price of admission gives you a chance to dig into anything and everything, so you should bear in mind the potential for weight gain if you're under the impression that you have to eat everything just because you paid for it.

## ***AURORA***

While L'Olivo and Il Riccio are perfect for dinner, you should set aside at least one evening for an evening at Aurora in town, where they have the lightest pizza I have ever sampled, a dish known as “water pizza.” Sit outside and engage in a bit of people-watching at this lively place, which is run by a mother and her daughter. The daughter's name is Mia while the mother, naturally, is Mamma, giving us – you guessed it – “Mamma Mia!” They have a nice selection of Ornellaias and Solaias to match your food.

[Back to TOP](#)



## ÇEŞME/URLA/ALAÇATI

These three small towns are very near to one another. They are all about an hour away from İzmir on the Turkish west coast. There are three places I need to mention in this area, one from each small town.

### *HORASAN*

Horasan is a seafood restaurant in Çeşme run by a couple. The husband cooks, and his better half serves. Their place is big enough for about fifty people at a time. They are full everyday lunch and dinner in the high season of summer months. They only use the catch of the day as they were fish mongers before. They cook all the seafood as it should be cooked, and they only use local seafood and not from other parts of Turkey. They have ceviche dishes and rich seafood pasta dishes too. Come January, they close the shop for a month and travel to Europe to eat, observe and learn from other seafood places around Europe. They add new dishes each year from what they learn, to their already sophisticated menu. You may see Basque, Catalan, or Provençal inspirations in their dishes. They have a good Turkish wine and rakı menu. I wish I would live there and eat there more often.

## ***YENGEÇ***

Yengeç is a seafood restaurant by the sea in Urla, run by a father and his daughter. They both serve and also have a say in all the innovative cold and warm seafood “meze” dishes prepared by the able kitchen brigade. They have a selection of fresh fish and other seafood procured daily from the Urla fishermen to be grilled or cooked otherwise. It is a small place open all day; you may have better chances of getting a table during the off- afternoon hours during the summer months.

## ***İNCİRLİ EV***

For me, İncirli Ev is a perfect breakfast restaurant in Alaçatı, with eight beautiful rooms. Run by a couple, Sabahat and Osman, and managed by Murat, it is an oasis in the hectic historical town of Alaçatı. You need to order their “menemen” as your main course for your breakfast; you also need to taste as many as possible of the more than one hundred kinds of jams Osman prepares all the year around, using local fruits, herbs and vegetables only and just a little sugar. They go well with their local butter and also the local yogurt. Local cheese kinds and fresh fruit, including figs in august from the fig tree in the central courtyard, are served too. Stay here for two days with great breakfast feasts and two dinners at Horasan and Yengeç. I’m sure you’ll want to stay two more days to repeat the joy.

[Back to TOP](#)



## COPENHAGEN

### *NOMA*

This time, I happened to find myself in a realm far away, Copenhagen. The city might be cold and northern, but I discovered this amazing place and its extraordinary dishes. Let me share a bit about my time in the Danish capital. And if you go, will you like Noma as much as I did? So, what's so special about this restaurant that sits a mere 40 at lunch and 40 for dinner? How did this Copenhagen restaurant, which has been named the top restaurant three times in a row, come out on top in a city where the sun, farming, and food diversity are below average? What's more, the restaurant is located in an average neighborhood without any special view. It might be near the seaside, but a lot of things in Copenhagen are, so that's not a stunning feat. Noma's chef, Rene Redzepi, was born and raised in Copenhagen but is the child of a Macedonian family. He mainly cooks fish and vegetables, but he is also a stickler for using fresh food and really cares about using seasonal harvest. Accordingly, Rene offers a constantly changing and also narrow menu. Rene gets most of his ingredients from Denmark, only procuring some of his fish from further afield, like Greenland,

Iceland, and the islands of South America. Noma still has just two Michelin stars, but it perhaps deserves a third. In 2019 Noma came second in the 50 best list. I'm sure next year they will get the top spot once again in its new location and will be included in "the best of the best" list forever. Located in a stone building, Noma boasts high ceilings and a fair degree of comfort. I had long wished to visit Noma but constantly failed to find a chance to book. But thanks again to the intervention of a friend, I was able to make a reservation for a Saturday night. And let me tell you, I couldn't be happier. If you accompany your meal with wine, you might have to part with 500 euros for the whole affair. It might seem pricy, but considering how popular the restaurant is, quality and fame come at a price. Rene left school at the age of 15 and started studying culinary arts at a simple institution. After graduating, he began working in restaurants as a busboy. At the age of 20, he found work as a chef at a nice restaurant in France. After that, he made his way further south, heading to El Bulli, where he stayed for a couple of years and learned all one can about the ins and outs of the legendary Catalan restaurant. Looking for something new, he headed stateside for a new experience, succeeding in finding a job at Napa Valley's The French Laundry, a world-famous establishment owned by Thomas Keller, who also owns Per Se. After working at The French Laundry for a while, he decided to return home to Denmark, where he converted an empty warehouse into a restaurant. In time, Rene started to show off his skills, earning himself a global reputation. Noma has a gastronomical menu that includes nine main courses cooked by different cooks. In the Noma system, chef groups of three or four people cook and serve the same meal – generally easily prepared meals – for a whole day. Rene mostly uses oil olive for meals. He also uses plenty of vegetables and herbs for an intensive flavor and smell. He grows these herbs himself in the restaurant's closed section, as it's hard

to find all the necessary vegetables come winter, although it might not be that onerous a task in which only 80 people are dining each day. Rene also uses these herbs for the sauce and garniture. Another important feature at Noma is their use of a technique to dry food by draining it. They mix these dry foods with others or, alternatively, make them crispy before serving. In this way, they turn porcini mushrooms, sea scallops, and carrots into something resembling chips. The Scandinavians often smoke their food, such as salmon, to preserve it. Rene, naturally, uses this method as well, and it is possible to find all manners of smoked meat, fish, and vegetables on the menu. Noma has an extraordinary wine menu. I'm generally familiar with about half the names on the wine menu whenever I go to a place because of my special interest in wine. At Noma, however, I was at a loss: I didn't know almost 90 percent of the wines on the restaurant's menu. As I learned later, Noma's sommelier provides small amounts of wine that it sources from small brands, bringing wines that are produced in Denmark, Germany and Holland in limited runs. I let the sommelier select the wines for me, as I wanted to taste different wines instead of drinking a whole bottle. The sommelier started me off with a white Chardonnay from Denmark. Now, a Chardonnay is a kind of grape that generally prefers hot climates, but I enjoyed this natural and non-barreled wine. When I asked for a second glass, however, they told me that they had run out of the white Chardonnay, offering me a white Sauvignon Blanc from Copenhagen instead. After that, they offered me a glass of Italian wine made in 2004. I loved it – in fact, I drank a couple of glasses of it. I liked the wine so much that I noted the name and later contacted the producer. As luck would have it, though, they had already sold all of their product from 2004; the owner told me only Noma has some! Depending on the workload, there are about 40-50 people who work at the restaurant, 30 of whom are

cooks. They're all young people in casual outfits – you won't see any waiter in a black tie. Copenhagen is a city in which you rarely see the color green, but Noma compensates for the lack of green with its dishes that are grown in the kitchen. Meanwhile, they make use of herbs by draining them to color up the dishes. Ultimately, Rene cooks delicious meals with fresh fish and spices in a city where vegetables and other ingredients are not abundant. I and the other people that have come to eat Rene's creations over the past years are of the same opinion: Noma is a remarkable restaurant.

[Back to TOP](#)



## FLORENCE

Without question, Florence is the most important city in Tuscany, but more than that, it is a city of unparalleled significance in both Italy and Europe. The spiritual home of the renaissance, it also has plenty of restaurants,

### *IL PALAGIO*

My favorite hotel in Florence is the Four Seasons. Around 150 years ago, the building was the mansion of a rich Florentine, but has since been renovated and converted into a hotel, frescoes and all. In fact, they did such a good job that Four Seasons now considers the hotel to be the best of its brand in Europe. That it most certainly is. We do have a couple of Four Seasons in Turkey, and they're pretty good, but the Four Seasons in Florence is something else. The hotel boasts a 15th-century garden that stretches for over an acre – something that is welcome in a crowded city like Florence. And if you stay in one of the luxury rooms, you can't help but feel like an Italian aristocrat. My recommendation to you is to stay in the hotel's "Gallery Suit," which is bedecked in frescoes that cover the walls and ceiling. The room also has a view of the Giardino Gherardesca, an expanse of green that is sure to impress you in the same way. There's even an enormous tree in the center

of the garden in which 30 people could easily stand under and be hidden from view. The hotel also has a fantastic restaurant called Il Palagio, which is headed by extremely talented chefs. The restaurant, which has two separate sections for both summer and winter, serves delicious dishes at every meal, including brunch. And although the wine cellar is spectacular, it won't take a bite out of your wallet. Instead, you pay only about two times the bulk price – a far cry from the three or four times the bulk price that you usually pay at a fancy place like this. And better than that, you need not be a hotel guest to dine at Il Palagio. Still, given the garden, restaurant, wine cellar and the spa, you wouldn't go wrong in staying here for a night. The Four Seasons has another modern building in its garden that is separate from the historical main building. If you're looking for a less expensive stay, this is the place.

## ***ENOTECA PINCHIORRI***

Enoteca Pinchiorri is not only the best restaurant in Florence, it's also one of the best in Italy. A three-star affair, the Pinchiorri is an extremely elegant place and, if I may say, a little bit on the snobby side. A simple, three-course meal will run you 250 euros and that's without any wine. If you do want to imbibe, that will set you back a whopping 500 euros per person. Leaving this aside, the place, wine, food and service are remarkable.

## ***CIBREO***

Another suggestion in Florence is Cibreo, a family business where the prices are more down to earth. There are, in fact, five Cibreos now in Florence, all of which belong to the same family, and all within walking distance of each other and serving in different styles. One is more in the style of a café, with wooden tables and no reservations required. The other – the one I will recommend (while acknowledging that the first Cibreo is a good place for a spot of lunch if you're planning to stay in Florence for a while) – requires reservations and boasts a well-functioning service. You'll soon realize that Cibreo serves up a different taste when you see that there's no pasta served – a seemingly massive oversight, given that you're in Italy! (However, there is a Cibreo Tortelli e Ravioli just next door.) More than that, there is also no Florentine Steak, another popular dish in the city. But you will be extremely satisfied and will want to come back again, and you will be curious to try the other four!

## ***ANTINORI***

Leave aside the restaurants for now and come with me to a couple of wine houses. One belongs to the Antinori family, the biggest wine producer in Italy. Today, the third generation of the family produces wine – although the members of this generation are estranged from each other to the point that they have become rivals. Regardless, the family members who preserved the name Antinori have wineries in Italy and overseas. In the environs of Florence, the closest is in the Badiaregion, a place about 20 minutes away in which Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz grapes are cultivated. Antinori has a small winery here in which you can taste their product, eat some food and find almost every range

of wine for purchase. After a bit of breakfast is a great time to arrange a visit to the vineyards, watch the winemakers at work and have a wee taste. The restaurant is also the perfect place to take a break and enjoy a light lunch.

## ***CASTELLO DI MONTAUTO***

My second suggestion is Castello di Montauto, a 30-minute drive away in the San Gimignano region. What's at the end of the road is wonderful, but the journey itself is worth an after-breakfast trip because the roads and views are mesmerizing. Castello di Montauto is a small and modern winery with a wonderful garden that makes an excellent place for a light, noon-day meal. If you have two mornings in Florence, definitely make an effort to take in these two wineries.

[Back to TOP](#)



## HAVANA

It's no secret that I generally opt to visit cities with excellent restaurants, but this time, I plumped for something different: Cuba. I spent days immersed in all the dancing and music that Cuba has to offer, joining the locals who somehow manage to live happily despite everything they lack. Just don't ask about the food. I've been to many places in the world, some even more than once, but I had always put off going to Cuba. "Why?" you may ask. First, it's a faraway place that's really hard to reach with a direct flight. Second, I've always heard that the island's food is nothing to write home about. With beautiful restaurants and good food, my main reason to travel; why would I go to Cuba when there are all these other countries and cities with wonderful restaurants? But my resistance to my friends' entreaties finally cracked, and I decided to give it a go. The friends in question – one Italian, one Turkish – have visited Cuba every autumn for the past decade, typically staying there for a few weeks each time. They presented me with such a good itinerary that it was impossible to say "no" this time around. For one, they rented an apartment in the tallest privately owned building in Havana, hired a guide that spoke English, and provided a vehicle with a driver. But before anything else, the most beautiful thing in Cuba is life itself. The people may not be rich, but they sure are happy. You hear wonderful music everywhere. Everybody's either dancing or making music.

Havana also boasts a pedestrianized street – one that runs for about two miles. The street is lined with numerous cafés and bars, all of which emit all manners of music – yet thankfully not to the degree that it drowns out the music of their neighbors. Whether it’s a double bass accompanied by a saxophone or a piano and a guitar, everyone makes lovely music. The historical buildings and natural charm of the city create a whole other atmosphere. It baffles you to see such happy people live such poverty-stricken lives. For instance, I visited a cigar factory where hundreds of people work, yet earn a mere 35 dollars a month. Nevertheless, some factory workers were singing while others kept the beat. But if I had 10 meals during my visit there, I couldn’t finish my dish at seven of them; such were the dishes’ unappealing nature. If I were to visit Cuba again, it would probably only be for the music, and the dancing – that is, for fun. However, it might be a great way to lose a few pounds again without pushing myself too hard.

## ***FLORIDITA***

One must-see place at the center of Cuba’s nightlife is the famous bar El Floridita. During his years in Havana, Ernest Hemingway would come here and write short stories while sipping a daiquiri. And in homage to the great writer, a bronze statue bearing his likeness now graces what was once his regular seat. El Floridita’s walls are covered with Hemingway’s photographs, as well as those of Fidel Castro. The bar serves a variety of aperitifs, including at least 20 kinds of daiquiri. Their specialty, however, is the appropriately named Floridita Daiquiri, which has very little sugar in it. During our week in Cuba, El Floridita was a place we made sure to visit every day. Naturally, it also has great music, with the orchestra changing several times a day.

## ***WHERE TO STAY?***

We stayed at a penthouse in a 25-story building called Atlantic Tower, which overlooks the ocean. The price was affordable enough for us, although it was obviously expensive by Cuban standards. In fact, the place (which also had a pool and a terrace) was so large that it could have comfortably hosted four couples. And when locals heard where we were staying, they all raised an eyebrow. To put it another way, we became the cool kids on the block, thanks to the apartment. But if you're not interested in the penthouse, I can recommend four other hotels for accommodation.

### ***KEMPINSKI***

Kempinski is the newest and best hotel in central Havana, boasting a rooftop swimming pool and restaurant overlooking the city. It is just opposite Floridita too. It will cost you at least 509 dollars per night. But its top class.

### ***NACIONAL***

Hotel Nacional was a very nice hospital despite its somewhat disorderly appearance. The Nacional, which bears more than a passing resemblance to Istanbul's Pera Palas, is situated among the trees in the middle of Havana. Even if you don't stay there, come by at night to catch one of the live performances.

## ***SARATOGA***

Another nice hotel is Saratoga. Located in the city center, the place is convenient in that it's within the aforementioned pedestrianized area, meaning you can experience all the vibrancy and color that the street has to offer. I'm not sure about the food at the foreign-owned hotel, but I did like the rooms I had the chance to see.

## ***SANTA ISABEL***

Santa Isabel is another hotel overlooking a central square. It has a terrace that gets the sun from a beautiful angle, especially after noon, making it the perfect spot to have a sandwich and a few drinks by the sea. The Santa Isabel also has high ceilings and well-maintained rooms. The prices are also reasonable.

## ***DRINKS***

Beer, daiquiris, piña coladas, and, of course, rum are all in abundance in Cuba. The national Cuban drink, however, is rum. Just don't get your hopes up for the wine, though in terms of Havana's understanding of entertainment, the fun starts every day at midday. And continues right on until midnight or later. But even a walk of a few hours during the day may turn into a great visual feast as you encounter acrobats, music bands dressed in carnival costumes, and many others. And then, of course, there are the cigar shops, which have become synonymous with the country. In some shops, you can watch how the cigars are made and buy some if you'd like. I don't smoke myself, but a

gift of some of Cuba's finest did go well with friends back home who are into cigars. I had a great time drinking local beer since I couldn't find any decent wine. While there, we even threw a party at our apartment. My friend said he knew a lot of people there and that we'd have great fun if we threw a party. We ended up being 14 people, including a dancing couple who sang and played percussion, famous singer Giselle, our driver, as well as his father, who had a lovely voice and played the guitar. The only non-Cubans at the party were my friend and me. Everyone sang songs accompanied by the guitar and percussion for about two hours!

## ***TIPS***

If you don't mind parting with too much cash, you can always get about by one of Havana's old classic taxis for about 30 dollars a trip. It takes about 20 minutes to get from one place to another. If you're just traveling about town once or twice – and especially if you want to try out the old classic cars – these taxis are fine, although they're not a good idea if you're journeying beyond Havana, since they break down easily. Alternatively, another option is to hire a chauffeur for about 90 dollars a day. Typically, such drivers operate five- or six-year-old Japanese, Chinese or Korean cars. Ultimately, it's much cheaper and advantageous to hire cars with chauffeurs, particularly ones with a smattering of English; it only takes about 50 words to take care of everything here. You should also carry your credit card and passport at all times, but be advised that they don't accept American Express (probably because of the name). And though they do accept U.S. dollars, paying by credit card is more advantageous due to the exchange rate, and exchanging euros get a better rate than dollars.

[Back to TOP](#)



## **HONG KONG**

I was many years younger the first time I visited Hong Kong. The view is absolutely stunning when you gaze at the island from the mainland, but it's not the same when you do vice versa. Three decades on, I still think the same things about Hong Kong, a place with a vibrant social life. And, in actuality, the passing years have only added a few buildings to the silhouette of the city. The last time I was here, I stayed at a hotel on the mainland, enjoying a room with a view of the island. With a desire to experience something different, I stayed in Hong Kong proper this time.

### ***LUNG KING HEEN***

On our first night on the island, we dined at Lung King Heen – a restaurant with three Michelin stars. The restaurant was a beautiful, à la carte Chinese restaurant with a small testing menu. The wine menu was also wide, but it wasn't so expensive. The food and service were extraordinary.

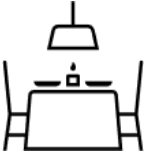
## ***TANG COURT***

I can easily say that Hong Kong is a place where you can find every wine imaginable – and at very reasonable prices. Almost all restaurants sell wines of high quality at a relatively low price thanks to tax breaks and high demand. So look no further than the island for a chance to sample the very best of French or American wine. The specifically Chinese restaurant we went to the next day, Tang Court, was located in the Langham Hotel. Though a restaurant with two Michelin stars, Tang Court has absolutely no windows and, thus, no view. Nevertheless, Tang Court was a pretty good choice for dinner thanks to its fair prices and Michelin standards. And one top tip: the Tang Court's Peking duck is fantastic.

## ***OZONE BAR***

The Ozone Bar is located on the 118th floor of the tallest hotel in the world, the 490-meter Ritz Carlton. Unsurprisingly, the Ozone Bar has a fairly breathtaking view of the island. There are no fancy Michelin stars here, but the place is famous for its kitchen, view, and fine drinks. Four or five years have passed since the opening of the bar, but it's stealing customers from the two-Michelin-star restaurant located in the Ritz Carlton. If you prefer a night view, then reserve your place for dinner, but if you're more of a morning-view person, hit the place for lunch. If you like fusion cuisine, then Hong Kong's Zuma or Roca are the places to dine. The service at both is excellent. Zuma, which is in the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, has an astonishing city view, and it's a good alternative for lovers of fusion Japanese Peruvian cuisine.

[Back to TOP](#)



## ISTANBUL

With its unique Bosphorus view, historic texture, and postcard-like skyline, Istanbul is not only a favorite city for us but also a beloved destination for international visitors. In such a large metropolis, there are of course countless great restaurants to choose from. Whether you prefer meat or fish, Turkish or international cuisine, upscale or casual dining, the choice is yours. One of the most beautiful metropolises in the world, Istanbul also captures our hearts with its many excellent restaurants. Many of our talented chefs who have gained worldwide recognition have opened their own places, delighting us food lovers while enriching our culinary scene. Long-established restaurants continue serving their loyal clientele, while new ones keep opening and introducing new styles to our food culture. As our chefs gain experience abroad, their perspectives on cuisine evolve, which benefits the entire gastronomic landscape. Over the past few years, the Michelin Guide's inclusion of Turkey has been a significant boost for both restaurants and diners. The international recognition of the local venues has served as a great motivation. In this section, I will share what I believe are the best restaurants in Istanbul, listed in alphabetical order. Some are refined, some are relaxed. With so many good choices, making a selection is no easy task. Long-time readers may recognize some familiar names — a testament to their consistent quality and dedication.

## ***ALAF***

Located on the top floor of a building behind Kuruçeşme Park, Alaf is a beautiful restaurant with a terrace and Bosphorus views, mainly serving meat and offal dishes. Opened by chef Deniz Temel, known from the former Alancha restaurant in Alaçatı, Alaf features recipes that span as far as Central Asia. Its style could be described as Turkish fusion cuisine. The menu changes with the seasons and includes dishes from Alancha days as well as Temel's new creations. Prices are reasonable, and it's a great place to take international guests. There's an impressive wine list focused on carefully selected Turkish wines. The menu features seasonal fish dishes, hummus, various pides, and a uniquely prepared kokoreç. The baklava — reminiscent of Alancha's legendary version — is phenomenal. Open only for dinner, Alaf's open kitchen and understated decor make it a must-visit. Some dishes are even served and explained by the chef himself — a nice touch. I only wish it were open for lunch on weekends too.

## ***BALIKÇI ABDULLAH***

Located near Beykoz, Balıkçı Abdullah is a seafood restaurant I greatly admire for its perfectly cooked fish, excellent mezes, and generous starters. Owner Abdullah is a fisherman by trade, so he knows quality seafood and how to prepare it properly. He's always present, welcoming guests, and while he's rarely in the kitchen now, the team he trained continues to execute dishes flawlessly. Many seafood restaurants in Turkey overcook fish, but Abdullah excels at cooking it just right — moist and tender, almost like in top-tier Italian or French restaurants. While you wait, they bring what I believe is Istanbul's best tarama (fish roe dip) and freshly pan-fried corn bread — a combination I always ask for seconds of. They also prepare their own lakerda (pickled bonito), which is sliced fresh upon order — as it should be. You won't find pre-prepared plates sitting around here. The only

drawback is that it's not directly on the waterfront — a minor issue that might just be psychological. The restaurant seats 150, is somewhat pricey, but absolutely worth it. It's open seven days a week, but closed at lunchtime. I recommend reserving in

advance. Be sure to try the grilled shrimp, seasonal grilled fish, tarama/cornbread, and of course the lakerda and other mezes.

## ***BALIKÇI KAHRAMAN***

Located in Rumeli Kavağı, Balıkçı Kahraman is a restaurant famous for its grilled turbot. With a loyal clientele, it has been in operation for nearly 30 years. While I do find the prices high, it's worth noting that turbot is an expensive fish everywhere. I must admit, I find it a bit off-putting that they serve turbot year-round; in my opinion, it's best enjoyed from December to March when it's at its fattiest and most flavorful. The location also feels a bit remote to me. Despite these small drawbacks, Balıkçı Kahraman excels in everything it serves. Even if it's only once a year, I enjoy coming here for a leisurely lunch during the ideal winter season. Their tandır-style turbot, house-made lakerda, and cornbread with anchovies are fantastic. I should also mention that in 2025, Balıkçı Kahraman earned recognition in the Michelin Guide, confirming its excellence.

## ***BARDOT***

Opened in 2024, inside Zorlu Center, Bardot is a very stylish restaurant operated by Beymen. As with many luxury brands abroad, Beymen seems to enjoy having its own dining establishments. Bardot is open daily from 10:00 AM to midnight, and its menu is curated by one of my favorite chefs, Cihan Çetinkaya. He was once the founding chef of Mikla alongside

Mehmet Gürs, and now consults for various restaurant concepts, also helping to train chefs and staff for such high-end venues. Bardot quickly became one of the top restaurants in Istanbul. With high ceilings, white tablecloths, and comfortable seating, it

meets all my personal criteria for a refined dining experience. The interior was designed by a renowned American architecture firm. The menu is Mediterranean-focused but also includes selections from various international cuisines. They serve black truffles in season, and white truffles when the time comes. Given its location, it's worth noting that it gets quite crowded during lunchtime.

## ***CASA LAVANDA***

Located near Şile, Casa Lavanda is the restaurant of a boutique hotel of the same name. It's an intimate place with seating for just 40 guests. The hotel itself has only 15 rooms, and the owner, Emre Şen, and his family have poured their hearts into this project. In 2025, Casa Lavanda earned a Michelin Star and also a Michelin Green Star — the latter awarded to establishments with a strong commitment to sustainability. By using local ingredients, maintaining a low carbon footprint, and demonstrating environmental awareness, the restaurant earned its green accolade. About 80% of the vegetables used are grown by the property itself, embodying a true farm-to-table concept. The menu features beautifully executed dishes such as Italian-style agnolotti, Black Sea seabass, and artichoke soufflé. They also boast a well-stocked wine cellar. Originally trained in architecture, Emre Şen found his passion in cooking and even spent a year working alongside Chef Maurilio Garola at the Michelin-starred La Ciau del Tornavento in Alba, Piemonte — the truffle capital of the world. Thanks to this experience, the restaurant also features seasonal truffle dishes. If you're planning just a day trip, it's ideal for a long, leisurely lunch. But if you

have more time, I recommend spending a night or two to truly savor the menu. They also serve an excellent weekend brunch on Saturdays and Sundays.

## ***DIVAN LOKANTASI***

Operating since the opening of Divan Hotel, Divan Lokantasi is known for its classic Turkish cuisine. Around 15 years ago, chef Ciancarlo Gottardo took over as executive chef for Divan Group and introduced several positive changes. restaurant was moved from the hotel's second floor to the ground level, and chef Volkan Arık now leads the kitchen. The menu, while still rooted in Turkish traditions, now includes Italian-influenced dishes and international selections. Open Monday through Friday for both lunch and dinner, and Saturday evenings only, Divan Lokantasi features white tablecloths, comfortable seating, and professional service. I believe it doesn't receive the recognition it deserves and especially recommend it for business lunches or dinners.

## ***FAUNA***

Located in Ataşehir, Fauna is a tiny 22-seat restaurant open for lunch only, every day except Sunday and Monday. Chefs İbrahim Tuna and Emrah Coşkun helm the kitchen, serving primarily Italian cuisine. They stop accepting guests after 2:00 PM. The menu includes pastas, salads, soups, and meat dishes, all made with organic, seasonal ingredients. Fauna has earned a spot on the Michelin Guide's Bib Gourmand list — a recognition for high-quality, good-value restaurants. The pasta here, made to Italian standards, is especially worth trying. Be aware that portions are large, so keep that in mind when ordering. The only drawback is that reservations are very difficult to secure. Still, I

consider it one of the best Italian restaurants in Istanbul.

## ***KIYI***

One of the oldest restaurants in this list, K1y1 has been run by Yorgi Sabuncu for nearly 60 years. Some of the flavors I tasted there long ago still linger in my memory — their pickles, “atom” beans, leaf liver, crispy calamari, house-made lakerda, and perfectly grilled fish make it an outstanding seafood restaurant. I first visited K1y1 in 1968 as a high school student when it was already considered pricey. I would try to go once or twice a year. Later, I even celebrated my university graduation there with friends. So it holds a special place in my heart. Yorgi, the founder and owner, is still at the door welcoming customers — a rarity after so many decades. Back then, like many seaside venues, K1y1 used to place tables on the seafront. In nice weather, tables would be laid out on the walkway. Waiters would cross the road with trays to serve guests. That practice is now long gone, but K1y1 never closed, never changed — except for one thing: it now spans two floors. Their pickles, house-made lakerda, perfectly grilled fish, “atom” beans, liver, and calamari still taste exactly as they did decades ago — nothing has changed.

## ***MIKLA***

Located on the rooftop of the Marmara Pera Hotel in Tepebaşı, Mikla is an elegant Michelin-starred restaurant and one of my personal favorites. Though its internationally renowned chef Mehmet Gürs sold the restaurant in 2024, the kitchen and service teams have remained, so the quality is still intact. There

are many reasons I love Mikla. First, the venue and its location are spectacular. The staff — from waiters to bartenders — are all very knowledgeable, and unlike most restaurants, there's little turnover. Adem Usta, Mehmet Gürs' right-hand man, prefers

using local ingredients and designs dishes based on what is available in Istanbul and Turkey. The food is Turkish cuisine with a modern fusion twist, and the fish used is always from Istanbul or nearby waters. The view is breathtaking, especially on full moon nights in summer. If you're lucky enough to get one of the few tables on the lower terrace, you can enjoy both the moonlight and the glowing city lights. The rooftop bar is also a lovely place to have a drink before dinner. Mikla is one of the few restaurants in Istanbul offering an extensive wine list — both local and international — and the pricing is fair. Since about 80% of the guests are international, you'll feel like you're dining abroad. Sadly, Mikla does not serve lunch.

## ***MÜRVER***

Located in Karaköy, Mürver is one of my favorite restaurants, thanks to its stunning view of the historic peninsula and the Golden Horn. Chef Mehmet Gürs has been an advisor here since its inception. The menu focuses on meat dishes and Turkish mezes, and the meats are cooked in a wood-fired oven or over open flame. With an open kitchen concept, you can watch the cooking process. Along with main dishes, they serve delicious small plates to share. There's no fixed fish on the menu — they serve whatever is fresh that day, often cooked in the wood oven and presented whole at the table. Their wine list is impressive by Turkish standards, offering a good balance of affordable and premium selections. Like Mikla, they emphasize fresh, local, non-frozen ingredients. Mehmet Gürs' culinary philosophy shines through here, albeit in a slightly different form.

## ***NAZENDE***

Once a businessperson, Uluç Sakarya decided to pursue his passion for food by opening Nazende with a few friends, taking on the chef role himself. The restaurant quickly became successful and earned a place in the Michelin Guide's Bib Gourmand category, which recognizes establishments offering refined cuisine at reasonable prices. Nazende isn't super cheap, but offers great value. It resembles a tradesman-style eatery but has white tablecloths and an elevated experience. If you enjoy offal, meat, or seafood, you'll love it here. For example, fava on olive oil artichoke may be a common dish, but Uluç Bey's version is on another level. Their lobster rice is unique. The tempura is exceptionally well-prepared — sometimes even Japanese restaurants struggle with getting it this right. You'll also find all kinds of offal dishes. The menu changes daily, based on what's available. Signature dishes include stuffed goat tandır with pilaf. Whatever you order, you're likely to leave happy. Nazende is open every evening except Mondays, but it's very hard to get a table. If you're lucky, you might score a reservation a month in advance. They also serve döner kebab on Sundays at lunchtime.

## ***NEOLOKAL***

Neolokal is located inside the Salt Galata building on Bankalar Street, formerly the Ottoman Bank's General Directorate and now home to a library and museum. Previously occupied by a modern Italian restaurant called Ca d'Oro, the space retained its decor but underwent a complete transformation in terms of ownership, team, and concept. Now focusing on modern Turkish cuisine, Neolokal is open for lunch and dinner every day except Monday. You can order small sharing plates and enjoy them with rakı, if you like. The restaurant has a style

similar to Alancha, reinterpreting traditional Turkish dishes. Chef Maksut Aşkar, also the owner, brings a distinctive philosophy to cuisine. Neolokal has been awarded both a Michelin star and a Green Star, the latter recognizing sustainability efforts — a rare and prestigious combination.

## **ŞANS**

Şans is one of Istanbul's best-known spots for business lunches. Located in an area heavily frequented by professionals, it can be hard to find a table at lunchtime, though evenings are quieter. In summer, the garden seating opens up as well. Run for many years by Niso Adato, a personal friend, I often hold business meals here. The cuisine is a blend of Turkish and Mediterranean. When longtime chef Ali Bey retired, Melda Hanım, a chef with international experience, took over briefly, followed by Rudolf Van Nunen, who preserved the classics and systematized the recipes. He then added his own dishes, modernizing the menu. Now, the menu includes around 10 new dishes alongside the old classics. Rudolf introduced new salads and pastas, but left the desserts largely unchanged. I particularly enjoy the olive oil-based appetizers — healthy and flavorful. Most popular dishes include grilled sea bass, braised lamb neck, beef ribs, küşneme (lamb fillet cut), and the signature Şans köfte. Their chocolate soufflé with clotted cream ice cream is, in my opinion, the best in Istanbul. The service team, led by Sait Bey, has been together for years. If you can find a table, I highly recommend it for business lunches.

## ***TURK***

TURK by Fatih Tutak, located in Bomonti, is a modern Turkish fusion restaurant created by the globally known chef who also ran a famous venue in Bangkok. With its 2 Michelin stars, it absolutely lives up to expectations. The space is stylish and spacious, featuring high ceilings, comfortable seating, and an open kitchen. While the acoustics could be improved, the overall experience is excellent. Some of my favorites include their fresh-baked bread, prawns, grouper, vegetable-stuffed mantı, and creative desserts. Their wine list, composed of thoughtfully selected Turkish wines, is impressive. With only 62 seats, it's quite exclusive. The restaurant is open Monday through Saturday evenings, and has recently started offering Saturday lunch service. Reservations are highly recommended.

[Back to TOP](#)



## **KYOTO**

East Asia is a different world in every way. Ever astonishing, the region perpetually has a surprise in store for the visitor. But among the region's many features, I'm mostly interested in their spectacular cuisine.

### ***CHIHANA***

Osaka and Kyoto are connected by a high-speed train that zips along at a brisk 240 km/h, meaning that a journey that once took an hour now takes a mere 15 minutes. We stayed in the city for two days, dining in two different restaurants during our sojourn. Our first reservation was for a restaurant called Chihana. It's a tiny place that sits just seven people – three at the sushi bar and four more at the tables. A gentleman and a lady own the place: The lady serves while the gentleman prepares the sushi. For drinks, there is champagne or red or white wine; you can choose one of them. We opted for the champagne, deeming it the least risky option. At Chihana, all the dishes are prepared in front of you. The chef, who is clearly a professional, cut and cleaned a shrimp that was more than jumbo size right before our eyes. The chef also prepared more than 20 kinds of sushi, sashimi, and rolls. He has a style all his own – a style that is impressive enough for Japanese standards that it fetched three

Michelin stars. In a nutshell, the meal was delicious but very costly!

## ***KITCHO ARASHIYAMA***

The day after Chihana, we went to Kitcho Arashiyama, a famous restaurant where customers had to make a reservation six months in advance. Because I had previously tried but failed to make a reservation for the place, it wasn't even on our Kyoto itinerary. But as luck would have it, Kitcho Arashiyama informed us while we were in Kyoto that we could go there for lunch – an opportunity we were certainly not going to turn down. The restaurant is a full 50-minute drive from the city, but that didn't stop us; along the way, we even got a chance to see some of the prefecture. Like Chihana, Kitcho Arashiyama is run by a husband-wife team in which the man cooks and the woman serves. Kitcho Arashiyama is an intriguing establishment with six rooms, each of which has just a single table. In other words, the whole place has just six tables, none of which see each other. In keeping with Japanese culture, we sat on the floor, deciding what to eat with the help of the server. The food was out of this world, while the whole event had an aura of yesteryear. At the end of our meal, the owner of the restaurant served us dessert.

[Back to TOP](#)



## LONDON

London is one of the world's foremost financial centers and is among the top destinations for business travelers. Although it is famous for its misty and rainy weather, with its museums, parks, and magnificent buildings, it is an extremely attractive city. While British cuisine is not considered a global treasure, the city's abundance of restaurants offers you the very best of any cuisine you might desire. London, with a population exceeding 10 million, is one of the world's largest cities. With a history of nearly two thousand years, the city pulses with art, commerce, education, finance, and entertainment. Despite its rainy and gloomy climate, the famous River Thames, its parks, museums, and historic architecture make London an extraordinary place. Because it is one of the world's greatest financial hubs, business inevitably brings one here. As for the cuisine, as you know, England doesn't really have a remarkable culinary tradition. Its cooking is known for simple, filling dishes prepared with basic techniques like boiling, frying, or baking. Meals are mostly centered around meat and fish. Over the centuries, British food has absorbed influences from other cultures but has managed to preserve its own character. Although it cannot compare to world-renowned cuisines such as French, Italian, or Turkish, dishes like fish & chips, the English breakfast, and shepherd's pie are famous and beloved. Since London is a cosmopolitan city that welcomes visitors from around the globe, it is home to a vast number of excellent restaurants. In fact, 347 of them are listed in the Michelin Guide. Among these, five restaurants hold three

Michelin stars, while 12 have two stars and about 60 have one star. In London, you will never find yourself wondering, “Where can I eat a great meal?” because the options are endless. I constantly update my list, since some chefs move on, quality can slip, some restaurants close, and new ones emerge to surpass older favorites. Yet the amongst the London restaurants I describe here, there are several whose places on my list never change , a testament to their enduring excellence. As I always emphasize, this selection is entirely based on my own criteria. Presented alphabetically, these are restaurants I strongly recommend you try if you haven’t yet and if you find yourself in London.

## ***DINNER BY HESTON***

Dinner by Heston, located inside the Mandarin Oriental Hotel and run by Heston Blumenthal, has always been considered among the best and is in high demand. On one occasion, I wanted to take a very important guest there for lunch, but despite trying twice, I couldn’t secure a reservation on my preferred date. Finding myself in a difficult position, I sought help from Isa Bal, the former sommelier of Blumenthal’s first restaurant, The Fat Duck. Thanks to Isa, the doors opened, and I was finally able to go there with my guest. Unlike The Fat Duck, Dinner by Heston operates differently. At The Fat Duck, Blumenthal still serves a 17-course tasting menu, while here he has appointed his right-hand man, Ashley Palmer, as head chef. About 10–12 chefs work in a small glass-walled kitchen that resembles an aquarium. The chefs may feel like they’re in a fishbowl, but for diners it’s wonderful to watch meals being prepared. Another special feature is that every dish is based on recipes from medieval England, with historical notes and preparation details included on the menu. Compared to The Fat Duck, Dinner by Heston offers a simpler menu, but one of its advantages is that it is open seven

a week, including Sundays. It also has a splendid view overlooking Hyde Park. With its food, service, and atmosphere, Dinner by Heston fully deserves its two Michelin stars and is a restaurant I highly recommend.

## ***DORIAN***

Located in the lively Notting Hill district, known for its cafés and restaurants, Dorian opened in 2022. Its owner, Chris D'Sylva, is clearly a visionary, as shown by the concept he created and the interest it has attracted. Chef Max Coen, who earned his experience in prestigious restaurants, leads the kitchen and presents modern British cuisine. The restaurant became such a success that within two years it had earned its first Michelin star. Dorian is particularly famous for dishes cooked over wood fire. If you're dining as two or three people, I suggest sitting at the kitchen bar, where you can watch the team prepare meals, place them into the oven, sear giant steaks, and plate the dishes before serving. I had a wonderful wood-fired turbot there. They even use separate ovens for fish and for meat, so that flavors don't mingle. Except for Mondays, it's open every day until the evening. Considering how hard it is to find a good restaurant open on Sundays in London, this makes Dorian a great option. The space is a bit tight, and the tables don't really meet my personal criteria, but sitting at the kitchen bar more than makes up for it. Watching the chefs at work, hearing their conversations, and following the cooking process is like enjoying a show. For me, Dorian has such high energy and a special atmosphere that I now make sure to include it in every London visit. The kitchen team cooks fish exactly right — I never once had to say, "Please don't overcook the fish."

## ***FAT DUCK***

The Fat Duck is at the top of London's three Michelin-starred restaurants, founded, owned, and run by none other than Heston Blumenthal. In addition to being a master chef, Blumenthal is also known for his cookbooks. Located in a historic building in the village of Bray, about 45 minutes from London, The Fat Duck serves around 60 guests. If you go, you must try the tasting menu, which takes about four hours. For this reason, I recommend going at lunchtime, since it may feel a little heavy in the evening. Going during the day also gives you the chance to stroll through the charming village and admire its old buildings. Blumenthal is extraordinarily creative and designs his dishes to stimulate all five senses: you taste, hear the crunch, smell the aroma, see the presentation, and feel the textures. One of the techniques he often uses is *sous vide* — low-temperature cooking in vacuum-sealed bags immersed in hot water at 70–85°C. The Fat Duck's wine list is practically the size of a phone book, and just reading through it whets the appetite.

## ***GORDON RAMSAY***

One of the world's most famous British chefs, Gordon Ramsay no longer cooks himself but owns restaurants worldwide. Known for his fiery temper and harsh treatment of staff, Ramsay is equally famous for his books and TV shows. Interestingly, before becoming a chef, he even claimed to have played football for Rangers in the Scottish Premier League — but ultimately found his true calling in the culinary world. I remember trying to book a table at Aubergine, the prestigious restaurant where Ramsay once worked as head chef. They were only taking reservations six months in advance and demanded prepayment.

When I finally secured a table, Ramsay had left to open his own place, Restaurant Gordon Ramsay, in Chelsea. So I cancelled Aubergine and booked at Ramsay's new restaurant instead. It's a small venue seating about 45 guests, located on a side street. Open for both lunch and dinner, it offers a slightly more affordable lunch menu, as is common in London. Holding three Michelin stars, the restaurant places great importance on presentation and design. Ramsay also sells his cookbooks on-site. During truffle season, the menu features a wide variety of truffle dishes. For those interested, you can even reserve a special session at 9:30 a.m. to join the chefs in the kitchen and help prepare dishes.

## ***HÉLÈNE DARROZE AT THE CONNAUGHT***

Inside the famous Connaught Hotel in Mayfair is French chef Hélène Darroze's eponymous restaurant, which truly deserves its three Michelin stars. Here you'll find modern French cuisine as well as fusion dishes inspired by international flavors. Guests can choose between the tasting menu and à la carte options. The restaurant opened in 2008, quickly earned its first star, soon after its second, and — strengthened after Covid with an enhanced menu — finally secured its third in 2021. Darroze sources ingredients seasonally and buys fresh fish daily. Although the Connaught is a historic hotel, the restaurant is strikingly modern. Designed by renowned interior designer Pierre Yovanovitch, the space reflects the elegance of Darroze's cuisine with soft leather and velvet chairs, wooden tables, and delicate glass chandeliers. It has everything I personally love: high ceilings, white tablecloths, generous spacing between tables, comfortable seating, and excellent service. Like many three-star restaurants, they also offer a more economical lunch menu. While meat is central, there are excellent fish options as well. For anyone

seeking comfort and refinement, Hélène Darroze at the Connaught is a culinary haven.

## ***LA PETITE MAISON***

With branches around the world, La Petite Maison's London location is in Mayfair. This beautiful French-Mediterranean restaurant serves dishes family-style: each dish is brought to the table and shared, which makes it perfect for a convivial experience. Although the cuisine is rooted in French tradition, its founding chef, Raphael, is Nigerian. Interestingly, butter is almost absent here; instead, olive oil, salads, and fish dominate. Influences from Italy and the South of France are evident, and it would be more accurate to describe it as Mediterranean cuisine. On the menu, you'll find dishes like socca from Côte d'Azur, pissaladière, Italian burrata and mozzarella, marinated raw fish, green lentils, and bulgur salad. One of its highlights is the seafood and cocktail bar located just behind the main dining room, offering a more intimate atmosphere.

## ***NOBU***

With around 30 branches worldwide, co-owned by Robert De Niro, Nobu is a global sensation. I've dined at ten of them, but my favorite remains the London location under the Metropolitan Hotel. It not only has a beautiful Hyde Park view, but also the most extensive menu. The head chef, originally from Japan, lived many years in Peru, and his cooking bears a distinctive Peruvian influence. He even invented unique sushi varieties, which turned him into a legend among sushi chefs. Signature dishes include black cod with miso, yellowtail sashimi with jalapeño, and shrimp with garlic sauce.

## ***PORTLAND***

Located on Great Portland Street, this restaurant takes its name from its address. Opened in 2015, it quickly earned a Michelin star. Though it may not rise to two stars, I would say it is more than worthy of its single star. Headed by chef Chris Bassett, Portland doesn't cling to any one culinary tradition but instead stands out as an excellent modern British restaurant. While it doesn't have soaring ceilings, in other respects it meets my criteria. Both tasting and à la carte menus are available. Lunch features a simpler two-course menu, while dinner offers three courses. Its wine list is impressive, with reasonable markups. Since the difference in lunch and dinner prices is not dramatic, I recommend going for dinner.

## ***THE COUNTER***

Not among the world's best, but a restaurant I love is The Counter, owned by Kemal Demiral, a chef I greatly admire. I've followed him since his Alacati Alancha days. After leaving Turkey, he settled in London with his wife and child, and post-pandemic opened The Counter — actually, two of them: one in Soho and one in Notting Hill. The Notting Hill branch is small, with some tables but best experienced at the counter itself. It's essentially a modern kebab house, but with excellent mezze. Demiral reinterprets the flavors of the Eastern Mediterranean with his own creative touches. You can easily have a satisfying meal just from the vegetarian mezze selection. His appetizers are also outstanding, which is why The Counter is one of my London go-to's. I send my regards to Kemal Demiral — I'm sure he'll continue to create wonderful things in London.

## ***THE IVY***

With over 100 years of history, The Ivy is a classic English restaurant. Founded by Abel Giandolini originally as a café, it evolved over time into an upscale restaurant. Located near the theaters, it became a favorite haunt of actors and theatergoers alike. Stars like Laurence Olivier, Vivien Leigh, and Marlene Dietrich were regulars, and many people came just hoping to spot them. In 2005, businessman Richard Caring bought it and expanded The Ivy into a chain across the UK and Ireland. Yet the original location remains known as The Original Ivy. Decorated in Art Deco style, it feels almost like a museum. For fans of traditional English food, The Ivy is essential. Its signature dish is shepherd's pie — minced meat and mashed potato baked into a comforting pie. Another highlight is Dover sole, a fish native to the Dover coast and larger than its counterparts elsewhere. In 2008, an exclusive members-only club was also added upstairs. For me, there are two quintessential places for classic English cuisine in London: The Ivy and Dinner by Heston.

## ***THE KITCHEN***

Tucked away on South Street in the heart of Kensington, The Kitchen is one of London's most beloved neighbourhood fine-dining restaurants, an elegant yet unpretentious one, Michelin-star gem that has quietly built a following. Opened in 2009 by acclaimed restaurateur Rebecca Mascarenhas and legendary chef Phil Howard, The Kitchen is helmed by Head Chef Mark Kempson, whose cooking marries classical French technique with a modern British sensibility. Kempson's cuisine is firmly ingredient-led: seasonal, flavour-driven, and deeply respectful of Britain's best small producers. He is known for weaving game,

hedgerow fruits, and subtle wild elements into refined, harmonious plates that evolve with the seasons. The restaurant earned its Michelin star in 2011 and has retained it every year since, a testament to its consistency and quality. Despite its pedigree, The Kitchen remains remarkably approachable. Its set lunch menu is widely regarded as one of the best-value Michelin experiences in London, offering superbly crafted dishes at an accessible price. The room itself exudes understated sophistication — crisp white linen throughout, fresh, contemporary décor, and an atmosphere that balances intimacy with polish. Service is attentive and warm, striking the perfect note between formality and friendliness. The wine list is another highlight, with an excellent selection both by the bottle and by the glass, often featuring premium bottles poured from magnums. A minor quirk: there are no armchairs, only traditional chairs — a detail that hardly detracts from the overall experience. In addition to its Michelin star, The Kitchen is frequently recommended by other guides for its balance of sophistication, value, and neighbourhood charm. It remains a satisfying fine-dining address, a restaurant where exceptional cooking, genuine hospitality, and refined comfort come together seamlessly. One issue with the Kitchen, you are forced to pay a "discretionary" 15% tip.

## ***ST. JOHN***

Located near London's financial district, St. John is a Michelin one-star restaurant beloved for its wide variety of dishes. Fergus Henderson, originally an architect, abandoned his career to follow his culinary passion, and in 1994 he opened St. John in a former smokehouse. The restaurant's motto is "nose-to-tail eating" — meaning every part of the animal is used, from liver to bone marrow. Open daily for lunch and dinner, St. John offers three different experiences: a white-tablecloth dining room

with full service, communal wooden tables with a limited bar menu, or simply sitting at the bar with drinks and snacks. It's reasonably priced by Michelin standards and always busy. I went for lunch, and it was packed. For dinner, reservations are a must. The menu features game meats, offal, seasonal vegetables, and herbs. Last time, I had a simple but excellent green salad, John Dory, and dessert. With it, I drank Guinness, followed by espresso, fresh-made madeleines, and strawberry ice cream. I left very satisfied. Next time, I plan to try their famous lobster soup.

## ***TRIVET***

Trivet was opened in 2019 in south London by our world-famous sommelier Isa Bal together with Jonny Lake, both formerly of The Fat Duck (Isa as head sommelier, Jonny as head chef). It's a small, modern restaurant seating 30–40, with wooden tables instead of tablecloths. In summer, a terrace expands the space. The food, directed by Jonny Lake, reflects the expertise he gained in world-renowned kitchens, and within three years Trivet earned its first Michelin star, followed by a second last year. Their signature dishes include playfully named plates like “Drunken Lobster.” The cooking style is influenced by The Fat Duck but is less experimental and more approachable. Both tasting menus and à la carte options are available, and I recommend the à la carte. Open Wednesday–Saturday for lunch and dinner (closed Sundays, with limited hours on Mon/Tue), Trivet also boasts an outstanding wine list curated by Isa Bal. It even features several Turkish wines. They also run a wine club with special events for members. Isa Bal, one of only about 300 Master Sommeliers in the world — and among the most senior — is an authority in wine. With his vast knowledge and extensive cellar, Trivet is truly a paradise for wine lovers. I suggest telling him your preferences and letting him surprise you — that's what I did, and I was amazed.

[Back to TOP](#)



## MACAU

East Asia is a different world in every which way. The region always astonishes me – as well as everyone else. It'll be no surprise to you, though, that one of the things that interest me most about East Asia is its spectacular cuisine... If you're planning a trip to the Far East, you might as well spend a few days in Macau – the Las Vegas of the region, so to speak. (In fact, Macau even has more machines and casinos than Sin City.) The city's gambling culture is the main reason behind the existence of its large and luxurious hotels, one of which is the Grand Hyatt Hotel, a new and eminently chic building. The Grand Hyatt doesn't lack for machines to gamble, while it also has a nice performance center. Make sure you don't miss the interesting shows performed every evening.

### ***THE EIGHT***

The Eight, a Chinese restaurant located in the Grand Lisboa Hotel, is extremely inviting with its three Michelin stars. The place probably has the largest wine menu I have ever seen; no lie, they probably have 100,000 bottles of at least 1,500 different wines. With so many wines to choose from, they've developed an innovative system for ordering: a tablet application. When you want to choose your wine, a waiter brings you a tablet. You

enter your preferences and presto, the app spits out appropriate suggestions. For example, if you'd like a 2000 vintage Bordeaux for under 300 dollars, the app will show you all the wines available at the restaurant that match your criteria. It's a great way to go about ordering some wine!

[Back to TOP](#)



## MADRID

Madrid is generally a flat city, which makes it great for walking. One of the nicest things about the city is how polite the people are. Something that might seem surprising is how easy it is to find a taxi. Plus, you can pay for taxis with a credit card. Unlike many other places, using Uber is actually more expensive here, so I recommend either walking or using taxis to explore the city. There are four must-see places in Madrid. First is the Prado Museum. In addition to paintings and sculptures, it also showcases medals, ornaments, and coins. If you want to truly experience the museum, you should dedicate a full day. After visiting, you'll have a well-rounded understanding of Spanish history. There's also a nice cafeteria inside for breaks. While touring the Prado Museum, I noticed just as many portraits of princesses as there were of kings, queens, and princes. This made me curious, so I did some research. It turns out that in Spain, the first-born child inherits the throne regardless of gender. That's why princesses are just as valued — they can be next in line to rule. In most monarchies, only male heirs ascend to the throne, while princesses gain royal titles through marriage. Spain has been progressive in this regard, promoting gender equality in royal succession. Kings would even assign political responsibilities to their daughters from a young age to help them gain governance experience. In contrast, the British monarchy historically allowed women to rule only if there were no male heirs. That's how figures like Elizabeth I, Elizabeth II, and

Victoria became queens. In 2011, Britain passed a law giving equal succession rights to the first-born child, regardless of gender. Still, most of Europe continues to follow a male-preference system. The Spanish monarchy has long supported the arts, something clearly visible in the Prado Museum. Many renowned artists were hosted by the royal family and selected as court painters, receiving financial support. Another fascinating detail: paintings show that the Spanish royal households placed great importance on nannies. These caregivers often appear in formal portraits, dressed elegantly — an insight into their social significance. The second is the Reina Sofia National Art Museum. This one can be done in half a day and features works by Dalí, Picasso, and Miró. Third is the Royal Palace of Madrid. Since the royal family lives outside the city, this palace is open to visitors. It has two small museums displaying classic and modern royal collections. Plan for about half a day. And lastly, make sure to stroll through Retiro Park, which has a large artificial lake and statues of many historical figures. Restaurant standards in Madrid are generally very high. Even at a basic place, you're likely to leave happy. If you're looking for something light or budget-friendly, Madrid is perfect for you. One of the first things that comes to mind when you think of Spain is tapas. These small bites—often just a few mouthfuls—combine simple ingredients in all kinds of creative ways. Some places offer more than 50 varieties, including desserts. Since you can mix and match to your taste, tapas always offer a satisfying experience. There are fantastic tapas bars all over the city. Spaniards usually go to these spots when they want a light meal or to socialize after work.

## ***BIBO***

This restaurant is helmed by Dani Garcia, a chef from Andalusia with one Michelin star. Although Bibo itself doesn't have a star, it meets all my criteria: high ceilings, spaciouly arranged tables, armchairs, white tablecloths, and excellent

service. The restaurant is shaped like a U, allowing light to come in from nearly every angle. What I especially loved here was the guacamole — not exactly a Spanish dish, but made to the quality you'd find in Mexico. It's prepared right in front of you, using a volcanic stone mortar. They ask you how much onion or spice you'd like and adjust accordingly. The guacamole is then served in the same mortar, which gives it a delicious flavor. Although not traditional, guacamole seems to be a common starter here — I noticed many tables beginning their meal with it. Bibo also has a great tapas menu, allowing you to mix and match to create your own personalized meal. The cuisine is globally inspired but leans heavily on Spanish flavors, and you can also order grilled dishes. Bibo is open from 12:00 to 24:00. As you might know, Spaniards usually don't eat lunch before 2:00 PM or dinner before 9:00 PM. Since our eating times are a bit earlier, you'll likely avoid the rush, and therefore, you probably don't need a reservation.

## ***VARRA***

Head chef Javier Goya, known from Triciclo, opened this two-story brasserie-style restaurant. There's a beautiful tapas bar on the ground floor, while the main restaurant is upstairs. The upstairs space has white tablecloths but the tables are quite cramped, so it's not the kind of place where I'd want to spend hours. I'd rather enjoy some time downstairs with tapas and drinks, then head up for a main course and dessert. What makes Varra special is that most of the dishes are cooked in a wood-fired oven. They present modern interpretations of traditional Spanish dishes. I especially like their sea urchin dish, which is quite risky since it needs to be eaten immediately after being caught due to how quickly it spoils. Still, in coastal areas and reputable restaurants, it's worth the risk. If you can get over the idea of eating something essentially alive, it's quite delicious. Downstairs, they serve creative tapas with a modern twist. Locals

also prefer this style — a few drinks, some well-made tapas, and a relaxed vibe. The main dining room upstairs opens at 8:00 PM, so you can come around 7:00 PM, enjoy the downstairs bar for a bit, and head up later. This lets you spread out your meal and enjoy different atmospheres.

## ***DIVERXO***

DiverXO is the only restaurant in Madrid with 3 Michelin stars. The head chef, Dabiz Muñoz, mainly cooks Spanish cuisine. A few years ago, this restaurant was ranked the number one restaurant in the world, which means it now gets enormous demand — and accordingly, the prices are quite steep. I had tried to go before but couldn't get a reservation. Back then, it seated only 25 people; now it accommodates 35. Chef Muñoz has since opened several other places ending in “XO,” which has somewhat helped with demand. DiverXO is full of surprises — from the decor to the staff uniforms to the theatrical presentation. About 50 people work there, each dressed differently: one server wears a Napoleon outfit, another a red suit, and yet another a light green tuxedo. It's like a visual performance. Each table has satin curtains around it, with a small opening for the server. The restaurant ticks every box for a 3-star experience: ambiance, comfort, post-meal treats, impeccable service, and of course, food. You're required to order a fixed tasting menu. They ask in advance about your dietary habits and create a personalized menu accordingly. Presentation is a huge deal here. I reserved one month in advance, and they charge you when booking. You can't bring your own wine, and their wine markup is quite high. We had a 15-course menu — although nothing blew my mind, the turbot was spectacular. To be honest, I'm starting to lose interest in these ultra-expensive restaurants. Not only are the bills often excessive, but it also feels a bit uncomfortable to surrender total control over what you're eating. Still, I think it's worth going at least once — for the experience.

## ***STREETXO***

StreetXO is another restaurant under Dabiz Muñoz's XO brand. They do a Spanish fusion cuisine inspired by Southeast Asian flavors. The atmosphere is much more casual and the prices are more affordable — honestly, this place excites me more than DiverXO. I had been here on a previous trip to Madrid. Back then, I had to wait in line for a while, but this time I was able to walk right in. One of the staff told me that they used to operate in two shifts — lunch and dinner — but now they're open all day except from 4:00 to 7:00 PM. This change has helped avoid customer congestion. Even when the kitchen is closed, the bar remains open. So you can spend some time at the bar before heading upstairs for your meal, which makes for a nice flow. At StreetXO, you sit at a food bar where everything is prepared right in front of you. Watching the process adds a lot of entertainment value. The menu is printed on the paper mat in front of you. You tell the server what you don't want, and they cross those items off — you're served only the remaining ones. There are a lot of pasta dishes here, featuring unique sauces that I've never even seen in Italy. Most likely, they're original creations by the chef. Loud rock music plays through high-quality speakers, and after a while, the powerful sound actually becomes enjoyable. StreetXO is a popular spot among young people. The whole team — from chefs to waiters — dances while they work, creating a very relaxed vibe. The wine menu isn't impressive, but there's a wide range of exotic cocktails. All in all, StreetXO is a fantastic, energetic spot.

## ***RAVIOXO***

Another spot in the XO family is RavioXO, which opened in 2022. This Michelin-starred restaurant focuses on Asian dumplings, ravioli, and other pasta dishes. It combines flavors from various cultures. You can order à la carte here, and the

dishes are surprisingly delightful — plus, the price is quite reasonable for a starred place. The wine list is a bit lacking, though. Still, it's an interesting and lovely restaurant. If I were in Madrid for just one day, I'd go to StreetXO. If I stayed for a week, I'd go there twice. And if I were staying for a month, I'd go once a week and also visit RavioXO at least once. But everyone should go to DiverXO at least once in their life.

## ***LA TASQUERIA***

La Tasqueria is a classic Spanish restaurant with one Michelin star, led by chef *Javi Estévez*. It has white tablecloths, high ceilings, and comfortable chairs — very much to my liking. The focus here is on meat, poultry, and offal. There's very little seafood. The menu includes dishes like tongue tacos, pâté made from meat around a pig's head, lamb brains, and variations of tripe. I ended up here for lunch without knowing about its meat-heavy menu. Since I follow a pescetarian diet, it wasn't exactly the right fit. But when I explained what I could and couldn't eat, the chef offered to create a four-course menu for me using some staff meals, some pasta, and a bit of fish from the main menu. The resulting dishes were excellent. Even though I didn't try their signature items, the fact that they accommodated my dietary needs without attitude — despite being a Michelin-starred place — really impressed me. If you eat meat, poultry, or offal, I highly recommend La Tasqueria.

## ***COCQUE***

Coque is a 2-Michelin-star restaurant in Madrid, and despite its high price, it's well worth visiting. It's been open for about 20 years and received its second star a few years ago. I wouldn't be surprised if it earns a third soon. Located in a stand-alone building in the city center, Coque is named after the chef's

nickname. The head chef is Mario Sandoval, and his brother Rafael Sandoval works as the sommelier. The restaurant is divided into two separate dining rooms, each accommodating about 15 people, which gives an intimate feel even when it's fully booked. The service is excellent, and they use seasonal, local ingredients grown on their family farm. The experience begins with a guided tour of the restaurant. First, you're welcomed at the bar, where they prepare a cocktail — alcoholic or non-alcoholic, based on your preference. The bartender uses a machine to create a matte bubble on top of the glass, which slowly deflates into the drink before you can sip it. Next, you're taken to the wine cellar. Since one of the owners is a sommelier, it's no surprise the wine list is extensive. You get to see a wide range of wines, from affordable to extremely rare. They also serve you a glass of champagne there. I even got to try a Bordeaux I had never heard of before — great value for the price. The tour continues in the kitchen, where there's a small bar for guests. While you sit there, they serve a few small bites tailored to your dietary preferences. After that, you're brought to the caviar bar, where you sample various types of caviar served in tiny tins with creative sauces. Finally, the actual dining begins at your table. You can't order à la carte — instead, they serve a four or five-course tasting menu based on what you previously communicated about your dietary needs. One of the standout features for me was the service: our waiter spoke excellent English, which enriched the experience. Turns out, he was British! If I were staying in Madrid for 10 days, I'd definitely go back a second time. Highly recommended.

## ***TABERNA ANTONIO SANCHEZ***

Open since 1787, this tavern is practically a cultural landmark. Historical records from around 1750 show that the building layout has remained unchanged since then. In 1884, Antonio Sanchez Ruiz bought the tavern and passed it on to his

son, a bullfighter. Over time, the tavern became a favorite spot for bullfighting fans, intellectuals, writers, and artists. It has preserved its traditional style with great care. The walls are adorned with vintage menus and photos of famous visitors, offering a glimpse into its storied past. It's a cozy space with about 40 seats, white tablecloths, and white napkins that create a charming atmosphere. Portions are large and served on big plates. You'll find traditional dishes like tripe stew, baby squid, and pisto manchego — a mix of sautéed vegetables topped with a fried egg. They also have a signature dessert called Torrija Antonio Sanchez, which is well worth trying. You can build your own set menu with a cold starter, a main course, and a dessert, and enjoy it all with a good glass of wine in this historic setting.

## ***SADDLE***

This restaurant stands where a 3-Michelin-starred venue used to be before it closed down during the pandemic. After everything returned to normal, Saddle opened in its place and quickly earned one star. It ticks all my boxes: high ceilings, white tablecloths, ample space between tables. The music is soft, and it's easy to get the waiter's attention — something I really value. The cuisine is a mix of classic and modern techniques, using seasonal ingredients. I went here with three others, and each of us had different dietary restrictions. We didn't want to order from the menu and instead asked them to bring a mix of small dishes for us to share. They said they couldn't do that, so we respected each other's preferences and ordered four or five dishes from the menu to split. This approach did increase the bill a bit, but the service and food were excellent. Next time, I'll probably just stick with the regular menu. Definitely worth a visit.

## ***TOMA***

Toma is a fantastic coffee shop with two locations in Madrid. They serve great coffee, but if you want something more, they also have an extensive menu of sandwiches and snacks. I visited both branches. The menu is the same, but I preferred the second one because the building it's housed in is architecturally stunning. It's a tiny spot — maybe 10 people can sit inside — and most customers choose takeaway. Since I usually eat just one meal a day, I skip breakfast. I originally came to Toma for coffee, but while browsing the menu, I noticed a dish that mentioned “Turkish style.” Curious, I asked about it and was told it was Turkish-style eggs. I ordered it out of sheer curiosity, and honestly, it was the best *çılıbır* (poached eggs with yogurt and spicy butter) I've ever had. The eggs were perfectly poached, the sauce was just right, and the yogurt was spot on. To truly enjoy *çılıbır*, you need bread to mop it up — I asked for gluten-free bread. Usually, gluten-free bread comes packaged and isn't particularly satisfying, but Toma bakes their own. They brought me their freshly made gluten-free bread, and it was excellent. I ate everything with joy. If you visit Madrid, definitely stop by Toma. Whether for coffee or a light breakfast, you'll find a variety of options like sandwiches, cheese platters, and cheesecake — all served in a cozy, stylish manner.

## ***THE RITZ CAFÉ***

I wouldn't recommend staying at the Ritz Hotel due to the high price, but you should absolutely sit at its café for a light snack or a few drinks. Now operated by Mandarin Oriental, the hotel is stunning — especially the café, which boasts a soaring glass ceiling. Hotel guests get priority seating, so you may need a reservation. Still, it's a luxurious experience well worth carving out time for.

## ***GoXO***

Chef Dabiz Muñoz has launched a street-food concept called GoXO. Through food trucks stationed around Madrid, he offers high-quality meals at more affordable prices. The aim is to make his cuisine accessible to everyone. Each meal includes several small dishes and a dessert, and their hot dogs with special sauces are especially popular. Workers line up at these trucks during lunch hours. Muñoz seems truly committed to providing good food for all income levels — a mission he's following with real passion.

[Back to TOP](#)



## MELBOURNE

When you set aside Sydney’s exuberance and head south to Melbourne, you encounter an entirely different spirit. Melbourne does not introduce itself loudly; it doesn’t try to impress. Instead, it walks up quietly, slips its arm through yours, and accompanies you. It is less flashy, less postcard-perfect, yet far richer in lived experience. This is a city that feels worn in rather than polished—young, relaxed, curious. Students, cafés, and beaches keep it constantly alive. Here, the idea of “eating well” is not treated with reverence or ceremony, yet it is executed with remarkable confidence and consistency. That, in many ways, is the essence of Melbourne.

Sydney impresses at first glance; Melbourne unfolds over time. People do not rush here. Tables are not cleared early, and no one glances at their watch before ordering a second glass. Although it is a city of roughly five million people—only a one-hour flight from Sydney—its soul feels entirely different.

Ask Australians which city is the most liveable, and most will answer without hesitation: Melbourne. Foreigners who live here tend to agree. The city is home to world-class universities, and American students in particular are drawn to it—education quality is high, while costs are far more reasonable than in the United States. While taking an Uber one afternoon, I met an American student earning his pocket money behind the wheel. The expression on his face made everything clear: he was genuinely happy to be here.

If Sydney is New York's Midtown, then Melbourne sits somewhere along the Soho–Tribeca line. Flatter, easier, more European in spirit. But urban planning is not really the point, of course. The real question is a far more important one: what are we going to eat.

## ***ATTICA***

Attica is Australia's most talked-about restaurant and has been a fixture on the world's best restaurant lists for many years. As you might expect, finding a table here is extremely difficult. I have been twice, and on both occasions I relied on friends to help secure a reservation; otherwise, my chances would have been slim. The kitchen is led by chef Ben Shewry.

Shewry has developed a quiet, introspective, and deeply personal culinary language. Attica serves only a set menu, with a single choice: whether to opt for the fish-based alternative instead of meat. Prices are high—very high—but what you experience here goes far beyond an ordinary meal. Of the twelve courses, ten were genuinely impressive. I chose the meat-free version and left thoroughly satisfied. My daughter, on the other hand, encountered one of Australia's local culinary surprises: fried ants. It was almost certainly the first—and last—time she would ever make such a choice. If these kinds of experiences are not for you, it is wise to be clear in advance about certain dishes. The most iconic dish at Attica is kangaroo served with native plants. It is the clearest expression of Shewry's philosophy—his narrative of place, memory, and nature translated directly onto the plate. By the end of the evening, it becomes abundantly clear that Attica's reputation as Australia's finest restaurant is no coincidence.

Address: 74 Glen Eira Road, Ripponlea

## ***CUMULUS UP***

Cumulus Up is the two-storey culinary world of Andrew McConnell, one of the most influential figures in Melbourne's dining scene. The ground floor, simply called Cumulus, is lively, energetic, and walk-in only—no reservations, a constant hum of conversation, and an open, bustling atmosphere. Upstairs, Cumulus Up is calmer, more settled, and reservation-only, with a dining room that invites you to slow down and stay.

I came here for a long evening with a friend. One of the people at our table knew Melbourne's restaurant culture exceptionally well, and the ordering was flawless. While he leaned toward meat-focused dishes, I chose from the seafood side of the menu. A very good American wine was opened, and the table naturally extended itself as the evening unfolded.

The slow-cooked lamb shoulder is the restaurant's defining dish and has remained unchanged for years. Generous, confident, and faultless, it neatly encapsulates McConnell's cooking philosophy. This is food without unnecessary flourishes—clear, assured, and deeply satisfying.

Address: 45 Flinders Lane, Melbourne

## ***EMBLA***

Located in the heart of the city, Embla is a wine bar that fills up quickly during lunchtime hours. The kitchen is led by chef Dave Verheul. The menu is built around small plates, designed for sharing, tasting, and keeping the table pleasantly crowded. Embla's greatest strength lies in its wine service—Australian wines presented properly, with the right glassware and at the right temperature.

Because of its central location, Embla has become a popular escape for the city's white-collar crowd. Prices are relatively reasonable; if you are familiar with Istanbul, you will find the bill comparable to what you might pay around Cihangir. The anchovy butter toast is the dish that lingers in the memory—simple, restrained, and quietly satisfying.

Address: 122 Russell Street, Melbourne

## ***ROCKPOOL***

Rockpool represents the self-confident side of Australian cuisine. The culinary vision here has long been shaped by chef Neil Perry. There is nothing experimental about Rockpool; instead, the focus is unwavering: the right product, cooked correctly, served properly. Inspired by North American steakhouses, the restaurant places product quality at the centre of everything it does.

The dining room is elegant without being stiff, and it is particularly enjoyable in the early evening hours. For those who enjoy seafood, Rockpool is one of Melbourne's most reliable addresses. Two dishes have remained perennial favourites over the years: the wood-fired dry-aged ribeye and the stracciatella served with figs and pistachios. It is also worth noting that Rockpool maintains the same level of quality in its Sydney and Perth locations.

Address: Crown Casino, 8 Whiteman Street, Southbank, Melbourne

## ***ROOFTOP AT QT***

One of Melbourne's rare elevated dining spots, Rooftop at QT is especially vibrant in the evening. City lights, a gentle breeze, and a good drink combine to create an atmosphere where time seems to slow down. The kitchen is overseen by chef John Lawson and the QT team, with a strong emphasis on sustainability.

The ordering system here is refreshingly simple: you go to the bar, place your order, pay, and receive a number. Popular with the after-work crowd, the venue can be busy, so it is worth keeping that in mind when planning a visit. The QT building also houses a hotel with eight different room types, making it a lively destination well beyond dining hours.

Address: Level 11, QT Melbourne, 133 Russell Street, Melbourne.

## ***SUPERNORMAL***

Bearing Andrew McConnell's signature, Supernormal draws inspiration from Japanese, Chinese, and Korean cuisines, built around a shared-plates concept. It is noisy, energetic, and relaxed. This is not fine dining, but when it comes to flavour, it is precise and confident.

An ideal choice for an unplanned evening with friends, Supernormal has managed to retain its popularity over the years. Two dishes immediately come to mind whenever its name is mentioned: the lobster roll and the baked scallops. Either one alone is reason enough to stop by.

Address: 180 Flinders Lane, Melbourne

## ***YARRA VALLEY DAIRY***

The final stop on this list lies outside the city: a farm and its restaurant, Yarra Valley Dairy. Founded by John and Lorraine Sestak, it is an ideal escape for those who want to leave Melbourne behind and reconnect with nature. I will admit that my primary reason for visiting was the mixed cheese platter.

The farm raises sheep, goats, and cows to produce its own cheeses. Inside the on-site restaurant, these cheeses are served alongside locally produced wines. Fresh, crusty bread and olive oil made right here on the farm complete the experience. You place your order, take a number, and wait while taking in the view. In summer, sitting outdoors adds another layer of pleasure.

The valley is also home to several wineries, and because of its location, I recommend setting aside at least five to six hours. That way, you can explore the area at a relaxed pace and fully enjoy the cheeses, wines, and landscape.

Address: 70 McMeikans Road,

[Back to TOP](#)



## **MEXICO CITY**

Mexico is no longer a developing country; in fact, it's the 15<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world thanks in part to its three strongest sectors: energy, agriculture and tourism. Mexico might have problems with high crime and bribery, but it's managed to reach such a lofty economic position as every successive government has adhered to standard international economic rules and a legal framework. Each president has a six-year term – with no chance of reelection. In recent years, the presidency has changed hands among various parties; at the start of 2019, the left-wing Andrés Manuel López Obrador – known almost universally as AMLO – took power with 53% of the vote with a promise to end corruption and serve the poor. More importantly, since coming to power, he's managed to grab an approval rating of 80%. And because Mexico's constitution and independent legal system are sound, foreign investors are active in the country – in fact, they're becoming more active in the country – in spite of the leftist government. Ultimately, with its supply of cheap and plentiful labor, Mexico continues to attract global companies. The capital, Mexico City, is located in a flat area in the center of the country. One of the world's largest cities with 21 million people, Mexico City was built on top of a drained lake after the Spanish conquest. Since then, the city has expanded thanks to the lack of hills; this sprawl also means that it does not have many tall buildings. What's more, the crime rate isn't as high

as the frightening levels of yesteryear, as the city center is now much safer. Mexican street food is out of this world; in terms of cleanliness, the street grills might pose a bit of a risk, but there are always little restaurants in every neighborhood offering street food to 15 to 20 customers at a time. If you're in Mexico, you just have to try them, especially for lunch. Soft corn tortillas, for instance, are scrumptious when you combine them with refried beans, guacamole, sautéed mushrooms, sour cream and grated cheese. If you want a bit more, you can add meat or shrimp as well. And on the table, you'll always be able to find a sauce that suits your tolerance for spice. Put it all together, and it's a delicious bite for next to nothing. A warning, though: it is addictive, and the Mexican restaurants outside the country just can't offer the same flavor. In such a spread-out city, there are hundreds of such restaurants throughout the capital – just ask at your hotel for one to go to nearby.

## ***PUJOL***

There are two particularly important restaurants in Mexico City – but my favorite is Pujol, the preserve of Enrique Olvera, a Mexican who seems to have gone straight from the cradle to the chef's table. Michelin isn't in Mexico, but if it were, Pujol would be a lock to get two stars. Pujol's foundation rests on street food, but what Olvera has done was refine Mexico's rather greasy and delectable street food in the kitchen. Pujol provides two delicious tasting menus, one vegetarian and one pescatarian, with top-notch service. And that's not all; the wine list is very broad, and the sommeliers really know their stuff. If you go as two people, go for both tasting menus – that way, you can share the best of both worlds. Otherwise, go twice if you have the time because it's really worth it. But while the prices are reasonable,

it's a tall task to land a reservation, as you usually need to book two months in advance. Pujol offers two sittings; whichever of them you go to, head a bit early so that you can enjoy the bar in the garden. In the end, we sat down at a table, but you might enjoy sitting at the bar. Ultimately, you can sample a similar fare at New York's Cosme (another Olvera creation), but Pujol is certainly a place I'm itching to go back to.

## ***QUINTONIL***

Like Pujol, Quintonil is another important Mexican institution that requires reservations two months in advance. While Quintonil didn't leave as big an impression on me as Pujol, it would be a shame not to visit it after going all the way to Mexico City. That's to say that I might not get to Quintonil again, but I'm glad I visited at least once. The restaurant's wine list is somewhat narrower, while it doesn't have the same ambiance as Pujol. Moreover, Quintonil's accent is more on international food rather than Mexican. In terms of dining, you have to go for a tasting menu at one of Quintonil's two sittings. Nevertheless, if you don't eat either meat or fish, they can accommodate you.

## ***TETETLÁN AND LALO***

If you want to steer clear of the standard hotel breakfast fare, let me recommend a couple of places for a meal to get the day started. Head to whichever one is closer – or head to them both! Both Tetetlán and Lalo combine Mexican cuisine and the food of a modern breakfast café. But the word is out about such places, so if you don't head early in the day, you're liable to wait

in line. And there's another plus to going early: You can eat your fill and then wait until dinner before getting hungry again, as it's impossible to have any lunch after eating a breakfast this big.

## ***ROSETTA AND LA ÚNICA***

If you're staying in Mexico City for a while and want to try something a bit more upmarket, allow me to recommend a couple of Italian places, Rosetta and La Única – both of which are luxurious Italian establishments. Know, though, that it's tough to find a good English speaker at the best of times in Mexico; it's even harder to find in one of these places, meaning you'll have to make do with Italian or Spanish. That said, you came here for the food, not the conversation with the waiters, and the food at both Rosetta and La Única is fantastic. There's just one underlying question: Should you go to Mexico and have Italian? Only you can answer that – but perhaps you already do that when you head to the U.S. or Britain.

## ***LICORERÍA LIMANTOUR AND MAISON ARTEMISIA***

Go to any bar in Mexico City, and you'll find a thick menu of tequila and cocktails made from the national drink, but there are two places that require a visit for pre-dinner drinks, Licorería Limantour and Maison Artemisia. Sitting out on the sidewalk with a drink and watching the world pass by is a most enjoyable pursuit at either. Artemisia's interior is also quite nice, and later on in the evening, it has live jazz.

## ***OUT AND ABOUT TOWN***

Of course, Mexico City isn't just about food, and there's one museum that should command at least half your day: The National Museum of Anthropology. The building's architecture itself turns your head, but of course, you've actually come here for the Olmec, Maya, Aztec and Spanish archaeological riches inside. Together, the various sections take you back as far as 2000 B.C. Grab yourself a good, English-speaking guide and learn about Mexico's 4,000 years of history – you'll be glad you did. There are three other museums that deserve your attention: the Soumaya (which devoted a whole floor to Rodine in 2019), Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera museums. For the three of them, it's good to allocate at least half a day maybe even one full one (including the travel time).

## ***CANCÚN AND TULUM***

If you've come all the way to Mexico City, you need to at least treat yourself to a bit of fun in the sea and sand. For that, look no further than Cancún and Tulum. The former is an easy, two-hour flight from the capital with Mexican Airlines. In general, the sea is phenomenal, provided the waves don't bring in too much seaweed. And on the coast, there are plenty of big, quality international chain hotels; hotel restaurants in the area are good, although there's no standout restaurant in town. That said, after 6 in the evening, the main square fills with hundreds of food carts serving up terrific street food. Here, there are two local things to try, Marquesitas (a wrap made from crispy corn right in front of your eyes that is filled with Nutella and grated cheese) and Esquites (boiled corn on the cob garnished with mayonnaise and cheese). Of course, you can also find fajitas,

burritos, tacos and quesadillas in Cancún, but marquesitas and esquites are both Yucatán specialties. If you happen to be there on a Sunday, you'll find all of Cancún's residents alongside you in the square, especially as there are public concerts that last for hours on the day. Located 90 minutes by car from Cancún, the seaside town of Tulum is full of history everywhere you turn. But because it's inundated by seaweed 10 months of the year, its beach isn't much of a draw. From the end of November to the end of January, however, the seaweed disappears (which, you won't be surprised to learn, is when all its touristic pictures are taken). Still, you should spend a couple of days visiting its historical ruins. There are two main historical areas; one is a coastal stone city from Maya times that takes about an hour to tour (but in including the time it takes to get there and away, you'll have to allow for a half day). From your hotel, hop in a taxi (there is no Uber) and tour the ruins yourself because if you opt for a non-private tour from your hotel, you'll spend a good part of your day in a bus as the driver picks people up and drops them off. After all, the open-air museum is well-organized, and there are plenty of English signboards around to explain the city. There's also a Mayan pyramid city that's further from the beach: Coba. Before you set out, make sure you've got sturdy footwear that will allow you to climb the stairs comfortably. And like the ancient ruins of Tulum, a trip to Coba takes half a day. For both, make sure you get there by about 9 in the morning, lest you find yourself swamped among the crowds from the tourist buses – and fatigued due to the searing heat. And if you happen to be there during a seaweed-free time, cap your day off with a dip in the water.

[Back to TOP](#)



## MILAN

Milan is a city that draws its fair share of business travelers. The Italian city, a world leader in the design, is a place where you can find boutiques and world-famous fashion brands side-by-side. But there are other things that come immediately to mind whenever you mention Milan: the Duomo, the city's beating heart and the planet's biggest Gothic cathedral; La Scala, perhaps the world's most hallowed opera and theater building; the city's historical passages, as well as the never-ending action on the streets. And whatever the season, Milan's culture of wining and dining is second to none. From charcuteries to restaurants and patisseries to cafes, the food scene is wonderful. Italy is a place I travel to frequently for work. And because Milan is Italy's commercial capital, I can say it's the city I visit the most in the country — if not all of Europe. I had to go to Milan for a number of business meetings at the end of February 2020, just as the coronavirus pandemic was beginning to show what a terrible menace it was. By the end of the week that I was there, museums and concert halls had shut their doors, people had disappeared from the streets and the obituary notices had started to come thick and fast. As for me, I had to curtail my trip a day or two early and I was sure to observe fifteen days of quarantine upon my return, just in case. Ultimately, my latest trip to Milan didn't have a particularly happy ending, but during pre-pandemic times, I did manage to revisit some restaurants I love.

## ***IL SALUMAIO DI MONTENAPOLEONE***

Whenever I come to Milan, the first stop on my list is invariably Il Salumaio di Montenapoleone — particularly if the weather is nice and there's a chance to eat outside in the afternoon. Il Salumaio is a place I've known for forty years. Back in the day, it was a charcuterie on the ground floor of an apartment building on Via Montenapoleone that I used to frequent for its cheese and cold cuts. At the time, the middle-aged owner sold wonderful Italian delicacies. In time, the owner set out a few tables in front of the store; those that came chose food from the charcuterie, had a bite to eat, washed it all down with a coffee and returned to their work content as can be. Later, this entrepreneurial Italian installed a kitchen inside and began to serve three or four types of pasta and risotto, offering the lunch crowd a broader menu. The new service proved such a roaring success that customers could no longer fit into the little shop. The owner, along with his grown son, found a solution. Across from the Four Seasons Hotel on Via Gesù there was a museum with a closed wing; the pair rented the wing, as well as the museum's garden, and grew the business. I say garden, but what I actually mean is a throughway that opens onto two streets. In the meantime, the father had taken a step back, allowing his son to run the show. When I was last there, though, the third generation had gotten down to work too. The present incarnation of Il Salumaio di Montenapoleone can now serve at least one hundred people at a time. As it is, the little charcuterie corner is still serving, but it forms only a small part of the overall business today, with most of the focus on the restaurant. With Il Salumaio now a Milan institution, it's a place you absolutely need to visit for lunch; in fact, even if you're only in Milan for a day, it's a place you need to go to to have, as Italians do, a good, long lunch and some wine. But what, then, should you eat at Il Salumaio?

Wonderful, original, and simple — but sophisticated — Italian fare. They have some fairly basic dishes, as well as much more refined ones. There are little pizzas, well-made pastas, freshly caught fish from Genoa, meat dishes and extraordinary desserts. In short, whatever you want, it's here. And, of course, you can add to this list whatever's at the charcuterie. Naturally, you can dine comfortably in Il Salumaio's indoor section, but I certainly prefer to eat there *al fresco* because you get to take in a busy street with Milan's chicest boutiques on one side and the Four Seasons on the other. Hundreds of people, after all, use this thoroughway at any given time, so it's a great place to come, eat, and people-watch. And if you look above, there's the separate joy of just watching the clouds go by.

## ***PECK***

You could call Peck the world's biggest charcuterie under one roof. Unsurprisingly, Peck is now a Milan landmark. The place, which is more than one hundred and thirty years old, earns an astonishing turnover of around seventy million euros per year. It's impossible to see this many types of food with small variations anywhere else. It doesn't matter if it's meat or cheese; your eyes won't believe the choices in front of you. For instance, if you go in and say you want parmesan, they'll ask you how old — the older the cheese is, the more expensive it is, ranging up to 5 years old. That's the case even with one of Parmigiano-Reggiano's more pedestrian variations, Grana Padano, which you can purchase according to six-month intervals all the way up to three years old. There's surely also mozzarella that is made daily from cow's milk or buffalo milk. Apart from these, Peck has every Italian, French or Spanish cheese that you can think of. There are also around fifty types of ready-to-eat food, as well

as perhaps Milan's biggest wine cellar on the bottom floor. The prices might be a bit expensive, but the wine cellar is fantastic with its top-quality, aged wines from France and Italy. Above Peck, there's a fine-dining restaurant that offers a broad menu with ingredients from the charcuterie. For lunch and dinner alike, the restaurant is a good choice. Meanwhile, on the middle floor, there's a small cafe amid the smorgasbord of choice: the charcuterie section. With seating for about thirty people, the cafe might just be the perfect place to grab a coffee and a sandwich, a plate of cheese, a spot of grilled mushroom or other quick bite and take in the sights and smells around you. But you don't have to just come here for a quick bite or breakfast, as the place is also good for a meal. Like Trussardi Alla Scala and Il Salumaio di Montnapoleone, Peck isn't far from the Duomo, so you can eat your food and then take a stroll through history.

## ***CANTINA PIEMONTESE***

Another historical restaurant is Cantina Piemontese — a place favored by Italians to the extent that foreigners only manage to fill a table or two. When I go there, for instance, I'm typically the only foreigner. It's a chic and spick-and-span place. At Cantina Piemontese, whose experienced older waiters offer good service, you're able to dig into classic fare from Milan and the region beyond. What's more, the cantina has a great wine menu. When I go, though, I just have some of their fantastic pasta, sometimes ordering different varieties depending on how many people I'm sharing the meal with. It might be a bit hard to find the place, given that the restaurant's name is hardly even written on the door, but ask any taxi driver and they'll take you right there.

## **COVA**

When you're on Via Montenapoleone, you just have to head to Cova, which isn't just Milan's oldest patisserie but Italy's too. Cova, which was established more than two hundred years ago in 1817, exudes history. The patisserie serves up every type of tea and coffee, alongside small cakes and quality wines, but its signature offering is the bitter hot chocolate, a not-too-sweet concoction that you can enjoy standing up. It's impossible not to notice the chocolaty smell of the drink as it wafts in and out of the patisserie. Particularly on a cold winter's day, you must drop by to have this phenomenal drink.

## **STARBUCKS MILANO**

You've come to Milan and you're going to Starbucks? Yes, you are — and it's good you are too. We all know the famous coffee chain Starbucks, but the American giant did something different in Milan, opening its biggest, flashiest, most splendid and most impressive branch in the world in this Italian city, to make a statement. Located in a historical building, the Milan Starbucks offers the smell of Italy with an American sense of order. Until now, I had only been impressed by Starbucks' signature Seattle store, but the Milan location has surpassed its Pacific counterpart, delivering a tremendous concept. The brand might be American, but as soon as you enter, you feel like you're in Italy. Italians must love the place too because they come in droves to drink great coffee and eat their food too. What's more, it's but a five-minute walk from the Duomo in the center of Milan. It's as if Starbucks has put on a show for Italians, saying, "Look, I can make Italian espresso too and do it well." Surely, it's a place you need to have a look, at least.

## ***MILAN'S BARS***

Because Milan is a commercial center, it's always welcoming business travelers from around the world. Because of that, Milan is a city with extremely luxurious, expensive, and top-notch hotels that charge a pretty penny on weekdays. You might choose to stay in places like these, but you'd still do well to drop by these hotels' bars or lobbies. At whichever one you visit, you'll see something that pleases you. Before dinner, head to one or any of these bars from 18.00 to 20.00 and enjoy yourself. Milan's best hotels are the Mandarin Oriental, Bulgari, Park Hyatt, Armani and the Four Seasons — all of which also have great bars and lobbies. As an added bonus, they're all located close to one another, so it's possible to visit them all the same evening and enjoy yourself bar hopping. Reservations aren't necessary, so enter one that takes your fancy, sit down at a table and grab a cocktail or a glass of Italian wine. Still, don't indulge too much in the offered bites and appetizers because you don't want to head to dinner with a full stomach. If you happen to be there during the summer, I suspect you'll enjoy yourself the most at Bulgari, where the tables spill out into the outdoors. At the same time, Armani's bar sets itself apart from the others as it's on the top floor. It doesn't actually offer a great view, but it's a pleasure to look down on the historical buildings from above. Armani does have a good restaurant, but it's not one you need to go out of your way to dine at — the bar has perfect appetizers if you're not hankering for a serious meal.

[Back to TOP](#)



## MODENA

### *OSTERIA FRANCESCANA*

One of the world's "best of best" restaurants, there's no place quite like Osteria Francescana in Modena. Well-worth its three Michelin stars, it offers fairly modern Italian cuisine. The restaurant's capacity, however, is as small as its reputation is big. The osteria has one dining room for 10 people, as well as another one for 20 people – ultimately meaning it's difficult to find a place at one of the individual tables. If you do snag a place, may I suggest you try the gastronomical menu. But if you're pressed for time, try three or four dishes. The dishes are served in small, non-fusion portions. Francescana goes for the minimal in its decoration, although it does have pink walls. The restaurant is also located in an alley, which can cause problems, especially as the area is closed to traffic on the weekends, meaning you might need to stretch your legs a bit if you're arriving by car on Saturday or Sunday. But while Osteria Francescana has gained fame in the world, Modena's hotels are not similarly up to scratch, as I couldn't find any worth staying in.

[Back to TOP](#)



## NEW YORK MANHATTAN

For various reasons, I find myself in New York often. As someone who loves both eating and cooking, the city has always felt like an inexhaustible pantry—layered, restless, and constantly renewing itself. Each visit, depending on how long I stay, gives me the opportunity to try newly opened restaurants as well as return to places I know well. Recently, New York appeared twice in quick succession on my calendar, thanks to two weddings held a week apart. Both celebrations were wonderful, and I wish the newly married couples a lifetime of happiness. Over time, some restaurants close, others lose consistency, and new kitchens emerge that deserve attention. This recent visit allowed me to update my personal selection—adding new discoveries and reassessing old favorites. The restaurants below are listed alphabetically, not by preference. There is no claim of “best” or “better.” These are simply places that resonate with my own taste. If your path crosses New York, I believe each of them will reward your time.

### *AQUAVIT*

Established in 1987, Aquavit has been part of New York’s fine-dining landscape long before Nordic cuisine became fashionable. Discreetly located near Central Park, it has always

avored quiet confidence over spectacle. Today, under Executive Chef Emma Bengtsson, the cooking feels calm, precise, and deeply assured.

Scandinavian technique is applied to impeccably sourced local ingredients. Fish is often gently torched to preserve moisture, rested, then finished just before service. A dish that captures the kitchen's spirit is Arctic char with dill, cucumber, and cultured cream—light, clean, and layered. Desserts are equally thoughtful, especially the apple ice cream with bitter caramel and smoked cream, one of the most memorable endings in New York dining. Lunch offers a refined experience at a more approachable price point.

Address: 65 E 55th Street, New York, NY 10022

## ***BLUE HILL AT STONE BARNS***

Opened in 2004, Blue Hill at Stone Barns sits about 50 minutes from Manhattan on a historic farm originally founded by the Rockefeller family. Under Chef and Co-Owner Dan Barber, the restaurant redefined what farm-to-table can truly mean. Menus are dictated entirely by what the farm produces that day. Even the simplest plate—the farm egg with seasonal vegetables and herbs—can be revelatory in flavor and texture. Everything except fish comes directly from the surrounding land. The dining room seats no more than 50 guests, with generous spacing, high ceilings, and a contemplative calm. The wine list is exceptional: global, intelligent, and remarkably fair, typically priced at about twice retail, with many outstanding wines available by the glass. Reservations are difficult; emailing five to six weeks in advance and remaining flexible with timing helps. Arriving early to walk the farm is an essential part of the experience.

Address: 630 Bedford Road, Pocantico Hills, NY 10591

## ***IL POSTINO***

Since 1982, Il Postino has quietly delivered classic Italian cuisine in New York, without fusion or unnecessary interpretation. Under Executive Chef Luigi Russo, the food remains confident, honest, and unmistakably Italian. My must-order dish is the seared yellowfin tuna with fries—lightly cooked, thinly sliced, and almost steak-like in texture. It is, without exaggeration, one of the best tuna dishes I have eaten anywhere. When in season, lightly steamed asparagus with butter makes the perfect companion. Finish with tiramisu, ideally with a small glass of Amaretto. Unlike many high-end restaurants, Il Postino allows you to build your own four-course Italian menu—starter, pasta, fish, dessert—an increasingly rare pleasure.

Address: 133 E 61st Street, New York, NY 10065

## ***JUNGSIK***

Jungsik opened in New York in 2011 and quickly rose to two Michelin stars. Led by Chef-Owner Jungsik Yim, it presents Korean cuisine through a modern, Western-inflected lens that feels refined and accessible. These are not traditional Korean dishes as you would find in Seoul, but thoughtful reinterpretations. A standout is the octopus with gochujang and seasonal garnishes, where balance and depth replace overt heat. Two tasting menus are available, one more extensive than the other, and the kitchen is happy to adapt dishes to personal preferences. The wine list is strong and well matched to the cuisine.

Address: 2 Harrison Street, New York, NY 10013

## ***LE BERNARDIN***

Originally opened in Paris in 1972 and arriving in New York in 1986, Le Bernardin has become one of the city's defining culinary institutions. Under Executive Chef Eric Ripert, it continues to set the benchmark for seafood at the highest level. The iconic thinly pounded yellowfin tuna with foie gras and chives remains a masterclass in restraint. Lunch is particularly rewarding—relaxed, elegant, and far more accessible than dinner. Despite holding three Michelin stars for decades, the service is warm and entirely free of pretension.

Address: 155 W 51st Street, New York, NY 10019

## ***MAREA***

Opened in 2009 on Central Park South, Marea quickly established itself as a reference point for Italian seafood in New York. Today, even after losing its stars, under Executive Chef Lauren DeSteno, it still maintains a distinctly Roman sensibility. The defining dish is fusilli with red wine-braised octopus and bone marrow—rich, intense, and unapologetically Italian. In autumn, white-truffle dishes appear, particularly egg-based plates that elevate the menu further. Expensive, yes, but consistently rewarding. The bar is an excellent place to begin the evening.

Address: 240 Central Park South, New York, NY 10019

## ***NOBU DOWNTOWN***

Nobu arrived in New York in 1994, founded by Chef Nobu Matsuhisa, and helped define modern Japanese dining outside Japan. The Downtown location remains the most authentic

expression of the brand. Recently reopened in a historic building, the upstairs space—with its dramatic ceiling height—is the place to be. The timeless black cod with miso remains flawless decades on. The menu encourages sharing, and lingering at the bar is part of the experience; the downstairs dining room is more cramped and best avoided if possible.

Address: 195 Broadway, New York, NY 10007

## ***PER SE***

Per Se opened in 2004 as Thomas Keller's New York counterpart to The French Laundry. Overlooking Central Park from Columbus Circle, it remains one of the city's most formal and exacting dining rooms. A signature dish, "Oysters and Pearls"—oysters with tapioca, caviar, and beurre blanc—has become inseparable from Keller's legacy. Two tasting menus are offered, one vegetarian. Reservations are difficult and prices are high, but Per Se continues to serve as a benchmark for American fine dining.

Address: 10 Columbus Circle, New York, NY 10019

## ***THE MODERN***

Opened in 2005 alongside MoMA's expansion, The Modern is led by Executive Chef Thomas Allan and offers one of New York's most polished dining experiences. A defining dish is the soft-boiled egg with caviar, deceptively simple and perfectly judged. When available, the roasted halibut is also excellent. Overlooking the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden, the dining room is serene, acoustically perfect, and impeccably run. The Kitchen Table provides a more intimate, chef-driven experience.

Address: 9 W 53rd Street, New York, NY 10019

## ***UNION SQUARE CAFE***

First opened in 1985, Union Square Cafe remains a cornerstone of New York hospitality. After reopening in 2017 in a brighter, more spacious corner location, it continues under Chef Lena Ciardullo. The roasted chicken with bread salad is still a signature—simple, generous, and consistently excellent. Reservations are notoriously difficult, but arriving mid-afternoon or dining at the bar often works. This is a restaurant built on warmth, familiarity, and return visits rather than spectacle.

Address: 101 E 19th Street, New York, NY 10003

[Back to TOP](#)



## **NICE AND RIVIERA**

The south of France is a dreamy coastal strip with breathtaking towns and beautiful cities. Whether to the east or west of Nice, there are incredible views, delicious restaurants and impressive hotels. Here, the French Riviera consists of intriguing small towns and villages right up to the Italian border. Rich families from both France and elsewhere spend an amazing time in these villages for a couple of months every year. Nice is a truly unforgettable destination thanks to its turquoise blue sea, sandy beaches, elegant streets, delicious food and vibrant nightlife, so make sure you start your French Riviera tour from there. And with the city on the Mediterranean, the cold weather of northern France is nowhere to be found here. And, as I noted above, there's beauty all around the area: Head out 50 km in either direction from Nice's airport and you're bound to find somewhere beautiful. The only issue is there's never enough time to truly experience every single town on the French Riviera, but if you can, do try and take in Cap Ferrat, Villefrenche, Monaco, Menton, Saint-Paul-de- Vence, Grasse, Antibes and Cannes.

## ***LA PETITE MAISON***

My favorite restaurant in Nice is La Petite Maison. Foodies will know it's an amazing restaurant. It has given franchises, with branches in London, Dubai, Beirut and Istanbul, but the one in Nice is the original. The passionate Madame Nicole opened La Petite Maison, and she now runs it with her daughter and sister. I've had the chance to go to a few La Petite Maisons around the world; they're all nice, but the one in Nice is something else, especially as Madame Nicole's presence in the restaurant creates a different kind of spirit. Another good aspect of the restaurant is that they have live music on Friday and Saturday nights from 10:30 p.m. to midnight. Thankfully, though, it's not noisy or disturbing at all. There are no mics or speakers – just a couple of musicians making music between the tables. Whatever you do, take some time to dine at La Petite Maison when you're in Nice. And if you're going there for lunch, you can enjoy the terrace; the terrace is also a good choice for dinner on warm summer nights.

## ***LA VOILE D'OR***

Head out east from Nice, and you'll soon come to Cap Ferrat, where my favorite hotel is La Voile d'Or, a small place by the sea. Now, most beaches in the area are public, but La Voile d'Or's visitors can get exclusive access to the hotel's beach, meaning it's never that crowded. And because the wind typically blows from the coast to the sea, the water is always brilliant. The hotel's restaurant, meanwhile, is also a favorite of mine.

## ***LA MÈRE GERMAIN***

Along the coastal strip, Villefrenche-sur-Mer comes after Cap Ferrat. Villefrenche is a stunningly beautiful village with an amazing coastline and numerous restaurants. In fact, Villefrenche is a modern fishing village, meaning the Côte d'Azur's best fish are in town. My favorite restaurant here is La Mère Germain (est. 1938), which has delicious food and wonderful service. Run by the founding family's fourth generation, La Mère Germain is growing day by day – by the time they reach their centennial in 2038, they might have taken up the whole coastline. While La Mère Germain is always full of people waiting to get in, the neighboring restaurants are mostly empty. The establishment owes this success to its two bosses, who happen to be brothers as well. At La Mère Germain, they do all the jobs without letting their egos get in the way. After Villefrenche-sur-Mer, our next stop is the Principality of Monaco. It's a small country, but you can also think of it as a large company with a king as its CEO. Invest in a good real estate opportunity and say goodbye to income tax with a Monaco passport – a great way to head to Europe or the U.S. with ease if your present passport doesn't afford you such an opportunity.

## ***HOTEL DE PARIS***

It's no surprise that there are many restaurants in this grandiose country. You're spoiled for choice, but the best one is Hôtel de Paris, which boasts more than a few stars. Alain Ducasse is on the scene with his restaurant, Le Louis XV, for those willing to part with a pretty penny by the end of the night. You even have a chance to see the great man himself often at this restaurant, as well as the newest dishes and the oldest tasting

menu. If you want to come here and pay “less,” the place is also open at noon. But if you’re not in the habit of spending money at a three-starred restaurant, Café de Paris, right across from Le Louis XV offers good fare for a tenth of the cost. Just don’t order Café de Paris steak, because there isn’t any! They removed it from the menu a long time ago, but apparently, the news hasn’t traveled far because there’s always at least one person at every table that wants to order it. As for me, I can’t really fathom why they don’t include such a popular dish on their menu. And here’s another useful tip for Monaco: carry your passport with you if you want to cheer up with a little bit of wine and fun at the casino.

## ***HOSTELLERIE JEROME***

La Turbie is a very small beautiful village uphill from the coast. There is a famous little hotel there with an extraordinary restaurant: Hostellerie Jerome. You should either visit La Turbie for a few hours and have lunch at Jerome and go back. But be careful with the wine, as the wine list is extraordinary and tempting. Or, go there for dinner and indulge yourself to the wine list with the extraordinary food and sleep at the hotel after dinner. Next morning enjoy a Michelin star breakfast at the hotel or a smaller one at one of the beautiful cafes of the village square. You will be happy either way to enjoy some countryside silence after the buzz of Cote d’Azur.

## ***MIRAZUR***

The last stop before Italy is Menton, the home of the world’s

best restaurants, Mirazur. Heading up the restaurant is an Argentine chef who cooks French dishes. If you want ironed cotton tablecloths like me, they'll immediately bring one. If you don't, you'll be eating at a wooden table. And given the location, you won't be surprised to hear that it has an unreal view. Mirazur was selected as the best restaurant in the world this year.

## ***LA FIGUIER DU SAINT ESPRIT***

Back in the other direction, to the west of Nice, is Antibes. Le Figurier du Saint Esprit is a restaurant managed by Christian Morisset, a famous mustachioed chef who has worked in two or three Michelin-starred restaurants along the Côte d'Azur. After Morisset decided to start his own business two years ago, he established this restaurant in a village called Saint Esprit, serving up delicious French meals and high-quality wine. Morisset himself is in the kitchen while his wife organizes the service. And to allow diners to know what is happening in the kitchen, he put up a big-screen television on the wall for the customers. There's so much going on in the kitchen come rush hour that you'll hardly talk to those at your table. Consciously, though, he decided to keep this place at a single star, although that obviously doesn't mean it is short on any quality. The restaurant was built around a fig tree located in the very middle – the very fig tree after which the restaurant is named (and from which you can still eat if you so desire). French restaurants are generally closed on Sundays and Mondays, but Christian Morisset opens on those days, closing only on Tuesdays. Though perhaps less well-known than other places along the French Riviera, Le Figurier du Saint Esprit is certainly worth a trip thanks to its delicious food and great atmosphere.

## ***CANNES***

Back on the road, it's time to head to Cannes – the summer playground for the rich. Come Easter, houses that sit empty for six months of the year start to fill up once more. And by July or August, it's nearly impossible to walk on the street. It's also so crowded that the beaches are full, regardless of the time of day, meaning that if your hotel's own private beach is full, there will most certainly be no room at the public beach. The best time to come here, accordingly, is in September and October. By fall, however, the restaurants have become more spoiled, and the waiters are more than a little tired. I reckon the best time to come is at the beginning of June, right after the Cannes Film Festival. More than that, you can even see that Turkish is competing with Russian in its quest to become the second language on the streets of Cannes if you wait for school to end before coming.

### ***LE PARK 45***

My favorite restaurant in Cannes is Le Park 45, which has one Michelin star at a location somewhat removed from the street noise. Le Park 45 also has a head waiter who is French but who spent his childhood in Istanbul, so you'll love hearing him speak Turkish if you happen to know it. And best of all, if you have a good wine with you, bring it along, as you'll only have to pay a small corkage fee. And while you're in Cannes, make sure you have a few snacks and a glass of wine on the terrace of the Carlton in the afternoon.

## ***COLOMBE D'OR***

Continuing a bit more to the west toward the mountains, we arrive at Saint-Paul-de-Vence to eat at Colombe d'Or. Tables with white tablecloths in the garden are at your service when the weather's nice. But it's not a problem if it starts to rain while you're eating, as there are tables available inside as well.

## ***CHATEAU SAINT MARTIN***

In Saint-Paul-de-Vence there is a hotel called Château Saint Martin. Beautiful and expensive, it's not a place that you need to stay in, but it is a must in terms of lunch or dinner. For me, it's a place imbued with special meaning, as I celebrated my 40th birthday in this hotel, as well as my 60th. If all goes well, I hope to celebrate my 80th here as well, and maybe even my 100th!

## ***VIEUX NICE***

If you're in Nice on a Sunday, definitely visit a marketplace. Skip the hotel breakfast and head for Vieux Nice, the old center where the town was formed a thousand years ago. Covered with stone buildings, there's a big marketplace in the middle of buildings. The market is open seven days a week, but Sunday is the big day when farmers from nearby villages sell their fresh products, from eggs to tomatoes, mushrooms and cheese. The market opens at 8 a.m. and closes at 1 p.m., as there's nothing left by that time. Coincidentally, all Nice- Istanbul flights are after 1 p.m., so you could, theoretically, do your weekly grocery shopping in Vieux Nice, hop on a plane back to Istanbul and

enjoy fresh ingredients from the Riviera all week long. I prefer to buy cheese, zucchini blossoms, baby asparagus and mushrooms. Cafes and restaurants also abound in the marketplace, so you can dig into breakfast in one of them after a bout of shopping (although I myself prefer to pick up food and eat as I stroll the market before hitting up a cafe for coffee or tea). Whatever the case, I can't imagine being in Nice on a Sunday and not going there.

## ***Socca/PISSALADIÈRE***

One of the most enjoyable things to do while you're strolling the market is to eat Socca cooked by a middle-aged lady in the market. Socca is a type of pancake made with olive oil and chickpea flour. First, you turn the dough into a liquid and then pour it into an iron plate in a thin layer. After cooking it, you take it out, put it into a roll and serve. The specialty pizza from Nice has nothing but the olive oil in its dough, along with fried onion on top – there are no other ingredients involved. It's actually a delicious food for the poor. When in Nice, definitely try a piece of this vegetarian pizza.

[Back to TOP](#)



## OSAKA

Tokyo has pride of place in Japan, but the most important cities after the capital are Osaka and Kyoto. For people from Turkey, it's never been easier to get to Osaka, as Turkish Airlines now flies there directly. We hit up Osaka, staying in the Imperial Hotel to get a feel for both it and Kyoto. The hotel includes a sushi restaurant, a classic Japanese restaurant, as well as a Chinese restaurant – all of which are good options if you want to grab a bite on the go. We landed in Osaka no sooner than we headed to a typical Japanese restaurant called Taian.

### *TAIAN*

The sushi was good, as were the other Japanese meals on the menu. Taian only has seating for 20 at the sushi bar and 10 at the tables. Four or five sushi chefs are hard at work behind the sushi bar who, if you're lucky, will occasionally give you a few small treats if you're sitting right by them. Now, the tradition at a Japanese restaurant is as follows: When you call for a reservation, they immediately tell you about the price of their menus, and you choose your preference right at that moment. At the same time, you also indicate the ingredients that you won't eat. Thanks to this, your menu is ready when you arrive at the restaurant! What's more, everything is prepared right in front of

you. And when you ask for the wine menu, they'll just ask you to choose between white and red; now, you might think that they have separate menus for white and red, but you'll soon realize that there are just two types of wine – no lists, no menus, just two types of wine. This is mostly the case everywhere – even in three-star restaurants. Thankfully, however, Taian had a decent wine list, which meant we had a wonderful meal with wine.

## ***DOJIMA&HUMAN***

While at Taian, we started to chat with a retired Japanese surgeon at the next table. The restaurant we had lined up for the day after was really far away and, to be honest, I wasn't eager to go there. I duly asked for some restaurant advice from this gentleman, who now spends his days enjoying his retirement with his wife. I wanted a nice, normal place that the locals enjoyed – something without a Michelin star. He gave us a card with the address, in Japanese, of one of his top restaurants. Thanks to the efforts of a cab driver, we were able to reach the restaurant, a sushi place with room for a maximum of 15 people. They didn't ask about our menu choices beforehand, as most places do, but they did ask us for our preferences. We plumped into different choices of sushi, which they prepared wonderfully. It was only later that I learned the place's name: Dojima and Human.

[Back to TOP](#)



## PARIS

Paris, with its museums, architectural texture, magnificent views, and the romance it offers, is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful cities in the world. It is possible to experience the finest examples of French cuisine—recognized as one of the world’s best cuisines—at the restaurants of Paris. In this city, there are hundreds of wonderful restaurants, some included in guides and some not, some Michelin-starred and others not. And new ones are constantly being added. That’s why every trip to Paris brings along a new surprise. French cuisine ranks first among the world’s cuisines. Within Paris’s magical atmosphere, eating exquisite dishes that have turned into a true art is another privilege. Since I often travel to Paris for business, I make a point of trying new restaurants each time. My list of favorites keeps changing and growing. A few months ago, I stayed in Paris for a while, continuing my work but also taking the opportunity to dine at some great restaurants. As you know, Paris is a very frequently visited destination. It’s romantic, it has a strong culture, and of course, it is also the very heart of French cuisine—the world’s best. The culinary scene in this city is constantly evolving. I will tell you about 12 Paris restaurants. Some of them have three Michelin stars, some have one, and some have none at all; but each is a place where you can say, “I had a great meal in Paris.” Perhaps you’ve already been to these restaurants, but if you haven’t, I hope you’ll make the effort to go.

## ***ANONA***

The first restaurant I'll talk about is Anona, run by a young team led by chef Thibaut Spiwack. This Michelin one-star restaurant also holds the Green Star certification, a quality label for environmentally responsible establishments. Sustainability criteria like using seasonal and local ingredients, limiting waste and water consumption are essential for this certification. As in many French restaurants, Anona offers a lovely lunch menu—at half the price of the dinner menu. If you want a proper dinner menu here, you'll pay over €100. But at lunchtime, if you choose the three-course menu (starter, main, dessert), you can experience Anona for a very reasonable €49. The contents of this three-course menu are determined by the chef; you only specify your preferences, like meat or fish. Wine pairings are available for each dish at an additional cost. One interesting dish here is scallops. In France, fresh scallops are easily available, so I always try to eat them when I'm there. Among the starters, I also like the baby leeks served with mustard sauce. Another dish I recommend is the Corsican squid with beetroot, prepared with a hint of spice.

## ***ARPÈGE***

Arpège, where the famous chef Alain Passard has been creating wonders for nearly 25 years, is a beautiful Paris restaurant with three Michelin stars. Passard also considers himself a gardener, since all the vegetables and fruits he uses are grown in his own garden just outside the city. Strangely enough, despite this, the restaurant does not have a Michelin Green Star. Other ingredients—meat, poultry, fish, cheese—are sourced from the same suppliers he has worked with for years, all organic and additive-free. This way, he offers an organic

menu. If you choose the vegetarian menu, dessert might be a crème brûlée made with milk and eggs. If you opt for the vegan menu, you'll get a fruit platter with exotic fruits from his garden. It's remarkable that Passard, now nearly 70, still works in the kitchen himself. Many chefs of his caliber expand their brands, opening restaurants in London, Las Vegas, New York, or Dubai, handing them to their protégés while only occasionally checking the menus. Passard has chosen not to follow this path; he runs only this one restaurant, and when I visited the kitchen, he was personally cooking. Don't miss Arpège—it's a fantastic dining experience. And if you want it to be more affordable, as with all two- and three-star Paris restaurants, I recommend going at lunchtime.

## ***AUBERGE BRESSANE***

Some restaurants make me wish I lived upstairs so I could eat there every day. Auberge Bressane is one of those places. Run by chef Jean-Pierre Vullin, this restaurant's cuisine is influenced by France's western coast and a touch of Burgundy, which is evident from the wine list: very few Bordeaux wines but plenty from Burgundy. It's a white-tablecloth restaurant with comfortable seating and reasonable prices. With a capacity of 30–40, it expands in summer with outdoor seating. It's always fully booked at lunch and dinner, so reservations are essential. One of my favorite things here is the soufflé. When you order it, they bring you a beautifully puffed cheese soufflé, which is enough to satisfy your starter needs. At dessert, there are 8–10 varieties of sweet soufflés (chocolate, almond, vanilla, etc.), but they're too sweet for me. In truffle season, I love the truffle pasta: you'll want to wipe up the sauce with a piece of baguette. They also offer excellent local fish, sometimes daily specials not on the menu. Tables are usually for 6–8 people, so a group of 10 would have to split. The waiters all speak English, and there's an English menu. For traditional western French cuisine, Auberge Bressane is a delight.

## ***AUGUSTE***

Auguste is a Michelin one-star restaurant offering a wide variety of dishes, with a focus on seafood. Chef Gael Orieux has also written cookbooks. His *Cuisiner la mer* features 90 seafood recipes (seabass, mackerel, whiting, abalone, oysters, prawns, etc.), while his *Cuisiner la terre* covers vegetables and fruits with 80 recipes. At his restaurant, he serves dishes from both books. I usually go for the crayfish and seabass—they're always prepared perfectly. The monkfish, however, was slightly overcooked the last time I had it, so I'm hesitant to recommend it. As with other starred restaurants, lunch is more affordable. Salads are also excellent. Start with one, have crayfish, then your fish. Don't forget the cheese platter: you can even request only goat cheeses or only blue cheeses. For dessert, both the *crème brûlée* and the chocolate soufflé are superb—the latter made with very dark chocolate and served with cream, and optionally ice cream. With its relatively moderate prices, Auguste is one of the restaurants I never miss in Paris.

## ***BENOIT***

Founded in 1912 as a bistro by Benoit Matray, Benoit remained a family business until 2005, when Alain Ducasse's *Maison Ducasse* acquired it. Ducasse has preserved its spirit while adding his touch. It's a restaurant where you can enjoy reasonably priced lunches and dinners. Alongside *à la carte* options, they also offer a fast lunch menu: starter + main, or main + dessert, designed to be finished within an hour. It's popular with French businesspeople at lunch and with women meeting after shopping. Apart from Ducasse's profiteroles, there are other signature dishes under his name. Centrally located and convenient, Benoit remains a charming spot.

## ***BRIGITTE***

Brigitte is the central France version of Auberge Bressane. Brigitte is almost 100 years old, with a simple menu of classic French dishes like onion soup. The menu always includes vegetables, while fish depends on the daily catch. You may have scallops as a starter and monkfish sauté as the main—both excellent. A sweet wine at only €7 a glass is remarkably cheap, since the bottle costs €25 wholesale, and the restaurant sells it at €29. I found this very fair. Brigitte is a great value-for-money option for lunch or dinner.

## ***DOKI DOKI***

Hand rolls occupy a unique and revered place in Japanese cuisine. They must be crafted fresh and eaten the moment they're made. Any delay—whether in the journey from the kitchen, a pause at the bar, or a wait at your table—dulls the experience entirely. A perfect hand roll balances three contrasting sensations: warm rice, cold seafood, and crisp seaweed. The first bite should offer a satisfying crunch from the nori, followed by the clean, cool flavor of the seafood and the comforting warmth of the rice. When time interferes, that delicate harmony collapses—the rice cools, the seafood warms, and the seaweed, once brittle and fragrant, turns soft and lifeless. The ritual of eating a hand roll is intimate and immediate. Ideally, you sit at the counter, where the chef prepares and passes each roll across the counter seconds before you take a bite. It's a fleeting, almost ceremonial exchange between chef and guest, rooted in respect for freshness and precision. In Paris, a small chain of four restaurants has embraced this philosophy with remarkable fidelity. Though their menus also include soups, small plates, nigiri, chirashi,

and a few desserts, hand rolls are the centerpiece—the reason to come. Diners can order a set of six, served sequentially, each arriving roughly every five minutes. The next roll is not made until the previous one has been eaten, preserving the perfect temperature and texture balance. The best hand rolls, contrary to popular belief, are cylindrical rather than cone-shaped. The cone form tends to lose its crunch as you reach the end, while a proper cylindrical roll—about the length of a cigarette and the thickness of a cigar—maintains its structure from the first bite to the last. Three or four bites are all it should take. This meticulous approach defines Doki Doki, whose four Paris locations have become a quiet sensation among sushi lovers. Although the concept traces its origins to the United States, the Paris outposts elevate the craft to an art form. Each roll arrives as it should—warm, cool, crisp, and gone in a few unforgettable bites. The ambiance at Doki Doki perfectly complements the precision of its cuisine. Each location follows a minimalist aesthetic—clean lines, warm wood, soft lighting, and an unspoken calm that lets the focus remain on the food. The counter is the heart of the space: sleek and narrow, with chefs moving quietly and efficiently behind it, assembling each roll with a kind of restrained choreography. There's no clutter, no unnecessary motion—just the rhythm of rice, seaweed, and fish meeting in perfect proportion. Seats are few, which is deliberate. The experience is meant to feel personal, almost private. Conversations tend to fade into murmurs as diners wait for their next roll, watching the chef's hands rather than their phones. The soundscape is subtle—perhaps the quiet hiss of the rice pot, the soft rustle of nori, and a trace of ambient jazz or Japanese lo-fi humming in the background. Clientele ranges from local Parisians who have adopted the place as a quiet lunch refuge to visiting food enthusiasts who've heard whispers of its excellence. Many discover it by chance, others make a pilgrimage after hearing that it's the place in Paris to experience the hand roll properly—fresh, fleeting, and unforgettable. In a

city defined by its devotion to dining, Doki Doki stands apart. Paris has long celebrated the long lunch, the tasting menu, and the art of lingering over food. Yet here, the experience is the opposite—immediate, ephemeral, and focused. Each hand roll lasts barely a minute, but in that minute, everything matters: timing, texture, temperature, and technique. It's a kind of culinary haiku—short, precise, and deeply satisfying. And perhaps that's why, in the city of long meals, this briefest of Japanese rituals feels so perfectly at home.

## ***DIVELLEC***

This one-star Michelin restaurant is bright and elegant, with white tablecloths, comfortable chairs, and reasonable prices. Located centrally on a corner, it has two dining rooms: one seating 20 and the other 10. At lunch, only the larger room is open, offering a view of the street; in the evening, both are open. It's relaxed, with enough space between tables for easy conversation. The menu is à la carte, and prices are moderate despite the quality. They serve only seafood and vegetables: scallops, crayfish, sole, sashimi of tuna, salmon, or seabass, and even a tuna tartare version of the French classic steak tartare. A delightful place for fresh, well-prepared seafood.

## ***KEI***

Kei, a three-Michelin-star restaurant, is run by Kei Kobayashi, a Japanese-born but French-raised chef who cooks exclusively French cuisine. There is no Japanese influence. It's a very elegant, 20-seat restaurant with white tablecloths and comfortable chairs. Once you specify your meat or fish preferences, the menu is served—accompanied by amuse-

bouches before and after the main courses. As in other three-star restaurants, they send you home with a small treat package. Intimate, refined, and absolutely top-tier.

## ***LE PUR***

Located inside the Park Hyatt hotel, Le Pur has one Michelin star. It's closed on Sundays and serves only dinner. The food is light, the service is wide-ranging, and the prices are reasonable for its quality. On earlier visits, I found the wine program lacking, but recently I noticed two female sommeliers had joined. They created brilliant wine pairings—even adapting spontaneously when we replaced the meat dishes with fish. Each explained the wines in detail, introducing me to labels I hadn't known before. Le Pur passed my sommelier test with flying colors.

## ***MONSIEUR BLUE***

This restaurant is lively, with all age groups, background music, a big bar, and a view of the Eiffel Tower. You can dine in the garden in summer or inside in winter. I've been here a few times for business dinners and enjoyed it. There are two dinner seatings: 7:30 and 9:30. If you want a quick meal, book the first; if you want to continue into the night with drinks and music, choose the second. As the evening goes on, the music livens up, the place turns into a quasi-nightclub, with stylish people and sometimes celebrities creating an energetic atmosphere. Unlike stiff French restaurants, Monsieur Blue offers fun and vibrance. I once brought my daughter and her friends here for the second seating—they loved it and stayed for hours without boredom. It's not a place for quiet fine dining, but for lively, fun evenings with an Eiffel Tower view at reasonable prices.

## ***NANAUMI***

Nanaumi is a genuine Japanese restaurant, run by a Japanese chef and two Japanese women handling service. I usually eat eel at Japanese places. The eel's skin is removed, it's cut into pieces, seasoned, and cooked in a special sauce that is replenished daily for years, gaining refinement over time. If a restaurant has been around 20 years, its sauce is also 20 years old. Each restaurant's sauce is unique. At Nanaumi, the eel and its sauce were fantastic. The eel's taste took the lead, with the sauce in the background—just as I like it. Highly recommended.

## ***YOSHINORI***

I stumbled upon Yoshinori by chance. Thinking it was a Japanese restaurant, I went in—but it turned out to be a French restaurant with Japanese influences. Located in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, in a street filled with small Japanese restaurants (some Michelin-listed), Yoshinori is run entirely by chef Yoshinori Morié. He does everything: takes orders, cooks, serves, and explains the dishes. With only 12 seats (three 4-person tables), he has managed to earn a Michelin star. There's no fixed menu—he prepares whatever he feels like, based on your meat/fish preferences given at reservation. The open kitchen lets you watch him work, and though there are no tablecloths, the chairs are comfortable and the atmosphere is cozy. Centrally located and utterly unique.

## ***THREE MICHELIN STARS BURN A HOLE IN YOUR WALLET***

Restaurants aiming for three Michelin stars usually serve amuse-bouches at the beginning, end, and when bidding farewell. Some win the third star, others don't—but without such gestures, they have no chance. At three-star restaurants, dinner for two costs at least €500, excluding wine. With wine, it can climb much higher. I believe these prices are exaggerated, and there's no need to frequent such places regularly.

## ***WHY IS A WIDE WINE LIST GOOD?***

A broad wine list has many advantages. If you're knowledgeable, you make your own choice. But if there's a skilled sommelier, you can learn something new. You might discover an unusual wine at a reasonable price through their suggestions, broadening your horizons. To achieve this, a sommelier should ideally have access to at least 1,000 wines. In Turkey, that's rare. But in Paris, the restaurants I've called "good wine list places" have cellars with at least 2,000 bottles. In fact, the economic value of such a cellar may exceed the restaurant itself.

[Back to TOP](#)



## **RIO**

Rio de Janeiro is one of the most enticing destinations in South America; it's also the city that has stolen my heart many times. But with its beautiful beaches, friendly people and surprising restaurants, I'm sure it would steal your heart too. Rio obviously never gets particularly cold, but it's probably best to go there between November and March. When I first went to Rio three decades ago, the place had a lot of economic problems, like inflation and currency devaluation, that also fomented chaos on the streets. Everyone warned us to be careful while walking outside; we took the advice to heart and generally steered clear of the streets. Years later, I decided to go to Rio with my daughter as we were planning to go; however, I learned that one of my university friends had since moved there, settling down after marrying a Brazilian woman. Now the owner of a tourism agency, he related his lovely story of how he ended up in Brazil. My friend told his family that he wanted to go on holiday to South America after graduation. His family gave his assent and off he went. But when the time came to return, he found he just couldn't. "A couple of weeks aren't enough for Brazil, and besides, this place is really cheap," he said to himself. "I could stay here another month with the money you gave me." My friend duly asked for a bit more time from his family. But when the time came to leave again, he again found that he just couldn't bring himself to return. This time, he decided to stay for good. He eventually got married and established his own business. He

also explained the “danger” of staying too long: “If you stay here for a week, you end up deciding to come here again. If you stay here for two weeks, you’ll come here every year. And if you stay here for three weeks, you never go back again.” Truer words have never been spoken! It was wonderful to go back to Rio after 20 years. Everything has changed: You can safely walk in the streets, and the people are cheerful and more prosperous. At the hotel, they told us to avoid walking in the street with our mobile phones in our hands, but I couldn’t see anyone on the street without a phone in their hand. Despite the long flight, Rio de Janeiro has enchanted me once again, meaning I’m sure to return once again. Ultimately, we headed to Rio in February, which allowed us to enjoy the 35-degree weather, the sea and, of course, some delicious meals. Thanks to our summer holiday, we managed to arrive back in the Northern Hemisphere fresh for spring! One of the most beautiful things of Rio is, of course, the food and the restaurants. So allow me to run the rule over 10 restaurants and two hotels in Rio – organized, as always, alphabetically. And if you happen to visit them yourself, don’t hesitate to drop a line.

## ***CIPRIANI***

Rio boasts two luxury hotels, one of which is the Copacabana Palace, which is located in a historical building across from the famous beach of the same name. The hotel’s restaurant, meanwhile, is the Cipriani, which is like a lot of Ciprianis around the world. The restaurant, which can sit between 80 and 100, serves Italian cuisine that uses local fresh vegetables and fish. People generally want to have meat when they go to Brazil, but eating vegetables, fish, or pasta is another good option. But while the fare is good, Cipriani’s wine selection is fairly limited. Still, if you’re staying at the Copacabana, I highly recommend

you give the Cipriani a try. But even if you're not staying at the hotel, this is still a great chance to dine at a beautiful restaurant.

## ***ESPLANADA GRILL***

Esplanada Grill is surrounded by a number of fancy boutiques, offering you a chance to people-watch as the more elegant of Rio's women stop by for a break after a bout of shopping. Intent on not gaining weight, most of these women opt merely for some salad and water, but there's no stopping the assorted businessmen at the grill from digging into meat and fresh fish. Esplanada also has great garnitures and pasta.

Because of the Brazilian population's multicultural roots, it's possible to find European traces in the country's cuisine. One thing that was really surprising to me, however, was Brazilians' ability to endlessly pack away so much meat and fish. In truth, you hardly enjoy the taste of food after you get full, yet they're used to – and, indeed, enjoy – consuming vast quantities of meat and fish at a late hour. If you want to go to all the restaurants I've listed here, you'd need to stay in Rio for at least a week. If you have far less time, at least make your way to Satyricon, Esplanada and Rio de Canerio.

## ***FASANO***

The Fasano is the best hotel in Ipanema. The place also has a lovely fish restaurant serving small-portioned dishes and pasta for lunch and dinner. Fasano has a separate bar, which helps give it a bit of the atmosphere of a nightclub. Now, they might be

used to big portions of meat in South America, but as tourists, it's probably best to skip such a huge smorgasbord. If you have a big lunch, it's probably better to go light on dinner or vice versa (especially as they have their evening meals at 11 p.m., a time when I'm usually getting ready to sleep). Accordingly, lunches are a far more suitable alternative, starting at 2 p.m. and continuing until 5. You can get your daily amount of calories between these hours, allowing you to skip a big dinner in favor of a light bite instead.

## ***MARIUS***

Marius is a famous restaurant in Rio that, like Fogo de Chão, also uses the green/red-card system. Instead of meat, however, they will keep serving you a vast array of fish and seafood until you flip your card to the red side. Marius has a wide-ranging dessert menu as well. The price for a meat-based meal at Marius is about 200 TL, while it's about 300 TL for a fish meal, although wine is not included, so the cost may be a bit higher depending on the quality of the wine you choose.

## ***SATYRICON***

The fish restaurant Satyricon is my favorite restaurant in Rio. The restaurant's system took me back to my childhood and Urcan Restaurant in Saryyer, where you would choose a fresh fish for your meal before enjoying a green salad as you waited for your meal. When a group of four of us went to Satyricon, we chose a big fish that was big enough for six people, along with a crayfish for each of us. Before the fish came, we enjoyed a salad, as well

as a few starters. Then came the special part: the fish served as a whole. We topped everything off with a dessert. But perhaps the best part about Satyricon is its broad wine menu; as for us, we chose a good Chilean wine, even ordering a second bottle.

## ***RIO DE CENARIO***

Rio de Cenario is actually a dance studio, meaning music and dance provide an accompanying soundtrack at this restaurant, which is located inside a century-old, high-ceilinged building. An orchestra featuring a group of eight to ten, including two women soloists, takes the stage between 9 and 11 p.m. You can spend the night dancing in a wonderful historical building; we, for one, had hours of enjoyment in the company of French champagne.

## ***SUDBRACK***

Sudbrack is a boutique fusion restaurant that was established by Roberta Sudbrack, a person who evidently enjoys cooking. Sudbrack has worked in top restaurants overseas; upon her return to Brazil, she applied the techniques she learned to Brazilian cuisine. The restaurant seats 40 people on two stories, while there are 10 staff, most of whom are women, who work in the kitchen on the top floor. Sudbrack brings six or seven different portions from its gastronomical menu. While there, my daughter and I went for fish. If they ever get around to awarding a Michelin star to a Brazilian restaurant, Sudbrack will be the first to get it. The prices might be a bit on the high side, but the wine selection is remarkable. Note, however, that the place isn't really suited for lunch as it's usually quite empty at that time.

[Back to TOP](#)



## ROME

### ***DAL BOLOGNESE***

The second cheapest restaurant on the list, Dal Bolognese has been serving up typical Italian fare on Piazza del Poppolo for almost 70 or 80 years. You can eat inside, but it's better to go outside when the weather is nice. And come October, November or December, the smell of white truffles pervades Dal Bolognese, but if you go at any other time, it's impossible to find the delicious fungi (as is the case with porcini mushrooms). Whatever you do, give these mushrooms a try if you go right in season. Like many other Italian restaurants, the seats are a bit crowded, so you might have difficulty talking to the rest of your company. If you keep the wine intake down, a meal at Dal Bolognese will probably set you back about 60 or 70 euros. Reservations, meanwhile, are not required for lunch.

## ***LE JARDIN DE RUSSIE***

I'm not talking about hotels today, but I can't help but mention Hotel de Russie, one of my favorite hotels in the Eternal City. Hotel de Russie belongs to Rocco Forte, a brand of a British hotel group. Like the others in the chain, it is a boutique hotel. More than that, it's the best place for accommodation in Rome. The building is surrounded by a courtyard or, you could say, a big, layered garden. There is a bar on the ground floor of the garden, while the top floor is used as a restaurant called Le Jardin de Russie. Rome's weather is nice during six months of the year, so it's a real treat to enjoy a drink outside in the garden come summer. The restaurant has a 60-person capacity, while the accompanying café has a 100-person capacity. The place, run by Fulvio Pierangelini, is a hit with both locals and tourists for lunch and dinner. (Lunch, you will guess, would be absolutely perfect in the garden in summer.) Le Jardin de Russie serves traditional Italian food alongside a wide-ranging wine menu for an affordable price. Even if I don't stay in the Hotel de Russie, I also come to the restaurant for a meal. A meal here will set you back about 80 or 90 euros.

## ***LA PERGOLA***

Our last restaurant is La Pergola, which is well-known by tourists. For me, it is the best restaurant in the Italian capital. The restaurant is located near the Vatican, inside the Waldorf Astoria Cavalieri Hotel. Le Pergola, which has a German chef named Heinz Beck, is the only restaurant in Rome with three Michelin stars, meaning it typically draws rich tourists. Given such elegance, it's no surprise that you should try to make a

reservation a couple of months ahead of time. You can enjoy traditional Italian dishes at this magnificent restaurant, but why don't you experience Beck's special gastronomical menu for 200 euros, excluding wine. But whatever you eat, the food is delicious, especially the gnocchi and cheese. Le Pergola is open every day except Sunday and Monday, while it also closes its doors in January and August. The restaurant's wine cellar is also bursting at the seams, with 50,000 different types of wines, making it one of the biggest in the country alongside Enoteca Pinchiorri in Florence. This means that you'll need to spend a long time choosing a wine, although you can download the wine list ahead of time to help you make a decision.

[Back to TOP](#)



## SAN FRANCISCO

San Francisco is a charming city — although many of us already knew that from the old TV series “The Streets of San Francisco,” which introduced us to the city’s steep streets, trams and action-packed life. The city is home to one of the United States’ most iconic symbols, the Golden Gate Bridge. And with its two suspension bridges — the two-story, 7,180-meter San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge also crosses the body of water— San Francisco is indeed very beautiful; what’s more, its opportunities to wine and dine will please even those who are difficult to please. Located on the Northern Californian coast, San Francisco is a city that is famous for the Golden Gate Bridge, which bears a striking resemblance to the bridges that cross the Bosphorus. Known as the “Red Bridge” thanks to its color, the Golden Gate was opened in 1937. But that’s not the only thing that San Francisco and Istanbul have in common, as the existence of an opposite shore also makes the Californian city feel like home. San Fran, in the end, is like Istanbul’s European side, boasting long and lovely walking paths along the shore. With the two bridges, as well as a tunnel for trains, San Francisco offers a wonderful transportation system consisting of trains, trams, buses and metros that makes it one of the few American cities in which you can comfortably live without owning a car. The city also boasts a moderate climate; even on the coldest winter night, the temperature doesn’t drop below 10 degrees.

And more importantly, even on the hottest summer day, the mercury hardly pushes past 28 degrees Celsius. In terms of the economy, San Francisco is the birthplace of global brands like Apple, Uber, Facebook, Google, Instagram and many others. And because these companies rake in revenues and pay their employees a handsome wage, San Francisco has grown rich — which is why it's no surprise that SF is home to plenty of wonderful restaurants. The city has a number of restaurants with three Michelin stars, but these are naturally fairly expensive places. There are also many great restaurants located just outside the city center.

## ***ATELIER CRENN***

San Francisco's best restaurant is Atelier Crenn. They serve just 20, but a full 10 people are in the kitchen cooking! And when you add in the wait staff and people behind the bar, there's a restaurant employee for every customer. Atelier Crenn, which has three Michelin stars, is located on the left side of an apartment building's entrance. Bar Crenn occupies the other side of the entrance. On the bar side, the menu is restricted to wine and champagne; they offer small plates of food as well, mind you, although it's wider than the wine and champagne on offer at the adjacent restaurant. Atelier Crenn is the abode of the French-born Dominique Crenn, who became an inspiration to women chefs everywhere after becoming the first and, so far, the only woman to acquire three Michelin stars in the United States — a fantastic achievement in a male-dominated environment. She was also named the best female chef in the World by the World's 50 Best Restaurants; however, she did not accept to get the title as it was gender-based. After beginning her career in San Francisco in 1988, Crenn opted to open Atelier Crenn in 2011.

In no time at all, she earned herself a Michelin star, along with a second one in short order. In 2018, Crenn grabbed another Michelin star — only to be hit by breast cancer soon thereafter. It goes without saying that I wish Crenn, who is currently focusing on her treatment, the speediest of recoveries. As for the restaurant, the system that Crenn has instituted at the restaurant and bar works like such clockwork that even if she's not there, things still come off without a hitch. Crenn also has another restaurant in the area, the one-Michelin-star Petit Crenn, which serves only traditional French dishes.

## ***CHEZ PANISSE***

On the other side of the bridge in Berkeley, there's Chez Panisse, which has a fine dining restaurant on the ground floor and a brasserie on the floor above. I really like the brasserie/ café more, which has reasonable prices, very tasteful decoration and a view of the main street. Chez Panisse, which was opened in 1971 by the famous chef Alice Waters, only uses fresh and local ingredients. Waters presides over both restaurants that you just have to visit and compare for yourself. For the upstairs restaurant I suggest you start with a pizza or pasta and then have the “best” grilled salmon in San Francisco. Rather than any dessert, I would go with some fruit and ice-cream.

## ***ANGLER***

An inexpensive fine-dining seafood option opened this year by the famous founder and chef of Saison, Joshua Skanes, Angler is located on the waterfront. Saison was never in my

recommended list in spite of its three Michelin stars for many years, mainly because of its very high wine multiples and arrogant services attitude. Skanes sold Saison late 2018 to another famous chef Laurent Gras and created the down-to-earth Angler. Recently California State convinced Michelin to publish the first ever California Michelin Guide in June 2019 by sponsoring Michelin for 600,000 dollars. So all the restaurant stars were updated in mid-year 2019 as opposed to its normal end-of-year schedule. To everyone's surprise, Angler got its first star 6 months after its opening and the big-nosed Saison lost one. So, go to Angler before it got its second star in 2020, and enjoy the extraordinary warm bread, daily fresh seafood, amazing desserts and its perfect Californian wine selection.

## ***BOULEVARD***

A terrific French restaurant located in the center of town, Boulevard is a place for both lunch and dinner. Getting a reservation, however, isn't always an easy task. Reserve in advance. If you are two or four share your dishes and ask the waiter to serve them as two half dishes. They charge a little for this service, but this way you may create your own tasting menu in smaller dishes. . Wine list is full of Californian gems...

## ***BIX***

I like fine dining with live piano music, plus a singer. This is exactly what Bix provides. It has a very high ceiling in a relatively historic building. The bar is very active until 8:30 pm; and with a full house of early diners plus the piano it gets really

noisy. So, reserve to dine at 8:30 when the bar gets less crowded and the singer joins the piano. The service quality is extraordinary and the food is also a match. They have a couple of starters with local caviar, which is nice and a superb tomato/burrata dish where the emphasis is on the tasty tomato. Instead of or just before the dessert, you should have a cheese plate. Bix is a hidden gem for a good dinner out. I wish you could dance too.

## ***SCOMA'S OF SAUSALITO***

The bridge closer to the center of town heads to Oakland, while the Golden Gate heads to Sausalito, a place full of summer houses and the retirement homes of the wealthy. Sausalito is a charming seaside town with unreal views of San Francisco — in this, you feel like you're on the Anatolian side gazing at Istanbul. If you happen to take a morning Uber over the Golden Gate, I suggest you dine at Scoma's of Sausalito for lunch: Just make sure that when you make your reservation, ask for a table with a view of San Francisco. An American restaurant that carries a hint of the Italian, Scoma's is big on seafood, making it the ideal place to dig into fresh local fish, crayfish, shrimp, lobster, and clams. Good though its seafood is, I suggest you skip dessert at Scoma's — that's because just across from the ferry pier is Sausalito's famous ice cream place. After that, grab the ferry, and you'll be back in San Francisco in just 20 minutes. If you happen to be visiting during a warm summer's day, you can try the same route, just in the evening. Moreover, if you trust your athleticism, you could even forego the Uber and plump for an electrical bicycle that you could ride across the Golden Gate; after your meal, you can bring the bike back with you on the ferry. On your way back to the city center, you'll pass

Fisherman's Wharf, from which you can survey the myriads of lazy sea lions stationed around Pier 39, as well as Alcatraz.

## ***TONY'S PIZZA***

Tony's Pizza might just be San Francisco's — if not the United States' — best pizza joint. There are so many different types of pizza that you could spend half your day just perusing the menu. Tony's offers pizzas from California, Naples, Sicily, Rome, Milan and New York, as well as a smorgasbord of dough options, including thin crust, super-thin crust, thick crust, gluten-free dough, white dough and whole-wheat dough. But that's not all: You can even specify how you want Tony's to cook your pizza, whether it be in a wood-fired oven, coal oven or in a gas or electric oven. Continuing on, you then get to choose how hot you want them to cook your pizza, as you can choose one of 350, 500, 600, 800 or 900 degrees. In terms of tomato sauce, you have to choose among three different options; and in terms of cheese, there are 10 different options. And don't worry if you are a vegan, as there are pizzas for you too. As for the toppings, that's a whole different ballgame entirely — if you can think of it, you can probably put it on the pizza. Of course, the taste, shape and size (you can choose anything from a one-person pizza to a dish that can feed eight) and price varies depending on your choices. If you go on a weekday afternoon, you're only likely to wait about 15 minutes, but if you go in the evening or on the weekend, you're likely to wait a full hour minimum. Thankfully, however, you needn't wait in line; when your table is ready, they send you a message on your phone and you can come and order your pizza in peace. In the meantime, you can either go for a walk or choose one of the six mostly empty restaurants nearby and munch on a salad or sip something to drink. If you want, take a menu along

with you for better study — after all, it'll take you an hour to make a decision anyway. If you're in a big group, everyone can choose a different type of pizza, allowing each person to try a different type. But to ensure that you get to eat all the pizzas hot out of the oven, emphasize that they come at different times. To truly sample all that Tony's has to offer, you'd have to come every day for a week. And hopefully, in the end, your favorite doesn't turn out to be something really outside the box; otherwise, you'll endlessly be pining for a pizza you can't find elsewhere.

## ***BOULETTES LARDER***

On the Embarcadero coastal road right in the center of town, you'll find the Ferry Building, where ferries depart from. Inside, there are a number of restaurants, one of which I really like: Boulettes Larder. Central to Boulettes Larder's success is Amaryll Schwertner, an experienced American lady chef who owns and works at the restaurant. Open from morning till evening, Boulettes Larder serves breakfast, lunch and dinner and acts as a cafe during other hours. And because it's located right on the coast, it's possible to while away the hours watching the comings and goings of the boats, especially over breakfast and lunch. It's a place I heartily recommend, what with its excellent thin-crust pizzas and wonderful properly cooked fish dishes. Before you go, though, it's best to make a reservation. And note, too, that it's closed on Sunday evenings and all day on Mondays.

## ***WATERBAR***

After exiting Boulettes Larder and taking your fill of sea air, you'll soon come across two other restaurants on the seashore on the Embarcadero. These restaurants (Epic and Waterbar) happen to have the same owner, but while the former privileges meat, the latter focuses on fish. Even so, each offers several different varieties of meat and fish that fall outside their specialty. Whether day or night, both places boast a phenomenal view of the bridge — something that is somewhat unique in the city, given that it's hard to find restaurants right on the sea. Both eateries also offer a front-row view of the San Francisco fire department's old warhorses — fire-fighting boats that are well-lit and stationed at the nearby docks. Thanks to San Francisco's generally agreeable weather, it's possible to eat outside at both restaurants six months of the year. Each opens at 11.30 in the morning, continuing on for a full 12 hours; however, if you come outside of the main meal times, you might find a more restricted menu. If you're an oyster fan, come between 3 and 5 p.m., when local offerings are just a dollar each. And two more notes: both have good bars and bartenders, and both have good transport options since they're located in the center and right by the tram. Of the two, I would prefer the Waterbar.

## ***FOREIGN CINEMA***

A place with a high ceiling, Foreign Cinema has a giant white screen on one wall that, unsurprisingly given the restaurant's name, is always playing a film. Thankfully, the films feature subtitles, while the staff also keeps the sound relatively low so that it doesn't disturb you from your meal. As you eat, the choice is up to you: You can either keep tabs on the film as you dine, or

immerse yourself in whatever movie is on offer. Foreign Cinema also offers an extensive wine list to accompany its excellent food, whether in the afternoon or the evening. That alone would have been enough, so the film is just the icing on the cake

## ***COQUETA***

If you'd like some Spanish tapas by the water you should go to Pier 3 and eat at Coqueta. You may choose between the outside area with more views of the bay and the nicer inside section with a high ceiling. It is rather budget friendly and you may pick from a very large menu. My favorites are the cheese plate, Bikini (at least 2 per person!), Gambas Negras and grilled wild mushrooms.

## ***BLACK CAT***

I would call Black Cat San Francisco's best jazz club. Apart from Sundays, an artist is performing live every night. Black Cat Jazz offers hors d'oeuvres alongside drinks, although you can also order full meals as well. In general, there are two performances each night between 7.30 p.m. and 9.30 p.m. If you want, you can grab a seat on the ground floor and watch the performance on the floor below, or you can sit at one of the tables on the bottom floor and watch the performance from there. If you're going to sit down below, however, be sure to reserve a table ahead of time. As for selecting which day to go, the performance schedules are set a month in advance, so you're free to choose what you want. One option is to grab an early dinner somewhere else before catching the second act of the evening at the club.

## ***PROTÉGÉ***

The richest companies in the world are positioned near Palo Alto which is an hour away from central San Francisco. So their well-off executives need a nice restaurant in this small and nice town. Protégé is the one; casual looking but with very serious high-quality American/International food. Don't miss to order the oysters, corn soup, octopus and the barley risotto. The desserts are presented on a trolley and are indeed very tempting. The wine list and the sommelier are top grades too. Reservations are difficult; but you may walk in, if you are not too many, to eat at the bar overlooking the open kitchen.

[Back to TOP](#)



## **SAN SEBASTIAN**

Spain has taken great strides to become a center of gastronomy over the past decade. More than a few of the country's eating establishments have risen to become some of the world's most famous restaurants, including El Bulli, which I've mentioned on previous occasions. Some of these restaurants serve surprising and extraordinary dishes, while others offer more typical Spanish fare. Still, others might serve just Catalan or classic Basque dishes. Both of these regions are located not far from France: From El Bulli in Catalonia in the northeast of Spain, it's just a 30-minute drive to France. Likewise, from San Sebastian in the Basque Country in the country's north, it's just a half-hour drive to the French border. But while you might think that you see French traces in Spanish cuisine, you would be wrong, especially in the case of Catalan cuisine, which has no French traces. In San Sebastian, I stayed in the Maria Christina Hotel – a place I highly recommend. It's in the perfect location for guests who want to walk or swim. The only drawback? It only has a subpar Chinese restaurant (given the plethora of Michelin-starred restaurants in the vicinity, I assume they wanted to create an alternative). Still, the breakfast is nice. Sporting a classical interior design, the Marina Christina is located in an old building, although it has been newly refurbished and restored. I stayed in Bilbao just one night, but I did not like my hotel, so if you come across any possibility,

please do keep me informed. That aside, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is a magnificent place; if anything, the exterior is even more breathtaking than the artwork inside. The museum is almost worth extending your trip to see. Because some high-end restaurants are often closed on Mondays, if not Sundays, I specifically chose Friday and Saturday to visit, although some places are open on Sundays for lunch. Now, in an effort to eat everywhere, you may think you can visit up to five or six restaurants in just two days by just eating light, but you really can't: Sometimes it takes three or more hours to actually try a restaurant's menu. That's why it's better to just go for a light lunch and then try the menus for dinner so that you get the full experience of the restaurant – even if that means trying fewer establishments. San Sebastian has three three-star restaurants, as well as some two-star restaurants. In fact, there was one two-star restaurant I really wanted to visit, but the lack of time put paid to that, so it's on the list for next summer. But at the risk of raising your ire, I'm not going to mention the best restaurant in San Sebastian. That's because I want people who visit these restaurants to make their own lists. So let me share my opinions about four of the city's restaurants and then let me know based on your own opinions; that'll allow us to compare! San Sebastian gets more than its share of rain, so it's a very verdant place. That said, it's best to go when it's drier, so aim to head there between May and October. Be warned, however, that Europeans generally take their holiday in August, so the city might be very crowded at that time. Meanwhile, San Sebastian's beautiful coasts are great for a beach holiday. And it would be remiss of me not to mention Biarritz, a favorite holiday destination in the French Basque Country that is just 30 minutes away. But despite the proximity, you can see that there is a distinctive cultural diversity between the two. All these restaurants are quite expensive; the cost depends on your choice of drinks. As a rule

of thumb, you're likely to pay 200 euros per person, excluding alcohol. And to ensure you get maximum enjoyment, it's best to go to these places by taxi; that way, you don't have to worry about parking or driving under the influence.

## ***AKELARRE***

Let's get our San Sebastian tour underway at Akelarre, which is about 15 minutes out of town. Located on a hill that gives it a panoramic view of the ocean (so it's the place to be to watch the sunset and the full moon), this modern restaurant has seating for 50-55 people. Akelarre takes its first reservations for 8 p.m. Akelarre's chef is Pedro Subijana, while his 35-year-old daughter also works as a manager at the restaurant. Akelarre is closed in February and in the first half of October. During the week, it is also closed on Sunday evenings and Mondays. It is possible to eat à la carte, while it also has a few gastronomical menus – the latter of which might be a good idea if you want to try more than one dish. What's more, they can change some of the food on the gastronomical menu if there's anything you don't like. Akelarre serves a lot of Spanish wines, although not a lot of foreign brands. And you should especially make your way to Akelarre by taxi, as the road is windy and unlit – two things that don't mix well if you've had a drink.

## ***ARZAK***

Next on the list is Arzak. Paquita Arzak established the restaurant in the 1960s, eventually bringing her son Juan Mari Arzak on board to work in the kitchen. Now 70, Juan Mari runs

the show today, along with his daughter. Arzak got its first Michelin star in 1974, its second in 1978 and its third in 1989, making it the first three-star restaurant in Spain. When Ferran Adria became famous 10 years ago, everybody lined up to criticize him for serving 30 to 40 portions. Juan Mari, however, called up Ferran and asked to see what he was doing. After observing Ferran's work, Juan Mari said he had learned a lot from El Bulli's master and duly invited him to come to San Sebastian. Soon, the two gastronomic titans became close friends, traveling to different places around the world together and trying different food. Their close friendship notwithstanding, they have different styles and tastes. Juan Mari Arzak's daughter, Elena, graduated from culinary school in Sweden before becoming the restaurant's head chef. An energetic woman, Elena manages 30 people, welcomes the customers and even decides on the decoration. Scoring a reservation, however, is a tall task, so it was with a friend's intervention that I managed to find a table at Arzak. While enjoying my remarkable meal there, I also had the chance to see their kitchen. Arzak is a complete Basque restaurant, although others in the area have become international. Arzak has two gastronomical menus, both of which mainly have meat instead of fish. I managed to get half portions for each course, which allowed me to try 10 portions that amounted to two starters, a main course and a dessert over three-and-a-half hours. Needless to say. The food and presentation were excellent. The wine menu is also a bit more international than Akelarre's. And as a parting gift, they gave me a signed copy of a book by Juan Mari. I just need to learn Spanish first to read it.

## ***ELKANO***

Elkano is outside San Sebastian in a small fishing village called Getaria. This year it was ranked number 30 in the 50 Best lists. It is the place to eat the best turbo in the world cooked as a whole fish on a charcoal grill just outside the restaurant next to its entrance. It's served as a whole fish, the size depending on the people sharing it. For starters, try cod throats, red mullet, and small fresh peas if in season. Introduce yourself to the owner Aitor Arregui and congratulate him, pray for the soul of his late father, Pedro and say hello to Aitor's son too. Ask them for live instructions on how to eat the turbo with your bare hands. The trouble is you'll never enjoy turbo again elsewhere!

## ***MARTIN BERASATEGUI***

The fourth restaurant takes its name from its 50-year-old chef, Martin Berasategui. Its mesmerizing view of the forest makes it the perfect place to go for lunch. The restaurant is also quite modern and features a terrace during the summer. But it was perhaps Berasategui's details that impressed me the most. For the first time ever, I saw packaged toothbrushes and toothpaste in the restroom – something that is very useful for customers. The waiters also speak English fluently, as well as many other languages.

[Back to TOP](#)



## SÃO PAULO

It's a massive city that mirrors its country's soul. The metropolis – São Paulo – might have more than its fair share of traffic mayhem and some other disagreeable characteristics, but few places are better for a holiday. When the inhabitants of the Northern Hemisphere are rubbing their hands together in a bid to stay warm during the long winter months, São Paulo offers a perfect escape for those in need of a dose of summer. There's sun, sea and sand – not to mention some great restaurants. Here, then, are a few suggestions for your next trip to sophisticated São Paulo. There are a number of reasons why you'd want to frequently hit the road; the top of your list might be the chance to sample some great cuisine and add new discoveries to what you've tried before. Another might be the desire to head somewhere warm when the cold reigns at home. Of course, when it's winter in the northern hemisphere, it takes a long time to reach a warm southern climate like São Paulo, Brazil's largest city. The city has two hotels that are nicer a stay. One of them is the Intercontinental, a top-quality establishment that I stayed in for a decent price. What's more, the place has a great roof lounge on the 20<sup>th</sup> floor. And if you happen to be a member of the Intercontinental, you can enjoy breakfast, lunch and dinner at the hotel for free; if not, you'll have to shell out for the privilege. In the main, the hotel restaurants serve up a combination of Brazilian and Mediterranean fare. Perhaps one of the best things

about the Intercontinental is the fact that it's built a meter above the road. Let me explain: come the summer months of January, February and March, São Paulo gets short bursts of heavy rain – to the extent that the roads suddenly become rivers. If the hotel happened to be the same on the same level as the street, inundation would be inevitable. In such a situation, the hotel would lose power, the restaurant on the bottom floor would have to bail out the flood water and the elevator would be out of service; in short, the hotel would be in a lot of trouble. Such problems are unfortunately a fact of life at the second hotel that I recommend in São Paulo, Fasano. Nevertheless, Fasano is the city's most luxurious and expensive hotel. In the past, I've happily stayed at Fasano's hotel in Rio de Janeiro; I intended to do the same in São Paulo, only to be obliged to switch to the Intercontinental after learning about the possibility of flooding at my first choice.

## ***FASANO***

I did head to Fasano's restaurant for dinner one night, but lo and behold, the warnings came true: When I got there, a heavy downpour had created localized flooding that inundated the restaurant. The hotel staff brought me to another nearby restaurant owned by the chain, but I can't say that it was as exceptional as Fasano. Still, given how much I enjoyed the food at the Fasano in Rio, I was determined to dine at its São Paulo branch as well. In the following days, I duly found a chance to grab lunch at Fasano, and it's a good thing I did; in fact, you could say the Italian hotel and its restaurant were fantastic, as the risotto and the pasta were out of this world. At both branches, they serve mozzarella di bufala – quite how they acquire the buffalo dairy product is beyond me. Now, of course, you could

be right in asking why I opted for Italian cuisine in Brazil; however, if you're not going to have grilled meat, there's not much in the way of Brazilian cuisine to dig into except the following few places.

## ***D.O.M.***

But let me mention three other restaurants in São Paulo, one of which is D.O.M., a wonderful place with two Michelin stars. Until a few years ago, D.O.M. had successfully cracked the top 10 of the world's 50 best restaurants, but it's since lost a bit of its magic to fall into the 20s. In truth, the chef is a bit of a know-it-all. As the restaurant began to fall down the rankings, managers started to pay closer attention, but it wasn't enough to prevent the loss of a Michelin star, bringing the place down to two. The chef only cooks on Fridays and Saturdays; on other days of the week, his assistants handle the task. D.O.M. is laid out in an open-kitchen concept, which offers diners the enjoyable prospect of surveying all the hustle and bustle that goes on in the kitchen. But regardless of who's cooking, you can't return home without trying the tasting menu. They also offer a vegetarian menu, but no matter what you're planning on having, they'll be sure to offer you some ants dried in the oven. If you ask me, though, it's a bland, tasteless and completely pointless dish! It was only out of necessity that I had this food, whose taste is similar to dried pumpkin or sunflower seeds. Six years ago, at a time when it still had three Michelin stars, I ate a most enjoyable meal at D.O.M. And although I can't quite say I enjoy its latest incarnation, it's still a place you have to visit if you've come all the way to São Paulo. D.O.M. has three or four menus set at different prices – if you choose the smallest one, you can get a sense of what the restaurant's food is all about. There's no need,

though, to try the tasting menu for wine. Instead, plump for a Chilean or Argentine wine from the wine menu. And one final note: Because D.O.M. only seats about 40 people, it's tough to find a place to sit.

## ***MANI***

If you ask me, the place you really need to go to into São Paulo is Maní. They actually serve a set menu, but given that you get to select your entrée, main course and dessert, you basically get to choose your own menu. The portions are generous, so if you go as two people, I would suggest you choose different dishes – that way, you'll have a better chance to taste just some of what Maní has to offer. Maní starts its service at the relatively late hour of 20.45 – meaning that if you're there before 20.15, you'll be confronted by a closed door. Maní also has a pleasant waiting area where you can sip a drink and place your order for your food as you wait. The fare is well worth the wait; it's only a matter of time before Maní receives a second Michelin star – or even until it enters the list of the world's 50 best restaurants. In fact, you might even say that Maní is worth a trip to São Paulo in and of itself – a mantle that it's wrested away from D.O.M.

## ***THE MUSEUMS***

São Paulo is home to two modern art museums that deserve a visit, the Modern Art Museum of São Paulo and the Museum of Contemporary Art. What's more, both feature restaurants that offer great lunches. Traffic is a fact of life in São Paulo, as is security. That's why the best thing to do in terms of transport is dispense with a taxi and just go for Uber – you'll be happy you did.

## ***ILHABELA***

Located just over 200 kilometers from São Paulo, Ilhabela is Brazil's biggest island. Ilhabela is ringed by sandy beaches on three full sides; only the fourth side is rocky. The trip from São Paulo takes up to three hours (or two hours if your car is particularly fast – or just half an hour if you're really well-heeled and you have a helicopter). Unsurprisingly, it's a summer haunt for São Paulo's wealthy. If you're intent on coming, here's a tip: Come on a Sunday evening and stay until Wednesday – otherwise, you'll hardly have room to move. It's impossible to find a place at a hotel or a restaurant and just as hard to find a spot to lay down your towel on the beach due to the throngs of people. From Sunday evening to Thursday morning, though, Ilhabela is far more serene, meaning there are fewer crowds to detract from your holiday. I, indeed, did opt to come Sunday to Wednesday; while on the island, I stayed at DPNY Beach, one of the best hotels in the area. DPNY also has a great Italian restaurant on site that's so good, you'd think you've gone to Italy. But if you're not in the mood for Italian, DPNY also serves up some dishes that carry a hint of French cuisine as well. And Ilhabela isn't all just about the beach. You can take a tour around the island in a gullet or a speedboat or go on an adventure with a 4x4 jeep in the island's forested interior. If you opt for a jeep trip into the forest, make sure to lather yourself up with insect repellent, or you might not have a particularly enjoyable time. As for me, though, I couldn't bring myself to leave that heavenly hotel to squeeze in beside dozens of others for a ride on a boat or a trip in a jeep. Even if you just stay at a hotel like DPNY, you can be sure that you'll have an extraordinarily good time simply enjoying the light waves of the sea.

[Back to TOP](#)



## SEATTLE

I first traveled to Seattle a quarter-century ago in the company of Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. I fell in love with their movie *Sleepless in Seattle* and, by way of the movie, the featured city as well. Twenty-five years after, I finally got a chance to visit the Pacific Northwest metropolis in the flesh. Needless to say, I fell in love with the city once more. While in this absolutely spotless and orderly city, I also made sure to visit the floating house that appeared so prominently in the film. Everywhere you look, there's either a sea or a lake, and unlike a number of places in the States, there is not a single run-down neighborhood to find, at least not in a tourist's sight. Again, unlike plenty of other American cities, the city center doesn't have much of a homeless problem. And unlike the reputation that precedes it, Seattle doesn't get a lot of rain – unlike its northern Canadian neighbor Vancouver. Cloudy days, however, are the norm. Come summer, many people opt to swim in nearby pristine lakes, where the water is quite warm. If you have the time, take a week in June or July and combine a trip to Seattle with a visit to Vancouver. And if you're even more blessed with time, add a few more days in Alaska. To give you a sense of the city, jump on one of the two-hour harbor tours, which start on the sea and end at the lake, as they give you a great chance to view Seattle's biggest landmarks. And Seattle's restaurants? They're fantastic, with a ready supply of terrific daily seafood.

Seattle exports more seafood than any American city. Large ships from the city ply waters as far away as Alaska, where they catch fish; fishermen on board clean and freeze the catch before eventually exporting their haul from Seattle. The city's fresh sockeye salmon, big bonito and baby tuna are fantastic, as are the daily shrimp, sea and lake crayfish and lobster; in short, it's ground zero for a pescatarian. More than that, Seattle is also a paradise for fruits and vegetables. But whatever you do, head to the city's premier fish market, Pike Place Market, where the fish and fruit on sale seem like they're lifted directly from a photograph.

## ***CANLIS***

Canlis is Seattle's best restaurant, hands down – in fact, it might even be one of the United States' five best restaurants. Michelin doesn't yet have any ratings for Seattle, but when it expands there, I'm fairly certain Canlis will get three stars. Likewise, Canlis isn't on the list of the world's 50 best restaurants, which is a shame because it should be in the top 10. Canlis opened 52 years ago in a large villa constructed by an architect with vision. It also knows a thing or two about retaining its staff; our waitress, for instance, told us she had been working at Canlis for 33 years. At Canlis, you create your own four-plate tasting menu, which you can enjoy alongside some wine from the restaurant's well-stocked and reasonably-priced cellar. And if you're at a loss for what to order, the sommelier is a master of his craft. Canlis' bread and butter service is also excellent, but alas, it doesn't have a lunch service. Unsurprisingly, it's also difficult to find a reservation. So when you're planning your trip to Seattle, make a reservation early, preferably for an earlier hour, as that will allow you to see the view of the city by both day and night. Canlis is open every night except Sundays.

## ***HARVEST BEAT***

Harvest Beat is a vegan restaurant that can serve a four-plate vegan tasting menu to up to 62 people every evening (except Sundays) starting at 7. Two hours later, they handed out the bills and closed the doors. Before the meal, the young cook and owner, a young Seattleite, takes 15 minutes to explain the food and the recipes in detail. The food is truly delectable – and you needn't be a vegan to enjoy it. But be like me and bring your own wine, as the menu is rather sparse.

## ***STAPLES & FANCY***

Staples & Fancy is an American-Italian restaurant with pastas and burratas at an Italian standard. It also has several varieties of sockeye salmon – which, this being Seattle, has become the fish main par excellence. The wine list is middling, but there are some nice Italian options on the menu. Make sure to save some room for dessert.

## ***PORTAGE BAY CAFÉ***

America's breakfast/brunch culture is pervasive. With its four branches, Portage Bay offers a high-quality and broad breakfast menu from 7 till 2. But if you don't want to wait for a while for service at one of the few places at the bar, make a reservation ahead of time. Portage Bay offers breakfast from both the menu and a buffet. Instead of breakfast, though, you can also hold off and order brunch or lunch from a larger menu.

## ***STARBUCKS RESERVE***

Throw a stone in Seattle and it will probably land on a Starbucks – the global coffee giant that was founded in the city in 1971 before expanding to the entire planet. But look next to it (or perhaps across the street), and you’ll find the much better Seattle Coffee Works. To compete with this and other individual coffee shops, Starbucks has rebranded some of its stores as “Starbucks Reserve” shops which are more ex-pensive and offer more varieties of coffee and better sand-wiches. The flagship Starbucks Reserve in Seattle is even more fantastic. They offer delectable half-pizzas and cheese-cakes, while you can also order exotic egg and omelet com-binations from the open kitchen. As for Starbucks’ first-ever branch, it can only host about 20 people at a time, but that doesn’t stop 100 or more from waiting at the door for a chance to drink coffee in the historic location. Seattle also boasts plenty of boutique creameries and artisanal chocolate stores. Of course, this also means that whenever you’re walk-ing down the wide streets of Seattle, there are too many invi-tations to walk in and dig into a high-calorie snack.

[Back to TOP](#)



## **SYDNEY**

At a time when fall is beginning to show its true colors in our Northern Hemisphere, the warm days of summer start to bloom in the Southern Hemisphere. Snow in February here, August heat there. So why not pack up and head to Australia? Who could say no to the idea of exploring Sydney, eating extraordinary food, drinking high-quality Australian wines, and—on top of it all—enjoying some of the most beautiful beaches in the world?

The first time I went to Australia, I almost fell in love with the country—especially Sydney. Beyond reminding me of a few places I already love, what struck me most was the easy rhythm of life, the politeness of people, and the pervasive sense of happiness in the air. As a bonus, it's also a place where the seafood I love so much is abundant and prepared beautifully. Whenever I had the chance, I flew to this continent in January and February. So when autumn or winter begins back home, the idea of escaping to Australia—to spend time along its coasts and enjoy long outdoor meals with friends—inevitably takes hold of me again.

With every visit, I try new restaurants and expand my personal archive. In this piece, I've added many new places to the restaurants I previously wrote about in Sydney and Melbourne. If your travels ever bring you to this continent, I hope you'll visit

some of the restaurants on this list and enjoy truly memorable meals. Michelin does not publish a guide for Australia, but that in no way means the country lacks serious gastronomy. Beyond a handful of select fine-dining addresses, the depth and overall quality of restaurants here is genuinely surprising.

Australia's landmass is almost comparable to Europe's, yet its population is only around 28 million. That means product abundance, advanced agriculture, and outstanding seafood. And all of that translates into good food. Prices, moreover, are quite reasonable.

Sydney is a truly wonderful city. Its coastal layout, expansive bridges, and energy shaped by water sometimes remind me of San Francisco, and at other times of Istanbul. When you sit by the shore, you feel as though you can see a large part of the city at once. The coastline reveals two very different faces: at night, the harbor takes on a theatrical, energetic beauty; during the day, it becomes calm and airy. Towering above all of this is the city's great symbol and modern architectural masterpiece: the Opera House.

Sydney has a spirit that doesn't try to impress—it simply presents itself. Life is lived outdoors here. Food is taken seriously but never made heavy, and beauty is not staged as a spectacle; it's felt as a natural part of everyday life. Morning swims, long lunches by the water, and dinners with friends beneath one of the world's great modern architectural icons come effortlessly. Everything in Sydney seems to flow with a natural yet rare sense of ease. It's a city that rewards curiosity, appetite, and time—and one that lingers in the mind long after the journey ends.

Modern Australia's history goes back only about two hundred years, so the kind of "historic monuments" we're used to in Europe don't really exist here. Many of the places labeled as "must-see" are at most 160 years old. Still, within this relative youth, the city stands out for its beauty, balance, and quality of

life. One of the aspects that impressed me most is the relationship with the sea. Wherever you are, you can usually reach a beach—and the possibility of swimming—in five minutes by car or fifteen minutes by bike. From October to May, while the Northern Hemisphere slips into autumn and winter, Australia enjoys spring and summer. The beaches that line the deep-blue, clean, inviting sea are simply magnificent.

For those accustomed to calmer waters, the Pacific may seem intimidating at first, but let me reassure you: there's little to worry about. Alongside surf beaches, there are many coves protected by breakwaters or peninsulas, with waters almost as calm as a swimming pool. Swimming becomes even more enjoyable when you remember that it's winter or autumn back home. Sydney carries a constant holiday atmosphere; people make the most of the sun and sea even before heading to work. Australians are open and social—if you make eye contact with someone on the street, a greeting is almost guaranteed. And, of course, there are many excellent restaurants.

## ***ARIA***

With commanding views of the harbor and the iconic Opera House, Aria is one of the country's most distinguished dining rooms, offering some of the most confident expressions of modern Australian cuisine. It's a 100–150-seat restaurant with beautiful set menus and a spectacular view. The approach is highly seasonal, elegant, yet never showy. You clearly sense a strong technique that never seeks attention for itself—always rooted in deep respect for the product.

The menu, built around Australia's outstanding seafood and meat, is deeply satisfying. Oysters served raw or cooked in various sizes, Tasmanian salmon and trout, and Australian black

caviar are among the highlights. One of the menu's quiet centers is its line-caught fish dishes: cooked with absolute precision, arriving at the table perfectly done, with texture fully preserved. The accompanying emulsified sauce and finely tuned garnishes are there to support, not decorate. What makes this dish special is not complexity, but balance—nothing more, nothing less. To me, it's an expression of understated confidence and a kitchen that knows its limits.

Alongside a very extensive wine list, Aria offers an impressive selection of Australian wines by the glass—at prices that are not excessive. If Michelin ever comes to Australia and Sydney, I believe Aria would certainly earn a star.

Address: 1 Macquarie Street, Circular Quay.

[Back to TOP](#)

## ***BENNELONG***

Located inside the Sydney Opera House itself, Bennelong is a restaurant that left a deep impression on me. The building—an architectural masterpiece composed of multiple shells housing concert halls, opera and theater spaces—allocates one of its city-facing shells entirely to Bennelong. With a ceiling nearly fifteen meters high, the space has a breathtaking atmosphere. Here, dining becomes inseparable from architecture. Surrounded by water and sky, the soaring interior feels not like a backdrop to the meal, but an essential part of it. Light, movement, and scale shift throughout the evening, subtly shaping the dining experience. Where you sit meaningfully changes how you experience the meal. The main dining room feels ceremonial—ideal for long menus and special evenings. The counter seating near the kitchen allows you to watch the calm, precise preparation of dishes up close. The bar area is more relaxed and spontaneous, perfect for lighter meals before or after a performance. Dishes are typically built around a single central ingredient—often fish or a vegetable—which best expresses the kitchen’s philosophy. Local herbs and ingredients are used consciously and sparingly, never as a display. The result is thoughtful, rooted in place, and quietly impressive. Bennelong’s wine list is as thick as a phone book, featuring both Australian and international wines. Enjoying this meal with a good Australian wine and that view was one of the best dining experiences I’ve had on the continent. The ambiance was superb, the service excellent. From the richness of the menu to the table settings, glassware, and the presence of four sommeliers, it delivers a truly elevated experience. Despite all this refinement, prices remain quite reasonable—though, of course, your wine choice can change that equation.

Address: Sydney Opera House, Bennelong Point

## ***ELEVEN BARRACK***

Housed in a restored historic building, Eleven Barrack is a restaurant that favors calm over spectacle. High ceilings, natural light, and an airy layout create a space that's elegant yet informal—urban but relaxed. Perfectly cooked fish is treated with the same respect as seasonal vegetables; nothing is ornamental or overpowering. Sauces are clean, flavors precise. Portions are not oversized, but they're satisfying. Across all dishes, you sense a mature kitchen that considers restraint a virtue.

Address: 11 Barrack Street, Sydney CBD.

## ***ESTER***

About twenty minutes outside the city center, Ester is a wonderful evening restaurant furnished with wooden tables. The atmosphere is casual, the space simple—but the kitchen's intent is focused and disciplined. Although we had to wait despite arriving on time (they're not strict about reservations), we eventually settled at a lovely table and enjoyed excellent food. I ordered shellfish again, as usual, and it was superb. Often, a vegetable cooked over fire becomes the centerpiece of the experience. What looks simple at first reveals layers of smoke, caramelization, and balanced seasoning. At Ester, texture matters as much as flavor. The cuisine is quietly bold, never overexposed. They serve only Australian wines—both conventional and organic—with a wide selection available by the glass.

Address: 46–52 Meagher Street, Chippendale

## ***GARFISH***

Garfish reflects Sydney's effortless relationship with the sea: unpretentious, straightforward, and honest. Dining here feels like joining a seafood celebration. The atmosphere is relaxed—perfect for long lunches. Located in Manly Beach, about thirty minutes from Sydney by ferry or car, it's a place I visit every time I come.

From Tasmanian salmon and trout to exceptionally fresh oysters and other seafood, everything is pristine. Whole local fish are grilled with minimal intervention—crispy skin, perfectly cooked flesh, precisely seasoned. Nothing distracts from the essentials: freshness, sound technique, and respect for the product. A particularly nice touch is that on quieter Mondays and Tuesdays, they allow you to bring your own wine without corkage.

Address: 1/2 The Corso, Manly Whar

## ***ZAJUSHI***

OJazushi is one of the places I gladly recommend in Sydney: an affordable Japanese restaurant with very good sushi. It's a small, simple spot for about thirty people—no reservations needed. One of its most distinctive features is live jazz music, performed without microphones or speakers. As the evening progresses, the restaurant transforms into a lively cultural space with an energetic, social flow. Perfectly seasoned rice, crisp nori, and exceptionally fresh fish are brought to the table separately, allowing guests to assemble their own hand rolls. Hand rolls are deceptively simple, yet hard to get right. Here, the balance is spot-on: warm rice, cold fish, and crisp seaweed. Many Japanese restaurants fail at the very first step by losing that crunch;

Jazushi passes with flying colors. The experience is tactile, communal, and never artificial. If the idea of Japanese-inspired food paired with live jazz appeals to you, this is a must.

Address: Basement, 561 George Street, Sydney CBD.

## ***JORDON'S SEAFOOD***

Elegant yet relaxed, Jordon's Seafood works equally well for business lunches and intimate dinners. Their cooking focuses on clarity and balance rather than drama, often using the grill to bring out the ocean's natural flavors.

If you come here, you must try the fish soup. Deeply aromatic yet remarkably clear, it draws its strength from proper extraction rather than heaviness. You can clearly taste the fish itself—warm, comforting, but never dense. It perfectly encapsulates the kitchen's philosophy. Other highlights include grilled king prawn skewers, sesame-crusting swordfish belly, black cod, and grilled lobster.

Address: 153 Phillip Street, Sydney CBD; King Street Wharf, Darling Harbour, Shop 6/32 The Promenade.

## ***PARK HYATT DINING ROOM***

Park Hyatt is unquestionably my favorite hotel in the city—precisely because it's elegant, measured, and unpretentious. Located on the ground floor, the Park Hyatt Dining Room is creatively directed by James Viles and is known for its imaginative cooking and commitment to sustainability. Floor-to-ceiling windows frame the Opera House, turning this global

icon into part of your table setting. Nothing here feels forced—from the food to the service, from the kitchen's style to the décor. Luxury is expressed through silence, space, and flawless service. Dishes built around local fish reflect this philosophy: refined, precisely cooked, and free of unnecessary embellishment. I love coming here, enjoying the view, and letting time slow down. It's an experience that always makes me want to return.

Address: 7 Hickson Road, The Rocks.

## ***SUSHI E***

Sushi E is a quietly confident address that captures Japanese dining at its most composed. There is no sense of performance here, no attempt to impress. Everything feels measured, deliberate, and calm. The experience unfolds naturally, guided by balance rather than excess. At the centre of it all is Masa Torii, whose restrained, precise style defines the kitchen. The restaurant sits on a single floor, with three dining areas arranged side by side. Each offers a slightly different pace, but all share the same clarity of purpose. The sushi counter places you close to the craft, where movements are quiet and exact. Tables alongside allow for a more relaxed, conversational meal. A few steps away, a high-ceilinged space with elegant décor and deeply comfortable leather chairs encourages longer evenings and unhurried dinners. Different settings, one continuous experience. The food is defined by control and consistency. Nigiri are exemplary, particularly the lightly seared salmon and the unagi—clean, precise, and deeply satisfying. The fish is impeccably fresh, the rice perfectly judged. Fried tofu is delicate and understated. The miso soup is clear and grounding. Hand rolls are excellent throughout, handled with confidence and care. Dessert arrives without flourish but leaves a lasting

impression. A cheesecake served with ice cream provides a gentle, well-judged close to the meal, in keeping with the restaurant's overall sense of restraint.

Sydney's Japanese dining scene is strong, shaped by proximity to Japan and access to exceptional seafood. Even so, Sushi E distinguishes itself through consistency, composure, and an absence of unnecessary theatre. Open from 6:00 pm, the experience is complemented by a well-curated, high-quality wine list.

Address: Shop 3, 127–129 Phillip Street, Sydney NSW 2000, Australia

## ***TOKO***

Opened in 2007, Toko has grown steadily, earning awards and establishing itself as a pioneer of modern Japanese cuisine in Sydney. It combines Australia's world-class produce with a contemporary sensibility to great effect. Charcoal-grilled fish often sits at the heart of the menu—fire adds depth without heaviness. Cooking times are precise, seasoning restrained, resulting in clear, satisfying dishes. Its style can be described as a contemporary Japanese izakaya. The cocktail list, sake selection, and Japanese whiskies are impressive. With its sophisticated yet approachable menu, polished service, and lively social atmosphere, it's an easy recommendation.

Address: 490 Crown Street, Surry Hills.

## ***FISH MARKET***

From early morning onward, the fish market is alive—raw, real, and unfiltered. It's a large market space with seafood stalls, delicatessens, wine shops, bakeries, and restaurants. Eating oysters or tuna immediately after purchase perfectly captures its essence: open, cut, eat—nothing more needed.

The market opens around 5:00 a.m. and closes at 5:00 p.m., accessible by car or ferry. While fish markets exist all over the world, this one is different. Each fishmonger has cooking facilities: you can take your purchase home or have it cooked on the spot. You can mix and match what you want to try. Seating is limited, but there are plenty of standing bars—your enjoyment is never interrupted. About 90% of the products are local seafood; imported items are clearly labeled. Virtually all of Sydney's fish passes through here—hotels, restaurants, and residents alike source from this market. You'll find large ocean fish marinated, sliced for sashimi, or prepared for sushi. My personal favorite is langoustine—lightly grilled, it's outstanding. Prices are very reasonable; weekdays are best for a relaxed visit.

Address: Corner of Pyrmont Bridge Road and Bank Street, Pyrmont.

## ***SEAFOOD OR MEAT?***

In Australia, I almost always choose fish and seafood in restaurants—there are many unfamiliar yet delicious species here. Large ocean fish such as grouper and cod are prepared in ways that suit our palate beautifully. Shellfish like lobster, prawns, and crayfish are abundant. Meat is also widely available, and due to Australia's proximity to Japan, you can even find various cuts of Kobe beef.

## ***ORGANIC WINE***

Australia has a strong organic wine movement. Many wines are made with little or no added sulfur. This reduces longevity—these wines don't age and should be consumed within a year or two—but they're far less likely to cause headaches. Some are even unfiltered, with visible particles in the bottle. I see this as part of their character. For this kind of wine experience, Australia is an exceptional place.

[Back to TOP](#)



## TAORMINA

As far as beach destinations go, Taormina is ancient. Located on the east coast of Sicily, Taormina was formed on a hill overlooking the Mediterranean 2,500 years ago, which means, of course, possessing a fantastic ancient theater that sits a good 3,000. Closer to the water, however, it also has a long, beautiful beach that affords one a great chance to swim come summer. But looming over the town is something else: Mount Etna, one of Europe's most powerful active volcanoes. On any given day, you have a good chance of seeing it puff a little bit of smoke. Heading for a visit, volcanic activity permitting, is a great way to remind yourself about just how powerful nature can be. You need at least a week to visit Sicily; two or three days are just not enough to see Taormina and other nearby cities. The nearest airport to Taormina is in Catania, which is located to the south of Taormina, on the other side of Etna. Catania shows many traces of the volcano's power, as it was completely destroyed by lava in 1700. In fact, there are some buildings in town where only the roof remains visible after lava inundating the rest of the structure. Taormina is an exceptionally touristy place, so I suggest you not visit during the height of the season in July and August, particularly on weekends. Some say that Taormina is so crowded in these months that they hardly bother going out, preferring just to spend their time in their hotel rooms. I, for one, went in May, but even, it was still crowded. Seeing all that

Sicily has to offer is probably easiest in the company of a tour guide that can be arranged through a tourist agency. A group of eight of us went through a good agency called *Legendary Sicily*, which is owned by an Italian man named Eddy, a life-long tour guide who knows everything from A to Z about the area's history and geography. Packing into Eddy's jeep, we saw everything there was to see on Etna and in the 2,500-year-old town of Siracusa, which lies toward the southern tip of Sicily, from dawn till dusk. Etna is approximately 3,500 meters high, although we climbed only about 2,000 meters of the mountain in Eddy's jeep. At one point, there is a one-kilometer-wide and 50-meter-deep channel that was formed by a past lava flow. The black volcanic rocks left behind by the flows have been a boon to the surrounding towns, particularly for the construction industry; even the shower bath of our hotel in Taormina was made from this black rock. As we clambered about the lava flow, Eddy noted that he had seen molten lava flowing in the area 19 years ago. The nature of the lava flows created caves that are as deep as three or four kilometers and seven or eight meters high. All this activity, however, was more than a little tiring, so if you only have two or three days in Sicily, I suggest you first drop by Siracusa on your way from Catania's airport before heading later in the day to Taormina; though you might not get to the latter until the evening, there will be more than enough chance to see Taormina on the second day. And if you have enough time (like five hours) before any flight from Catania on the third day, you can then go and see Etna. After that, grab a late lunch in Catania and peruse the city, which is located a mere 10 minutes from the airport.

## ***SIRACUSA***

Siracusa is home to a semi-circle Greek theater from around 500 BC, from the time when the Mediterranean basin was under Greek hegemony, as well as a full-circle Roman amphitheater from around 300 BC. Both these mesmerizing wonders of engineering and architecture are located within walking distance of Siracusa. Another intriguing thing about this ancient city is the stone quarries from 2,000 years ago. Long ago, the Roman Empire – or, more precisely, thousands of slaves – opened a hole that was 10 meters wide, 25 meters long, and 100 meters deep to extract all the stones necessary for all the empire's monuments. Truly, it is amazing to imagine how they could have managed all this work. Later, Roman emperors decided to use the cave created by the quarry as a prison. There is also another 2,500-year-old Greek monument with columns in the center of Siracusa. The structure was deformed after the emergence of Christianity in the region, and locals ultimately built walls around the columns, transforming it into a splendid church. Siracusa is also a good place for shopping, while there are also a lot of fancy restaurants near the seaside.

## ***METROPOLE TAORMINA***

For our stay in Taormina, a number of locals suggested that we stay at San Domenico, a nice place with a nice garden and view, but alas, a place that has not been renovated in years. In the end, we decided to stay at the newer Metropole Taormina – a decision we would not regret. Located in the middle of the main street, Corso Umberto, the Metropole Taormina has only 22 rooms. Though a historical building, the hotel has a modern

interior design. It also boasts breathtaking views of the sea – meaning you might have some problems scoring a room in the hotel. The restaurant and the bar are also terrific; and you walk out from the hotel into the center of the historic city of Taormina.

## ***RISTORANTE LA CAPINERA***

Ristorante La Capinera was founded by two brothers on a location right by the water – which would especially make it the place to be on the night of a full moon. Whether for lunch or dinner, La Capinera serves up some extraordinary food. Given its excellence, it's no surprise that it requires a reservation. The pasta in southern Italy leaves much to be desired in comparison to what's on offer in northern Italy, but the seafood is excellent in places like Taormina. And the last word about Taormina: One simply cannot understand why there are so many churches in such a small city. So many churches, however, will afford you a chance to perhaps come across an Italian wedding.

FOR THE ETNA TOUR

Salita de Luna, 10, 98039 Taormina

+39 0942 620061.

Website: [www.legendarysicily.it](http://www.legendarysicily.it)

[Back to TOP](#)



## **VERONA**

Verona is a historical Italian small city dating back more than 20 centuries. There is the famous "Arena" in the center of Verona , which is a Roman amphitheatre built nearly 2000 years ago and is still in use; it is famous for the opera and classical music performances given there in warmer months. Verona is also famous for its Amarone and Valpolicella wines , made from local grapes dried for a few months before they are made into wine. They also produce the Ricietto which is a sweet red wine produced from the same grapes , dried for upto six months before they are processed. "Dal Forno" and "Quintarelli" are the best two producers of this top quality wine , but there are hundreds of other wineries with their own vinyards producing these high alcohol slightly sweet but still dry red wines. You may try to reserve to visit one of these wineries, enjoy the beauty of the vinyards, taste their wine and buy some of their top vintages. Another famous dimension of Verona is the food. There are a few Michelin starred restaurants in and around the city; however we shall mention some restaurants without them.

## ***LOCANDA CASTELVECCHIO***

Castelvechio is well known for its trolley of the meat selection and also of the trolley of the desert; but their pasta is out of this world too. In autumn months you may opt for their pasta or risotto with wild porcini mushrooms. They also have their “al dente” red risotto cooked in Amarone wine. Or , you may go lighter and create a porcini tasting three course menu for yourself with raw, grilled and pan cooked porcinis with a splash of grated parmesan on each dish. The wine list and the cellar downstairs are both impressive with some top French wines too, in addition to the usual Valpolicella suspects. The desert trolley is not to be missed with the bitter chocolate cake taking the pole position.

## ***TRATTORIA AL POMPIERI***

This very central trattoria has a great selection of cold cuts. They are all cut in front of you fresh as you order , by an exclusive cold cut chef. You may also order steaks by the kilo to be cooked as per your choice ; however “well done” is not an option! My preference is their extraordinary pasta dishes. I do not mind ordering three pasta dishes in a row to make up my lunch or dinner. Replacing one pasta dish with an Amarone risotto may also be considered. After this carbohydrate bonanza, one should still reserve some appetite for one of their local deserts. The wine list is full of top Valpolicellas and Amarones to choose from. A half liter sweet Ricietto is also recommended to go with the local desert of your choice and the local biscotti.

## ***ANTICA BOTTEGO VINO***

This is a wine bar with great food. It has the largest cellar of wine in Italy. Their wine book is at least two inches thick. It has anything from a 50 euro Superiore to a 10000 euro Petrus, not to forget a few pages each of Giuseppe Quinterallis and Dal Fornos. Depending how many you are , you may consider one of many magnums and double magnums on the wine menu. The hard to find Alzero has many vintages listed in their big book of wines. The food is very meat-centric, however they do serve the local Amarone risotto. They have an Italian Brie on the menu, melted in the oven in the original box , and served with fresh black truffle shavings. Their mixed local berries in ginger sauce may be a light ending to your wine and dine treat.

## ***PONTE DEL PIATRA***

Like many other beautiful cities, Verona has a river dividing the city into two. Ponte del Piatra is next to the bridge by the same name. If you are only two, you may reserve one of the few small tables in the balcony overlooking the river. Their home made pasta selection is very much recommended , as well as their by the kilo steaks to be grilled to taste. The wine list is predominantly local with all kinds of Superiores , Amerones and Riciettos.

## ***GABBIA D'ORO***

Gabbia D'Oro is " the " hotel to stay. It was built in 1323 as the town's first clock tower in the center. A few centuries later it

was converted into a hotel. It has 27 rooms of all sizes and with completely different decorations , designed to not to alter the centuries of history of the building. You see rock blocks ,steel and wood columns and slabs everywhere, jointly carrying the five level building. I recommend you to stay at 406 with its private and secluded small terrace. 406 also has the most lovely inside walls , highlighting the 700 years of preserved history in a properly architected way. The hotel has an outstanding service and an extraordinary breakfast served in the very nice breakfast room. They have a tea menu consisting of a long list of the rarest of all teas,a buffet with a selection of fruit,cheese , fresh savory and sweet cakes ; you may order your egg dish of your choice.And, the waiter does "wait"! One may come in warmer months for a few days of stay here, enjoying an evening concert at the Arena and a few good dinners , all walking distance from Gabbia D'Oro.

[Back to TOP](#)



## VIENNA

### *STEIRERECK*

Located inside a city park in Vienna is Steirereck, a single-story restaurant run by a couple. It has a tasting menu that you can order for either lunch or dinner. The restaurant can prepare the menu, one of which is fish-based and the other meat-based, depending on your preferences. One useful thing about Steirereck is that they bring cards written in both English and German explaining the dishes – it's a great idea given that many waiters outside the United States have less than fluent English. You could even call it an ID card for the food. And if you want, you can even take the card with you when you leave the restaurant. It offers a great view of the surrounding park thanks to its floor-to-ceiling windows, making you feel like you're eating in the centre of a garden full of beautiful flowers and trees. If you're in the Austrian capital, you can do no wrong in heading to this magnificent restaurant with its remarkable dishes, presentation and design. The bread trolley, the cheese trolley and the desert trolley are all very noteworthy. Please remember that reservations are always needed weeks in advance and that the place is closed on Saturdays and Sundays.

[Back to TOP](#)

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Metin Ar is a partner at Clairfield Turkiye, which advises clients on mergers and acquisitions. He also serves as a director for several companies. The Italian government awarded him with Cavaliere and Grande Ufficiale titles in 2004 and 2015 for advising Italian companies.

