



A BONUS GUIDE FROM ELEGANT ESCAPES TRAVEL

# Eat, Drink & Go

*The food, wine and cocktail destination guide: twenty places compared, and how to choose the one that fits how you actually travel.*

---

Companion to the Food, Wine & Cocktail Destination Match quiz

# Contents

|           |                                                  |    |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------|----|
| <b>01</b> | Why where you eat and drink should pick the trip | 3  |
| <b>02</b> | The decision framework: six questions            | 4  |
| <b>03</b> | The twenty destinations side by side             | 5  |
| <b>04</b> | Piedmont & Tuscany                               | 7  |
| <b>05</b> | Sicily                                           | 8  |
| <b>06</b> | San Sebastián & Basque Country                   | 9  |
| <b>07</b> | Barcelona                                        | 10 |
| <b>08</b> | Paris & Burgundy                                 | 11 |
| <b>09</b> | Lisbon & the Douro                               | 12 |
| <b>10</b> | London                                           | 13 |
| <b>11</b> | Scotland (whisky)                                | 14 |
| <b>12</b> | Lima                                             | 15 |
| <b>13</b> | Oaxaca                                           | 16 |

|           |                                           |    |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------|----|
| <b>14</b> | Mexico City                               | 17 |
| <b>15</b> | Mendoza                                   | 18 |
| <b>16</b> | Tokyo                                     | 19 |
| <b>17</b> | Seoul                                     | 20 |
| <b>18</b> | Bangkok                                   | 21 |
| <b>19</b> | Singapore                                 | 22 |
| <b>20</b> | Cape Town & Winelands                     | 23 |
| <b>21</b> | New Orleans                               | 24 |
| <b>22</b> | Napa & Sonoma                             | 25 |
| <b>23</b> | Kentucky (bourbon)                        | 26 |
| <b>24</b> | Drinking well, wherever you land          | 27 |
| <b>25</b> | Ten mistakes that quietly ruin food trips | 28 |
| <b>26</b> | What a travel advisor actually does here  | 29 |
| <b>27</b> | Questions people ask before they book     | 30 |

**How to use this guide.** Start with your quiz result, then read the runner-up too. Most people land between two places, and the framework on page 4 settles it. Facts were checked against current sources in October 2026. Prices, schedules and restaurant openings change, so treat every number as a planning estimate and confirm before you book.

# Why where you eat and drink should pick the trip

*Most people choose a destination from the photos, then go hunting for somewhere good to eat. Food and drink trips run the other way around.*



*Oysters and a glass of rosé*



*Something cold, something sweet*



*Aperitivo hour*

The tables people talk about book out weeks or months ahead. The harvest that makes a wine region worth visiting lasts a few weeks. Some of the best bars on earth have no reservation system at all and a line out the door. Seasons, booking windows and local habits decide whether a food trip is great or merely fine, and none of that shows up in a hotel photo.

So this guide starts from the other end. Twenty destinations, each built around a different way of eating and drinking: long wine lunches, bar-hopping, counter dining, market grazing, white-tablecloth institutions, historic cocktails. Find the style that matches yours and the destination follows.

## What this guide is

A side-by-side comparison, the logistics that trip people up, and my honest read on who each place suits. It covers timing, booking pressure, rough costs and what to skip.

## What it isn't

A list of restaurants to copy. Menus change, chefs move, places close. I use the specifics here to show how each destination works, then rebuild the list fresh for your dates.

# The decision framework

*Six questions. Answer them in order and the shortlist usually shrinks to two.*

## 1 How far are you willing to fly?

Tokyo is a long haul (nonstops from Chicago run about 13 to 14 hours). Cape Town needs a connection from most U.S. cities. Europe and Peru are overnight flights. Oaxaca can be nonstop from Dallas, Houston or Los Angeles, and New Orleans is the shortest hop on the list. Travel time eats into a short trip, so be honest about the days you have.

## 2 When can you actually go?

Season decides more here than anywhere else. Harvest, truffles, cider-house months, blossoms, hurricane season and festival weeks all change what the trip is, and what it costs. Match the destination to your dates rather than hoping the dates work.

## 3 How far ahead will you plan?

Counter seats in Tokyo, tasting-menu restaurants in the Basque Country and Lima's top tables need booking as soon as dates are firm. Pintxos bars, Oaxaca's markets and Napoleon House in New Orleans take no reservations at all. If you plan late, pick the second group.

## 4 What do you like in your glass?

Wine first: Italy, Cape Winelands, Burgundy. Cocktails: New Orleans, Tokyo. Spirits with a story: Oaxaca for mezcal, Lima for pisco. Easy, social, drink-and-wander: San Sebastián.

## 5 Who is driving?

Wine regions are spread out and tasting rooms add up. Plan a hired driver or organized tour for any day built around tastings. It costs less than most people expect and protects the rest of the trip.

## 6 What does a good day cost?

Daily costs range from about \$45 to \$60 at the budget end in Cape Town to \$350 to \$600 or more at the upper end in New Orleans. One tasting-menu meal can double a day's total, so decide where you want to spend before you book the hotel.

**Where to splurge, where to save.** Spend on the one meal that is the reason for the trip, a driver on wine days, and a hotel in the right neighborhood. Save on the ordinary lunches, the second tasting menu and anything that only exists to be photographed.

# The twenty destinations side by side

| Destination                    | Best for                                     | Prime timing                                                    | Booking pressure                                    | Planning estimate per person, per day                            |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Piedmont & Tuscany             | Wine-first travelers, slow lunches, truffles | Sep to Oct harvest; late Oct to Nov truffle; May to Jun Tuscany | Cellars by appointment; fair weekends               | €150 to €250 comfortable; €250 to €450+ upscale                  |
| Sicily                         | Street food, Etna wine, road trips           | Sep to Oct harvest; May to Jun                                  | Etna wineries by appointment                        | About €130 to €180 mid (excl. lodging)                           |
| San Sebastián & Basque Country | Bar-hopping, tasting menus, txakoli          | Sep to Nov; Jan to Apr cider houses                             | Tasting menus months ahead; bars walk-in            | Pintxos crawl about €20 to €35; tasting menus about €190 to €355 |
| Barcelona                      | Vermouth, small plates, cocktails            | May to Jun; Sep to Oct (cava harvest)                           | Tasting menus about 8 to 12 wks ahead               | About €90 to €160 mid (excl. lodging)                            |
| Paris & Burgundy               | Classic bistros, Burgundy wine               | Paris year-round; Hospices de Beaune auction Nov 15, 2026       | Top restaurants often open tables 30 to 90 days out | Varies widely; built with you                                    |
| Lisbon & the Douro             | City eating plus Douro wine stay             | Mid-Sep to early Oct harvest; May to Jun                        | Quintas by appointment; Belcanto ahead              | About €120 to €220 mid-range (rough)                             |
| London                         | Cocktail bars, pubs, Sunday roast            | May to Jun; Sep to Oct                                          | Roasts and top bars yes; pubs often walk-in         | About £200 to £310 mid-range, with hotel                         |
| Scotland (whisky)              | Whisky tours, haggis, scenery                | May for festivals; midges May to Oct                            | Tours and ferries ahead; walk-ins risky             | Edinburgh about £150 to £240; tours £18 to £30                   |
| Lima                           | Ceviche lunches, pisco, tasting menus        | Sunnier in summer; gray garúa in winter                         | Central and Maido well ahead                        | About \$80 to \$150 moderate                                     |
| Oaxaca                         | Moles, markets, mezcal                       | Nov to Apr dry season                                           | Top restaurants yes; markets no                     | \$40 to \$60 budget; \$80 to \$140 mid; \$200 to \$350+          |

## Side by side, part two

| Destination           | Best for                                   | Prime timing                               | Booking pressure                          | Planning estimate per person, per day                     |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Mexico City           | Street food plus top tasting menus         | Mar to Apr, Nov; Day of the Dead Nov 1-2   | Pujol, Quintonil: roughly 60 to 90 days   | Est. \$90-150/day comfortable, ex airfare                 |
| Mendoza               | Malbec, winery lunches, asado              | Mar to Apr harvest; Oct to Nov spring      | Wineries: 1 to 4 weeks, lunches earlier   | Est. \$180-300/day comfortable, ex airfare                |
| Tokyo                 | Sushi counters, izakaya, whisky bars       | Late Mar to early Apr; Nov to early Dec    | Counters as soon as dates are firm        | ¥12,000 budget; ¥22,000 to ¥35,000 mid; ¥40,000+          |
| Seoul                 | Barbecue, markets, soju, top bars          | Apr to May; Oct to early Nov               | Top tables 1 to 2 mo; markets walk-in     | \$120 to \$200 mid; \$250+ upscale (est.)                 |
| Bangkok               | Street food, craft cocktail bars           | Nov to Feb; hot and rainy otherwise        | Bars yes; stalls walk-in                  | \$85 to \$145 mid; \$170+ upscale (est.)                  |
| Singapore             | Hawker food, cocktail bars, easy logistics | Hot year-round; Feb driest                 | Bars yes; hawker stalls no                | \$150 to \$250 mid; \$350+ upscale (est.)                 |
| Cape Town & Winelands | Estate lunches, wine views                 | Feb to Mar harvest; Mar to Apr; Oct to Nov | Top restaurants need deposits and weeks   | \$45 to \$60 budget; \$120 to \$160 mid                   |
| New Orleans           | Classic cocktails, Creole dining, music    | Mar to Apr; Oct to Nov                     | Institutions yes; some bars none          | \$95 to \$135 budget; \$175 to \$275 mid; \$350 to \$600+ |
| Napa & Sonoma         | Tastings, tasting menus, scenery           | May to Jun; late Sep to early Oct harvest  | Tastings 2-4 wks; top tables months ahead | Est. \$450-700/day mid-range (Napa), ex airfare           |
| Kentucky (bourbon)    | Bourbon tours, racing, Old Fashioneds      | Apr to May; Oct for Keeneland              | Tours ahead; Derby very early             | Tours about \$20 to \$35; inn about \$140 to \$230        |

Estimates exclude international airfare unless stated. Figures are shown in the local currency where the source used it. Daily ranges are planning estimates, not quotes, and festival dates can push them sharply higher. Where I could not verify an all-in daily figure, the cell says so or the figure is a rough allowance. Your advisor builds a real estimate once your dates and hotel level are set.

**Fast read.** Easiest to execute: Italy, New Orleans, Napa, London and Singapore. Most planning-dependent: Tokyo, the Basque Country, Lima, Mexico City and Scotland. Shortest hop from Chicago: New Orleans and Kentucky. Longest: Singapore, Bangkok, Cape Town, Tokyo and Seoul. Best for a first food trip: Italy, New Orleans, Napa or London. Best for a repeat traveler who wants something new: Oaxaca, Mendoza, Sicily or Seoul.

# Piedmont & Tuscany, Italy

*Slow lunches, serious wine, and the pace to enjoy both*



*A street worth walking slowly*

## At a glance

### BEST FOR

Wine-first travelers who like a long lunch and no rush

### WHEN

Sep to Oct for Langhe harvest scenery. Late Oct to Nov for white truffles: the Alba truffle fair runs Oct 10 to Dec 6, 2026, and the start of truffle season depends on weather. May to Jun and Sep to Oct for Chianti and Montalcino.

### GETTING THERE

Milan Malpensa for the Langhe, Florence for Chianti and Montalcino, Rome as a farther option. Nonstop schedules from Chicago change by season, so I check yours.

### BOOK AHEAD

Cellars by appointment; walk-ins are not guaranteed. Popular restaurants on weekends and during the truffle fair.

### PLANNING ESTIMATE

About €150 to €250 per person per day for a comfortable trip. €250 to €450+ with a driver, premium wineries and truffle dining.

### ENTRY

U.S. citizens generally travel visa-free in Schengen for up to 90 days in any 180. The EU's EES and ETIAS systems are rolling out, so check current rules before you go.

## What to eat and drink

- Piedmont: Nebbiolo wines from Barolo and Barbaresco, and white truffles in autumn.
- Tuscany: Sangiovese-based wines from Chianti and Montalcino.
- Aperitivo hour, a board of cured meats, local cheese and a glass of red is a full and legitimate lunch.
- Check the menu for coperto, a per-person cover charge some restaurants add.

## How to do it well

- Pick one region per trip. Langhe and Chianti are far enough apart that combining them eats your days.
- Make lunch the main meal. Many restaurants close between lunch and dinner and take one weekly closing day, so confirm hours.
- Book cellar visits before you fly and ask what the tasting fee includes.
- Use a driver or organized tour on tasting days.

## Heads up

- Truffle quality and timing swing with the weather. A dry summer delayed the start of hunting in 2026.
- Truffle fair weekends push lodging prices up.
- I would not quote a drink-driving limit to you. Plan a driver instead.

**My take.** *If you want to eat and drink well without feeling rushed, this is the easiest yes on the list. The mistake is trying to see two regions in a week.*

# Sicily, Italy

Street food in Palermo, volcanic wines on Etna, and slow lunches in the southeast

05

## At a glance

### BEST FOR

Curious eaters who like street food, regional wine and a road-trip pace, and don't need tasting menus

### WHEN

Sep to Oct for harvest on Etna, Marsala and the southeast. Etna's high vineyards can pick into October or later. May to Jun is a calmer alternative. August is hot and busy.

### GETTING THERE

No nonstops from O'Hare to Catania or Palermo. Expect one stop via a European hub such as Frankfurt or Munich, roughly 11 to 15 hours in reported itineraries. Confirm current routings.

### BOOK AHEAD

Etna wineries by appointment, written confirmation recommended. Popular restaurants on weekends and in peak season. Palermo's market stalls and street food are walk-in.

### PLANNING ESTIMATE

Excluding lodging and airfare: roughly €50 to €90 a day on a budget, €130 to €180 mid-range, from Palermo-based figures. Tastings, drivers and Etna tours add more.

### ENTRY

U.S. citizens generally travel visa-free in Schengen for up to 90 days in any 180. EES border registration began in April 2026; ETIAS had no confirmed launch date in my research. Confirm before you go.

## What to eat and drink

- Arancine (fried rice balls), pasta alla Norma (eggplant, tomato, basil, salted ricotta), cannoli and granita with a brioche.
- Etna Rosso, a volcanic red from the mountain's slopes, and Nero d'Avola, another signature Sicilian red.
- Marsala: the fortified wine of the west, made in styles from dry to sweet.
- Palermo's Ballarò and Capo markets work best by day. Vucciria is more of an evening scene now.

## How to do it well

- Book winery visits through the estate and get confirmation in writing. Harvest work can take priority over tastings.
- Pick a base: Palermo and the west, or Catania, Etna and the southeast. Sicily is large, and combining everything eats days.
- Check each restaurant's coperto (cover charge). One guide lists €1 to €3 per person as typical.
- Use a driver for Etna tasting days.

## Heads up

- Italy is at Level 2 (increased caution) on the State Department list, with the embassy's latest notice dated Sep 10, 2026. Recheck before departure.
- ZTLs (restricted traffic zones) in historic centers are camera-enforced and can mean fines for rental-car drivers.
- Compare prices before ordering seafood platters in Palermo's market areas; one guide documents complaints about small, expensive portions.

**My take.** Choose Sicily for street food, wine and a long drive with good stops, not for a big restaurant list. Pick one half of the island per trip.

# San Sebastián & the Basque Country, Spain

*Pintxos bars, tasting menus, and one of the most talked-about food scenes in Europe*

## 06

### At a glance

#### BEST FOR

People who like to graze, bar-hop and eat late

#### WHEN

Sep to Nov for a food-focused trip. Jan to Apr for cider-house season. Summer is busy, so book early.

#### GETTING THERE

San Sebastián's own airport is closest but has limited service. Bilbao and Biarritz are the larger alternatives. Most U.S. itineraries connect through a European hub.

#### BOOK AHEAD

Tasting-menu restaurants: sources suggest roughly 2 to 4 months for three-star tables. Pintxos bars: no reservations.

#### PLANNING ESTIMATE

Pintxos crawl about €20 to €35 per person. Three-star tasting menus about €190 to €355 per person before drinks.

#### ENTRY

Schengen rules as in the Piedmont & Tuscany entry. Confirm EES and ETIAS status before departure.

### What to eat and drink

- Pintxos: order a drink and one or two bites, then move to the next bar. The bar crawl is called txikiteo.
- Txakoli: a young, dry Basque white, often lightly fizzy, poured from height at the bar.
- Sagardotegi (cider houses): new cider from the barrel, traditionally January through April. Book ahead and confirm dates.
- Tasting menus: Arzak and Akelarre are in San Sebastián, Mugaritz is in nearby Errenteria, Elkano is in Getaria. Confirm current status when booking.

### How to do it well

- Eat later than you do at home. Pintxos run around lunch and early evening, and dinner starts late.
- Do not treat every bar as a sit-down dinner. Stand, order, move on.
- Limit yourself to one big tasting-menu meal and let the bars carry the rest.
- A Rioja day trip is possible, but distance depends on which winery you mean. Plan a driver.

### Heads up

- Michelin lists 3 three-star, 3 two-star and 7 one-star restaurants for San Sebastián and its surroundings, 19 stars in all. "Most stars per capita" is a popular claim, not a clean statistic.
- Don't assume U.S.-style tipping. Check the bill for service charges.
- Semana Grande and Gastronomika dates were not confirmed in my research. Check official calendars.

**My take.** Don't over-schedule tasting menus. One big dinner, then let the pintxos bars do the work. This is the best destination on the list for people who hate being told when to eat.

# Barcelona, Spain

Vermouth hour, market bars and a city that eats late

07

## At a glance

### BEST FOR

Social, drink-and-wander eaters who like vermouth, small plates and a big-city cocktail scene

### WHEN

May to Jun and Sep to Oct are the best balance. Cava harvest around Penedès can start in August and runs through autumn. La Mercè, the city festival, was Sep 23 to 27, 2026; check the official dates for 2027.

### GETTING THERE

United and American list nonstops from O'Hare, about 8.5 hours in published schedules. Iberia appears as a codeshare on American. Seasonal dates vary, so confirm for your trip.

### BOOK AHEAD

Tasting-menu restaurants, roughly 8 to 12 weeks per one 2026 guide. Bar Cañete about 1 to 2 weeks or at opening. Quimet & Quimet takes no reservations.

### PLANNING ESTIMATE

Excluding lodging and airfare: about €90 to €160 a day mid-range, €180 to €300+ for a food-and-wine-focused day with tastings.

### ENTRY

U.S. citizens generally travel visa-free in Schengen for up to 90 days in any 180. EES border registration began in April 2026; ETIAS had no confirmed launch date in my research. Confirm before you go.

## What to eat and drink

- Vermut: the pre-lunch aperitif, usually with a small snack at a casual bar.
- Pa amb tomàquet, croquetes and bombas (fried potato croquettes with sauce) are the standard small-plate order.
- Cava: Catalonia's sparkling wine. Penedès is the wine country behind the city and works as a day trip.
- Cocktails: Paradiso, behind a fridge door in a pastrami shop, ranked No. 4 on The World's 50 Best Bars 2025 list.

## How to do it well

- Eat later than you would at home, and check kitchen hours rather than assuming continuous service.
- Book one headline dinner and let vermouth bars and market stops cover the rest.
- Visit La Boqueria early and look past the entrance stalls. It is a real market, but it is crowded and geared partly to visitors.
- Book Penedès winery visits ahead, especially around La Mercè and harvest.

## Heads up

- Disfrutar held three Michelin stars in the 2025 guide and is weekday-only per Michelin. It topped the 2024 World's 50 Best list. Confirm status and booking terms.
- Bodega 1900 was reported permanently closed in one venue listing. Confirm before you plan around it.
- Hotels charge a per-night tourist tax that varies by lodging type. Confirm the total when you book.

**My take.** A good pick if you want food, cocktails and a big-city setting in one place. Book one serious dinner and spend the rest of your time grazing.

# Paris & Burgundy, France

Classic bistros in the city, Burgundy wine country a train ride away



*Escargot and a glass of white*

## At a glance

### BEST FOR

Classic French food and a wine-country extension

### WHEN

Paris works year-round, though some restaurants close or cut service in the summer holidays, so confirm. Burgundy harvest moves year to year: the Hospices de Beaune estate started picking Aug 15 in 2026, its earliest ever. The Hospices de Beaune wine auction is Sunday, Nov 15, 2026.

### GETTING THERE

Paris to Beaune by rail: SNCF's Oct 4, 2026 schedule showed an average of about 2 hours 40 minutes and a fastest trip of 2 hours 8 minutes, with a change at Dijon. Check your date.

### BOOK AHEAD

Many top Paris restaurants release tables roughly 30 to 90 days out, though it varies by restaurant. Burgundy cellars: contact the domaine directly.

### PLANNING ESTIMATE

Varies widely by hotel and dining choices. I build this one with you.

### ENTRY

Schengen rules as in the Piedmont & Tuscany entry.

## What to eat and drink

- Service compris means service is already in the bill. A small extra tip for good service is optional.
- Lunch formules and prix fixe menus are the best-value way into a serious kitchen. Ask what is included.
- Burgundy: Pinot Noir for reds and Chardonnay for whites.
- A bistro lunch with a glass of white and a classic starter is the standard to beat.

## How to do it well

- Do Paris for the restaurants and Burgundy for the wine, and give Burgundy at least two nights.
- Arrange cellar visits ahead and confirm language, tasting format and fee.
- Book Beaune lodging early for auction weekend.

## Heads up

- I could not verify a reliable count of Paris Michelin stars across city versus region. Check the current guide rather than relying on a number.
- Some Paris restaurants shut in summer. Confirm dates before you build a trip around one.

**My take.** A day trip from Paris to Burgundy is a lot of train for a few tastings. If wine is the point, stay overnight.

# Lisbon & the Douro Valley, Portugal

*Custard tarts and ginjinha in the city, port and terraced vineyards upriver*

09

## At a glance

### BEST FOR

Travelers who want city eating plus a wine-country stay, without the pace of a big-name food capital

### WHEN

Mid-Sep to early Oct for Douro harvest (vindima), though exact dates shift each year and quintas are busy working. May to Jun for green vineyards and easier visits. Lisbon is comfortable in spring and early autumn.

### GETTING THERE

Nonstops from O'Hare to Lisbon have been reported (TAP, United), so confirm for your dates. Lisbon to the Douro is about 4 hours by car to Peso da Régua; there is no direct train. Porto is closer to the valley.

### BOOK AHEAD

Belcanto and other destination dinners; quinta tastings by appointment (Quinta do Crasto requires one). Casual Lisbon spots are mostly walk-in, with lines at the famous ones.

### PLANNING ESTIMATE

Roughly €120 to €220 per person per day for a mid-range trip, excluding airfare. Treat it as a rough figure; a driver, tastings and fine dining raise it.

### ENTRY

U.S. citizens generally travel visa-free in Schengen for up to 90 days in any 180. EES border registration began in April 2026; ETIAS had no confirmed launch date in my research. Confirm before you go.

## What to eat and drink

- Pastel de nata: the custard tart, best warm. Pastéis de Belém draws a long line, so go off-peak or use the takeaway queue.
- Ginjinha: a sour-cherry liqueur sipped from a small cup in the city center.
- Bacalhau (salt cod) turns up in many forms, and vinho verde is the crisp regional white of the northwest.
- Douro: Port and the valley's table wines, tasted on a quinta (wine estate) with the terraces in view.

## How to do it well

- Book quinta visits directly and confirm what the tasting includes. Quinta do Crasto's 2026 sheet lists a five-wine guided tour at €40 per person, minimum two, by confirmed appointment.
- Stay at least one night in the Douro. A same-day round trip from Lisbon is roughly 8 hours of driving.
- Treat Time Out Market as a convenient food hall, and save a booking for the one dinner you came for.
- Use a driver or organized tour on tasting days.

## Heads up

- Harvest is working time, not a show. Confirm access and dates with each quinta, since no 2026 dates were confirmed.
- Belcanto is listed by Michelin with two stars and is closed Sunday and Monday, per its own site. Confirm before building a day around it.
- Portugal's general limit is 0.5 g/L, but I would plan a driver rather than test it.

**My take.** Pair a few days in Lisbon with a night or two upriver, and don't try to do the Douro in a day.

# London, England

Cocktail bars, proper pubs and a Sunday roast, all on one transit pass

# 10

## At a glance

### BEST FOR

Bar-hoppers and pub people who want a big city, a deep cocktail scene and no rental car

### WHEN

May to June and September to October are comfortable for pub gardens and walking between stops. Summer is livelier and pricier. London Cocktail Week appears to be paused for 2026, with a return reported for March 2027, so confirm before planning around it.

### GETTING THERE

Nonstops from O'Hare to Heathrow on United, American and British Airways. Expect roughly 7.75 to 8.5 hours eastbound and 9 to 10 westbound, depending on schedule and winds.

### BOOK AHEAD

Sunday roasts at popular pubs and any destination bar you care about. Many pubs take walk-ins, but check each place's booking policy and kitchen hours.

### PLANNING ESTIMATE

Roughly £200 to £310 per person per day mid-range with a hotel, a mix of meals and a few drinks. Sharing a room lowers it. Excludes airfare and attractions.

### ENTRY

U.S. citizens need a UK ETA before travel. It costs £20 (raised from £16 in April 2026), covers multiple trips and lasts 2 years or until the passport expires. Apply early; most decisions are quick.

## What to eat and drink

- Sunday roast: roast meat, potatoes, vegetables, gravy and usually a Yorkshire pudding, served from lunchtime into the afternoon. One central pub's current menu lists roasts at about £25 to £28, a useful benchmark.
- Pubs: order and pay at the bar, give your table number if you are eating, and skip tipping per drink. A pint in a central pub can run about £6 to £8.
- Cocktails: four London bars made the 2025 World's 50 Best Bars top 50: Tayer + Elementary (No. 5), Connaught Bar (6), Satan's Whiskers (21) and Scarfes Bar (31). Confirm each is open before you build a night around it.
- Borough Market is a good grazing stop: open Tuesday to Sunday, closed Mondays, with shorter hours on Sunday. Not every trader attends every day.

## How to do it well

- Pick one neighborhood per evening and walk between two or three bars instead of crossing the city. London is big enough to eat your night in transit.
- Book the roast or the one destination bar you care about, then leave the rest loose. Pubs and many bars reward turning up.
- Check the bill for service. A 12.5% discretionary service charge is common in restaurants and optional, and you can ask for it to be removed before you pay.
- Do not plan on late-night pub service. Even famous pubs can close around 11 p.m., and kitchens often stop earlier.

## Heads up

- A 50 Best placement is a snapshot. The 2026 top 50 was due to be announced Oct 7, 2026, so lists may shift. Check the current ranking before quoting one.
- England's drink-driving limit is 80 mg per 100 ml of blood. Scotland's is lower, at 50. Skip the car in London and use transit.
- Famous does not mean good value. Check menus and service charges before sitting down near the big attractions.

**My take.** London is easy to do without a car, which is why people underestimate how much better it gets with two or three bookings made ahead. Lock in the roast and one serious bar, and let the pubs fill the gaps.

# Edinburgh, Speyside & Islay, Scotland

A city base for bars and haggis, with distillery country a long drive or ferry away

11

## At a glance

### BEST FOR

Whisky drinkers who like distillery tours, scenery and are comfortable planning logistics

### WHEN

Late April to May is the busiest whisky stretch: Spirit of Speyside runs Apr 28 to May 3, 2027 and Fèis Ile on Islay May 28 to Jun 6, 2027. Midges are around May to October, worst in July and August. Edinburgh's August festivals push prices up.

### GETTING THERE

United flies O'Hare to Edinburgh nonstop, but seasonally; the schedule I found ran through Oct 24, 2026. Otherwise connect, and confirm the routing for your dates.

### BOOK AHEAD

Distillery tours, especially on Islay, in summer and around the festivals. Islay ferries and flights too. Do not count on walk-ins.

### PLANNING ESTIMATE

Edinburgh mid-range runs about £150 to £240 per person per day including a hotel. Standard tours often start around £18 to £30. Islay and Speyside costs vary, so I build those with you.

### DRIVING

Traffic keeps left. Scotland's drink-driving limit is 50 mg per 100 ml of blood, lower than England's 80. Plan a driver. A UK ETA is also required for U.S. citizens.

## What to eat and drink

- Edinburgh classics: haggis, neeps and tatties, Cullen skink (smoked haddock soup) and the Scotch pie. Cheap and filling, and a good counterweight to a day of tastings.
- Islay: heavily peated whisky. Tours at Laphroaig, Ardbeg, Lagavulin, Bowmore, Bruichladdich, Caol Ila and Kilchoman were listed from roughly £18 to £25.
- Speyside: tour listings run about £18 at Cardhu to £30 at Glenfiddich, with Aberlour around £25. The Speyside Cooperage was listed around £5. Prices vary by tour, so check each booking page.
- Edinburgh whisky bars: Johnnie Walker Princes Street lists a rooftop bar open daily and Devil's Advocate appears in a 2026 cocktail guide. Confirm hours before you go.

## How to do it well

- Choose Speyside or Islay for a first trip, not both. Edinburgh to Speyside is roughly 3.5 to 4.5 hours by car, and Islay needs a ferry or a short flight on top of the drive from Glasgow.
- Islay by ferry: Kennacraig to the island takes about 2 hours, with Kennacraig roughly 2.5 to 3 hours from Glasgow. Loganair flies Glasgow to Islay in about 40 minutes. Confirm both schedules.
- Book tours before you fly and ask what the fee includes. Reserve cars early, since automatics are limited and cost more.
- On Islay expect single-track roads with passing places. Pull in to let others by and never park in them.

## Heads up

- Midges are worst in damp, still air at dawn and dusk. Pack repellent from May through October.
- A trip with Speyside and Islay both eats most of a week in transit. Be honest about your days.
- Edinburgh reportedly added a 5% visitor levy on paid stays from July 24, 2026. Confirm before you budget.

**My take.** Edinburgh is the easy part. The whisky is in the north and on the islands, and getting there is the real planning job. Pick one region, book the tours early and hire a driver.

# Lima, Peru

A dining city that keeps turning up at the top of world rankings

12

## At a glance

### BEST FOR

Seafood lovers, pisco fans and anyone who wants a serious tasting menu

### WHEN

Summer is warmer and sunnier. Winter is overcast and humid with garúa, a fine coastal mist. Lima hosts The World's 50 Best Restaurants awards Nov 2 to 4, 2026, so expect that week to be busy.

### GETTING THERE

Confirm nonstop versus connecting service for your dates. I check current routings when I build the trip.

### BOOK AHEAD

Central and Mado, well ahead. I could not verify an exact booking window.

### PLANNING ESTIMATE

About \$80 to \$150 per person per day for a moderate trip, excluding airfare and high-end tasting menus.

### ENTRY & HEALTH

Check Peru's current entry rules and the State Department advisory before booking. Lima is at sea level. Avoid untreated tap water.

## What to eat and drink

- Ceviche is traditionally a lunch dish, when seafood is freshest.
- Pisco sour: pisco, lime, sweetener, egg white and bitters. Peru and Chile both make pisco and both claim it, a long-running dispute.
- Recognition: Mado was No. 1 on the 2025 World's 50 Best list. Central was No. 1 in 2023 and now sits in the Best of the Best group. Kjolle, Mérito and Mayta also placed.
- Miraflores is an easy base (Mado is there). Barranco is artsy and historic (Central and Kjolle are there).

## How to do it well

- Plan lunch as the main event and keep evenings flexible.
- Reserve the one or two tasting menus you care about first, then build days around them.
- Leave room for neighborhood walking in Barranco.

## Heads up

- Michelin does not publish a Lima guide. The recognition here comes from the 50 Best lists, which are a different system.
- Tipping is not obligatory the way it is in the U.S. A modest tip for good service is appreciated, and check whether a service charge is already included.
- Whether the Mistura festival is running in 2026 was not confirmed.

**My take.** Lima rewards planning the meals first and everything else second. Ceviche at lunch, one tasting menu, then let the city fill the rest.

# Oaxaca, Mexico

One of Mexico's great food cities, built on moles, markets and mezcal

13

## At a glance

### BEST FOR

Curious eaters who like markets, mezcal and a slower pace

### WHEN

November to April is the most dependable dry season. January to March is a good choice if festivals aren't the priority. Day of the Dead (Oct 31 to Nov 2) brings big crowds. Guelaguetza is in July (July 20 and 27 in 2026).

### GETTING THERE

Nonstops appear in schedules from Dallas (American), Houston (United) and Los Angeles (Volaris). Otherwise connect, often via Mexico City.

### BOOK AHEAD

Casa Oaxaca, Criollo and Los Danzantes: reserve before you arrive. Markets are walk-in.

### PLANNING ESTIMATE

About \$40 to \$60 budget, \$80 to \$140 mid-range, \$200 to \$350+ upscale, per person including lodging, excluding flights.

### SAFETY

State Department lists Oaxaca state at Level 2 (increased caution) as of its May 29, 2026 advisory, with no restrictions noted for Oaxaca City or Monte Albán. Recheck before departure.

## What to eat and drink

- The seven moles: negro, rojo, amarillo, verde, coloradito, chichilo, and a seventh that depends on who you ask (manchamanteles or estofado). The seven is shorthand for a much bigger tradition.
- Mercado 20 de Noviembre: the Pasillo de Humo, where you pick meat and it's grilled on the spot. Mercado Benito Juárez has chapulines, chocolate, sweets and tejate.
- Mezcal: Santiago Matatlán in the Tlacolula district is a major production center, but not the only one.

## How to do it well

- Palenque visits (mezcal-making sites) are not drop-in bars. Arrange them ahead, confirm the fee and what tasting includes, wear closed-toe shoes and ask before photographing workers.
- Eat first, sip small, drink water, and use a tour driver rather than driving after tastings.
- Oaxaca City sits at about 5,085 feet. Go easy the first day.

## Heads up

- Pujol and Quintonil are in Mexico City, not Oaxaca. Recommendations mix them up constantly.
- UNESCO recognizes traditional Mexican cuisine as a whole, and lists Oaxaca's historic center and Monte Albán as World Heritage sites. "Culinary capital" is a reputation, not an official title.
- Do not drink tap water. Hot, freshly cooked food and fruit you peel yourself are lower risk.

**My take.** Go for the markets and the mezcal, and hire a good guide for the palenque day. Skip Day of the Dead unless that's the reason for the trip.

# Mexico City, Mexico

Street tacos, tasting menus and a serious cocktail scene, all at 7,350 feet

14

## At a glance

### BEST FOR

Eaters who want street food and a tasting menu in the same trip

### WHEN

March to April and November are generally drier. Rain is most likely June to October, often in the afternoon. Day of the Dead is Nov 1 to 2, with the city listing a big parade on Oct 31, 2026. September brings Independence celebrations and central-area crowds.

### GETTING THERE

Nonstops from Chicago O'Hare are listed on Aeromexico, American, United, Volaris and Viva, about 4 hours 20 to 35 minutes. Confirm service for your dates.

### BOOK AHEAD

Pujol (SevenRooms) and Quintonil (Tock) fill first. Sources suggest roughly 90 and 60 days out. Rosetta (Tock), Contramar and the top bars (OpenTable) also take bookings.

### PLANNING ESTIMATE

About \$40 to \$60 budget, \$90 to \$150 comfortable, \$250 to \$350+ on a fine-dining day, per person per day, excluding airfare. Estimates, not quotes.

### ENTRY & HEALTH

U.S. citizens need a valid passport book and no visa for tourist stays (officer sets the days). Altitude is about 7,350 ft, so go easy on day one. Use bottled or purified water. State Dept: Level 2 for Mexico City.

## What to eat and drink

- Tacos al pastor: pork shaved from a vertical spit, usually with pineapple, onion and cilantro. Also look for tacos de guisado and suadero.
- Chilaquiles for breakfast, tamales with atole, and masa snacks like tlacoyos, esquites and pambazos.
- Mezcal and pulque: pulque is fermented agave sap, and fruit versions are called curados. A pulqueria is a different night out than a cocktail bar.
- Markets: Mercado de Coyoacan for tostadas, San Juan Pugibet for specialty ingredients, Mercado Roma as a modern food hall.

## How to do it well

- Book Pujol and Quintonil first, then build the rest of the trip around them. Check the live calendars for your dates and for cancellations.
- Stay in Roma Norte or Condesa. Rosetta, Contramar, Expendio de Maiz and Limantour Roma are close together.
- Eat the big meal at lunch when you can. Contramar is a lunch spot, open until 8 p.m.
- Use ride-hailing or a hotel-arranged taxi, and match the car and plate before you get in.

## Heads up

- Expendio de Maiz takes no reservations, is cash-only and closes Mondays. Contramar and Limantour Roma list Monday service, so check each place.
- Tip about 10 to 15% at sit-down restaurants, and check the bill first. The flight fee is normally in your airfare, so don't prepay a paper FMM.
- Pujol's site still shows an undated closure notice, though its booking page is live. Confirm your date before paying.

**My take.** I would book the top tasting-menu table first and let the taquerias fill the gaps. The mistake is stacking tasting menus and skipping the street food that makes the city worth the flight.

# Mendoza, Argentina

*Malbec at altitude, long winery lunches and a mountain backdrop*

15

## At a glance

### BEST FOR

Malbec lovers who want winery lunches and open-fire cooking

### WHEN

March to April for harvest. October to November for spring. Vendimia 2027 is scheduled March 5 to 7 (parade, central show, repeat show), but dates can shift with weather. Zonda wind is strongest in Aug to Sept. Seasons are reversed from the U.S.

### GETTING THERE

No nonstop from Chicago found. Connect via Buenos Aires or Santiago, then fly to Mendoza (about 2 hours from Buenos Aires, about 1 hour from Santiago). Confirm schedules for your dates.

### BOOK AHEAD

Reserve every winery visit. Sources suggest 1 to 2 weeks for ordinary dates and 3 to 4 weeks or more for sought-after lunches and harvest weekends.

### PLANNING ESTIMATE

About \$80 to \$130 budget, \$180 to \$300 comfortable, \$350 to \$700+ upscale with a driver, per person per day, excluding airfare. Estimates only.

### ENTRY & HEALTH

U.S. citizens: valid passport, up to 90 days visa-free. Carry travel medical coverage. State Dept: Level 1. City sits near 2,460 ft, so altitude is not a concern for ordinary touring.

## What to eat and drink

- Malbec is the headline. Cabernet Franc, Chardonnay, Bonarda and Cabernet Sauvignon also show up on winery lists.
- Asado and parrilla: ribs, vacio, chorizo and ojo de bife, cooked over fire.
- Mendoza-style baked beef empanadas, grilled goat (chivo), humita and provoleta.
- Winery lunches are the main event: Piedra Infinita at Zuccardi Valle de Uco, Angelica at Catena Zapata, and 1884 Francis Mallmann in Godoy Cruz.

## How to do it well

- Pick your district. Maipu is closest and warmest, Lujan de Cuyo is about 20 km south, and Uco Valley is a full day, 80 to 130 km away at higher, cooler elevations.
- Plan one winery visit and one lunch per day, not three. Many lunches run long.
- Hire a driver or book a tour for tasting days. A private full-day car was quoted around \$200 to \$400 per vehicle by one 2026 guide.
- Ask for the current peso or dollar price in writing before you commit to a tasting or lunch.

## Heads up

- Don't drive after tasting. Argentina's national rule is zero alcohol on national routes, and Mendoza's rules differ, so I would not quote a limit to you.
- Payments: the official and parallel dollar rates were close on Oct 2, 2026, so the old 'bring cash dollars' advice isn't a reliable saving. Carry some pesos for tips.
- 1884 Mallmann closes Mondays. Many shops close roughly 1 to 5 p.m. Confirm hours for each winery.

**My take.** Plan each day around one winery lunch and hire a driver. Don't try to do Uco Valley and Lujan de Cuyo in the same day.

# Tokyo, Japan

The deepest restaurant city on the list, with a bar scene to match

# 16

## At a glance

### BEST FOR

Sushi counters, izakaya nights, whisky and cocktail bars

### WHEN

Late March to early April for cherry blossoms (dates shift, and it is busy). November into early December for comfortable weather and fall color. July and August are hot and humid.

### GETTING THERE

O'Hare has nonstops to both Haneda and Narita. Allow roughly 13 to 14 hours.

### BOOK AHEAD

Sought-after counters as soon as dates are firm, through the restaurant's own instructions, OMAKASE or TableCheck. Phone-only counters go through a hotel concierge.

### PLANNING ESTIMATE

Excluding flights and a splurge omakase: about ¥12,000 a day budget, ¥22,000 to ¥35,000 mid-range, ¥40,000+ upscale.

### ENTRY

U.S. passport holders can visit visa-free for tourism up to 90 days. Passport must be valid for the whole stay. Carry proof of onward travel.

## What to eat and drink

- The 2026 Michelin Guide Tokyo lists 160 starred restaurants (12 three-star, 26 two-star, 122 one-star), and Michelin calls Tokyo the city with the most starred restaurants in the world.
- Omakase planning: roughly ¥5,000 to ¥22,000 for lunch and ¥20,000 to ¥40,000 for dinner at celebrated sushi counters. Elite dinners pass ¥50,000.
- Izakaya: many add an otoshi, an automatic appetizer that works as a cover charge (about ¥300 to ¥500 per person). It isn't free.
- Sake: junmai means no added brewing alcohol. Ginjo and daiginjo are rice polished to 60% or less and 50% or less.

## How to do it well

- Read each restaurant's cancellation terms. Published counter policies include 50% the day before and 100% on the day or for a no-show, and a card hold can be charged. Lateness can count as a cancellation.
- Ginza suits seated whisky and carefully made cocktails. Golden Gai has about 280 tiny bars, some members-only. Ask about the cover charge before you sit (roughly ¥500 to ¥1,500 in Golden Gai) and follow no-photo rules.
- Tipping is not customary.

## Heads up

- English menus are increasingly common but not universal at small bars and counters.
- Dietary needs need planning: fish-based dashi, bonito and animal-derived seasonings hide in dishes that look safe. Tell a set-menu restaurant when you book and carry a written Japanese explanation.

**My take.** Book two or three counters you care about and leave the rest loose. Tokyo rewards wandering in a way a spreadsheet never will.

# Seoul, South Korea

Barbecue, markets and a serious cocktail scene

17

## At a glance

### BEST FOR

Barbecue, market grazing and soju or makgeolli nights, with a few top cocktail bars

### WHEN

April to May and October to early November are the strongest. Summer is hot and humid with a rainy season (jangma) from mid to late June for about a month. Winter can be very cold. Seollal (Lunar New Year) is Feb 7, 2027.

### GETTING THERE

Korean Air flies a nonstop from O'Hare to Incheon, about 14 hours 40 minutes eastbound, arriving the next day. Confirm the schedule and carrier for your dates.

### BOOK AHEAD

Top restaurants and bars: watch CatchTable Global and book as soon as tables release, often one to two months out. Markets and casual spots: walk in. Check solo policies at barbecue places.

### PLANNING ESTIMATE

About \$70 to \$110 budget, \$120 to \$200 mid-range, \$250+ for a fine dining or bar heavy day, per person, lodging included, airfare excluded.

### ENTRY & HEALTH

Visa-free up to 90 days. K-ETA is waived for U.S. citizens through Dec 31, 2026, but you still need the free e-Arrival Card (within 72 hours). K-ETA is expected from Jan 1, 2027. Level 1 advisory. Tap water is safe.

## What to eat and drink

- Korean barbecue, soju, makgeolli and chimaek (fried chicken and beer) are the core. Many barbecue places want a two-portion first order, even for one diner.
- Markets: Gwangjang for bindaetteok and mayak gimbap, Tongin for the dosirak lunchbox, Namdaemun for kalguksu and galchi-jorim alleys. Hours vary, so check.
- Michelin Guide Seoul 2026 lists 42 starred restaurants (Mingles holds three stars) and 51 Bib Gourmands.
- Bars: Zest was No. 2 in Asia's 50 Best Bars in both 2025 and 2026. Alice Cheongdam was No. 13 in both years, and M+MS Bar was No. 42 in 2026.

## How to do it well

- Use CatchTable Global for reservations. It takes overseas cards for deposits. Naver added passport verification in 2026, and Tabling can be harder without a Korean phone number.
- Cards work widely, but carry won and a backup card for stalls or a rejected foreign card. Buy a T-money card for the subway. Tipping is not expected.
- With older companions, pour and receive drinks with two hands. In groups, let someone else pour yours.
- Drinking in public is not categorically banned, and Hangang Park picnics with a beer are common. Obey posted no-alcohol signs.

## Heads up

- Kimchi can contain fish sauce or salted shrimp, and soups and noodles often use anchovy stock. Ask about broth and sauces if you avoid seafood.
- Myeongdong street food carries a tourist-area premium, so check posted prices and compare with other markets.
- K-ETA status changes on Jan 1, 2027. Re-verify entry rules for any trip after that date.

**My take.** Seoul works well for a first Asia food trip, and a Chicago nonstop helps the logistics. I'd reserve one or two bars and a barbecue dinner in advance and let the markets fill the rest.

# Bangkok, Thailand

Street stalls, a serious bar scene, and heat you plan around

18

## At a glance

### BEST FOR

Street food lovers who also want serious cocktail bars, and who can handle heat and spice

### WHEN

November to February is the drier, more comfortable stretch. Rainy season runs roughly mid-May to October. March to May is the hottest (April highs often top 95F). Songkran is April 13 to 15, 2027. Loy Krathong is Nov 24, 2026.

### GETTING THERE

No nonstop from O'Hare that I could find. Plan one stop (Hong Kong, Taipei or Tokyo are common) and roughly 20 to 24+ hours door to door. Schedules change, so I check yours.

### BOOK AHEAD

Cocktail bars and any tasting menu: yes, as soon as dates are firm. Street stalls and most markets: no reservations. Jay Fai is a queue, and booking reports conflict, so confirm before relying on it.

### PLANNING ESTIMATE

About \$45 to \$75 budget, \$85 to \$145 mid-range, \$170+ upscale per person per day, lodging included, airfare excluded. A cocktail crawl or tasting menu adds to that.

### ENTRY & HEALTH

Reported 30-day visa exemption for U.S. citizens from Sept 15, 2026 (confirm before booking, older sources say 60). Thailand Digital Arrival Card required within 3 days of arrival. Don't drink the tap water.

## What to eat and drink

- Street staples: pad kaprao (holy basil stir-fry), boat noodles, som tam with grilled chicken, tom yum goong. Boat noodle broth can include blood, so ask if that's a dealbreaker.
- Michelin's Bangkok street food list includes K. Panich (mango sticky rice) and Bunloet, both Bib Gourmand. Jay Fai holds one Michelin star in the 2026 guide, is cash only and is known for the crab omelette.
- Bars: Asia's 50 Best Bars 2026 placed Dry Wave Cocktail Studio No. 4, Bar Us No. 6 and Lennon's No. 7. Bar Us was No. 4 in 2025. Quote the year if you repeat a ranking.
- Sweet and cold: mango sticky rice, Thai iced tea, fresh coconut. Drinks often arrive very sweet, so ask for less sugar.

## How to do it well

- Pair one or two reserved bars with a lot of unscheduled street eating. Go to the stalls at lunch and early evening, and save the cocktail bars for later.
- Carry small baht notes. Street stalls and taxis want cash, hotels and larger restaurants take cards. Tipping is not expected at stalls. Check sit-down bills for a 10% service charge before adding more.
- Alcohol can be bought 11 a.m. to midnight as of May 29, 2026, with no general afternoon ban. Sales can still be restricted on major Buddhist holidays and around elections, so check your dates.
- Cover shoulders and knees for temples and remove shoes where asked. Use a car or the BTS and MRT in the heat, and build in an afternoon break.

## Heads up

- Fish sauce, shrimp paste, dried shrimp and oyster sauce hide in dishes that look vegetarian. Look for jay (vegetarian) food and carry a written Thai allergy card for serious shellfish or peanut allergies.
- Rain and heat are the real planning issue. October is still rainy, and April is the hottest month.
- Tourist entry fee proposals have been discussed but were not confirmed in force as of my research. Reconfirm before departure.

**My take.** Bangkok rewards a plan for heat, rain and dietary needs. I'd pick November to February, reserve the bars you care about, and leave the rest to the street.

# Singapore

Hawker centres, serious cocktails, and rules worth knowing before you go

19

## At a glance

### BEST FOR

Travelers who want hawker-centre eating, polished cocktail bars and an easy first stop in Asia

### WHEN

Hot and humid all year (highs about 88 to 91°F). February is the driest month. The northeast monsoon runs Dec to early March and the southwest monsoon June to Sept, with showers possible any month. F1 weekend is Oct 9 to 11, 2026.

### GETTING THERE

No nonstop from O'Hare that I could find. Plan one connection and allow roughly 20 to 26+ hours elapsed, depending on layover. Confirm schedules for your date.

### BOOK AHEAD

Bars and restaurants with tasting menus: yes. Hawker stalls: never. The Raffles Long Bar is walk-in only. Race week and Chinese New Year (Feb 6 to 7, 2027) tighten hotels and some stall hours.

### PLANNING ESTIMATE

About \$80 to \$110 budget, \$150 to \$250 mid-range, \$350+ upscale per person per day, lodging included, airfare excluded. Alcohol is expensive, so it moves the total fast.

### ENTRY & HEALTH

No visa for U.S. citizens for up to 90 days; passport valid 6 months beyond stay. Free SG Arrival Card within 3 days before arrival. State Dept advisory is Level 1. Bring no chewing gum.

## What to eat and drink

- Hawker culture was inscribed on UNESCO's intangible heritage list in 2020. The listing covers the living tradition, not individual stalls.
- Michelin: Hill Street Tai Hwa Pork Noodle holds one star in the 2026 guide. Bib Gourmand 2026 lists 97 places, including King of Laksa and Tian Tian Hainanese Chicken Rice. Chilli crab is a sit-down meal to budget separately.
- Bars: Asia's 50 Best Bars 2026 ranked Jigger & Pony No. 9 (No. 3 in 2025), Nutmeg & Clove No. 12 and Offtrack No. 16. Atlas and Manhattan did not appear in the 2026 top 100.
- The Singapore Sling is served at the Raffles Long Bar, open and walk-in only. A zero-alcohol version is also on offer. Confirm the current menu price when you go.

## How to do it well

- Pay cash at hawker stalls. Many show PayNow codes your U.S. bank app generally can't use. Cards are fine at hotels and restaurants.
- No tipping is expected. Many bills add a 10% service charge plus 9% GST, which together run about 20% above the menu price.
- Public drinking is banned 10:30 p.m. to 7 a.m., and so is takeaway alcohol retail. Licensed bars set their own hours. Geylang and Little India add weekend and holiday restrictions.
- Hawker etiquette: a tissue packet on a table means it's taken. Return your tray and clear your litter. Durian is banned on public transport.

## Heads up

- Laksa and many soups use shrimp paste, dried shrimp or meat stock. Ask about vegetarian dishes. For halal needs, check each venue in MUIS's certification search.
- Drinks are pricey. Expect roughly S\$12 to 18 for a beer and S\$20 to 35 for a cocktail, more at top bars.
- F1 weekend (Oct 9 to 11, 2026) and the Chinese New Year stretch raise hotel rates and change stall hours. Plan around them or lean in.

**My take.** Singapore is easy to get around and easy to eat well in. Budget separately for drinks, because that's where costs jump, and skip race week unless it's the point.

# Cape Town & the Cape Winelands, South Africa

*Estate lunches, serious wine, and mountains in every view*

20

## At a glance

### BEST FOR

Wine lovers who want scenery and a long lunch

### WHEN

February to March for harvest activity (picking can run into April). March to April balances harvest, weather and lighter crowds. October to November is a good spring option. Dec to Jan is warm and peak season. July is cool and wet: about 13°C versus about 22°C in February.

### GETTING THERE

Nonstops from Atlanta (Delta), Newark and Washington Dulles (United). Chicago has no nonstop. Connect via Atlanta, Newark or Dulles.

### BOOK AHEAD

La Colombe and Épice take deposits. Reserve peak-season and weekend tables several weeks ahead.

### PLANNING ESTIMATE

About \$45 to \$60 budget or \$120 to \$160 mid-range per person per day. A tasting-menu lunch adds a lot.

### ENTRY & SAFETY

U.S. citizens need no visa for 90 days or less. Passport valid 30 days past departure with two unused pages. State Department: Level 2, crime and smash-and-grab theft are concerns. Use planned transport.

## What to eat and drink

- Tastings are commonly 4 to 6 wines, paid per person. Examples: Fairview in Paarl lists six wines with six cheeses for R95. Babylonstoren lists a three-wine express for R95 and a seven-wine tasting from R220. Pairings cost extra.
- La Colombe at Silvermist (Constantia): advertised weekday spring lunch R1,695 per person through Nov 30, 2026, deposit required.
- Épice at Le Quartier Français (Franschhoek): advertised spring lunch R1,495 through Nov 30, 2026, deposit required.
- Chefs Warehouse is two restaurants (Beau Constantia and Maison Estate in Franschhoek). Say which one when you book.

## How to do it well

- Drives from central Cape Town: Constantia 20 to 30 minutes, Paarl 50 to 60, Stellenbosch 45 to 60, Franschhoek 60 to 75. Traffic adds time.
- Driving is on the left. South Africa's legal blood-alcohol limit is 0.05%, and even a small drink can put you over. Hire a driver for tasting days.
- The Franschhoek Wine Tram is R350 per adult hop-on hop-off. It covers Franschhoek only, tasting fees (R60 to R260) and meals are extra.

## Heads up

- The original Test Kitchen closed after Sept 30, 2021. Test Kitchen Fledgelings is a different, operating project. SALON closed as a regular restaurant at the end of March 2026.
- Load-shedding: none scheduled (504 days without as of Oct 2, 2026). No water restrictions in effect, though dams were around 75.5% and the city is watching summer. Recheck near departure.

**My take.** Pick February to April if you want wine country at full volume. July works for a cozy trip, but don't sell it as a vineyard-patio trip.

# New Orleans, USA

Cocktail history, Creole cooking, and a city that treats lunch as an event

21

## At a glance

### BEST FOR

Classic cocktails, Creole dining and live music

### WHEN

March to April and October to November. June to September is hot and humid. Hurricane season runs June 1 to Nov 30, peaking mid-August to mid-October. Mardi Gras 2027: Fat Tuesday is Feb 9 (Carnival Jan 6 to Feb 9). Jazz Fest 2027: Apr 22 to 25 and Apr 29 to May 2.

### GETTING THERE

Nonstops from Chicago: American and United from O'Hare, Southwest from Midway.

### BOOK AHEAD

Commander's Palace, Galatoire's, Dooky Chase's and Compère Lapin. Napoleon House takes no reservations.

### PLANNING ESTIMATE

About \$95 to \$135 budget, \$175 to \$275 mid-range, \$350 to \$600+ upscale, per person including lodging, excluding airfare.

### SAFETY

Enjoy the busy areas of the French Quarter, but travel with others, favor well-lit streets and arrange rides at night.

## What to eat and drink

- **Sazerac:** Louisiana named it the official cocktail of the city of New Orleans in 2008. Peychaud's bitters are central, and the Sazerac Coffee House popularized a cognac-based version in the 1850s. Details of its origin are disputed.
- **Ramos Gin Fizz:** Henry C. Ramos, 1888. Vieux Carré: Walter Bergeron at Hotel Monteleone, 1938 (the rotating Carousel Bar opened in 1949). Hurricane: Pat O'Brien's, 1940s.
- **Grasshopper:** Philibert Guichet of Tujague's created it for a 1918 competition in New York. Tujague's is now at 429 Decatur.
- **Creole food** grew from cosmopolitan New Orleans; Cajun from Acadian traditions in rural south Louisiana. "Creole has tomatoes, Cajun doesn't" is a tendency, not a rule.

## How to do it well

- **Napoleon House** (500 Chartres) is the Pimm's Cup stop. Arnaud's French 75 Bar and the Sazerac Bar at the Roosevelt are operating, but the Roosevelt bar is not the original coffee house.
- **Commander's Palace:** business attire, jackets preferred, collared shirts and closed-toe shoes required. Weekday lunch advertises 25-cent martinis with an entrée, three per person.
- **Galatoire's** accepts reservations for the first-floor Main Dining Room and for Friday lunch. Jackets are required in the Main Dining Room after 5 p.m. and all day Sunday.
- **Dooky Chase's:** lunch Tuesday to Friday, dinner Friday and Saturday, reservations highly recommended. Cochon takes Resy and holds walk-in bar and counter space.

## Heads up

- "Birthplace of the cocktail" is local lore: a printed definition of the word appeared in a New York paper in 1806. New Orleans is the birthplace of many famous cocktails, which is a stronger claim to make.
- Walk with a drink only in a plastic go-cup. Opened glass containers are prohibited on public streets, and never take an open drink into a vehicle.
- **Tales of the Cocktail 2026** was July 19 to 24. Confirm 2027 dates with the organizer before booking.

**My take.** Treat it as two trips in one: historic bars in the evening, one proper white-tablecloth lunch. Go in spring or fall.

# Napa Valley & Sonoma, California, USA

Reservation-only tastings, serious dining and two valleys with different personalities

22

## At a glance

### BEST FOR

First-time wine travelers who want tastings plus top-tier dining

### WHEN

May to June for milder weather, or late Sept to early Oct for harvest. Harvest runs roughly Aug to Oct. Summer through fall is wildfire-smoke season, so keep plans flexible and check CAL FIRE and AirNow before you go.

### GETTING THERE

San Francisco (SFO) has nonstops from O'Hare on United and American, about 5 hours, then roughly 1.5 to 2 hours by car. Sacramento also has nonstops. Oakland and Santa Rosa did not.

### BOOK AHEAD

Assume tastings need reservations. Sources suggest 2 to 4 weeks ahead, earlier in harvest. The French Laundry and SingleThread need booking well ahead.

### PLANNING ESTIMATE

Standard tastings run about \$40 to \$80 in Napa and \$25 to \$75 in Sonoma. A day is roughly \$250 to \$375 budget, \$450 to \$700 mid-range, \$900+ upscale in Napa (Sonoma lower), per person, excluding airfare.

### SAFETY

California's legal limit is 0.08% BAC, but tasting adds up fast. Use a driver, ride-share or tour. Spitting into the bucket is normal. Tipping the host is appreciated, not required.

## What to eat and drink

- Cabernet Sauvignon leads in Napa. Sonoma is more varied, with Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Zinfandel all common.
- Tasting menus: The French Laundry (Yountville) and SingleThread (Healdsburg) hold three Michelin stars in 2026. PRESS in St. Helena holds one.
- Casual picks: Bouchon Bistro in Yountville and Oxbow Public Market in Napa (7:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily, individual merchants vary).
- Michelin's 2026 list also shows Enclos in Sonoma up to three stars and Kenzo in Napa losing its star.

## How to do it well

- Plan two or three tastings a day, not five. Most visits run about 90 minutes.
- Book the earliest slots. Opus One's last appointment is 3:30 p.m. and Stag's Leap Wine Cellars' last tasting is 3:30 p.m.
- Use Silverado Trail when Highway 29 is slow. Don't schedule back-to-back appointments across the valley.
- Ask each winery before you pack a picnic. Many don't allow outside food.

## Heads up

- Robert Mondavi Winery reopened April 20, 2026 after a multiyear renovation, so older closure warnings are outdated.
- Tasting fees are not fixed, and some wineries have cut them. Check the winery's own page for your date.
- Smoke or fire can disrupt harvest travel. Keep bookings flexible and have an indoor backup.

**My take.** If you want to stay in one region, pick Sonoma for value and a looser pace, Napa for polish and name-brand estates. Either way, book the tastings before the hotel and hire a driver.

# Bourbon Country: Louisville & Bardstown, Kentucky

Distilleries, Old Fashioneds and horse racing, a short flight from Chicago

23

## At a glance

### BEST FOR

Bourbon fans who want distillery visits, a city base and an easy trip from the Midwest

### WHEN

Keeneland's fall meet runs Oct 2 to 24, 2026 and its spring meet Apr 2 to 23, 2027. The Kentucky Derby is May 1, 2027, so expect crowds and high prices. Bardstown's Bourbon Festival ran Sept 10 to 13 in 2026.

### GETTING THERE

Nonstops from O'Hare to Louisville (SDF) were listed on United and American, about 1 hour 20 minutes. Louisville to Bardstown is about 42 miles and 50 minutes by car.

### BOOK AHEAD

Distillery tours, which can sell out, plus Derby and Keeneland weekends. Some places take walk-ins, but the Kentucky Distillers' Association recommends booking.

### PLANNING ESTIMATE

Standard tours run roughly \$20 to \$35 each. A Bardstown inn listed about \$140 to \$227 a night. I build a full daily figure with you, since lodging swings with the calendar.

### DRIVING

Kentucky's legal limit for drivers 21 and over is 0.08% BAC, but impairment can lead to charges below it. Use a sober driver or a tour service on tasting days. Open containers are not allowed in the car.

## What to eat and drink

- Old Fashioned: the Pendennis Club in Louisville is credited with it, which is a local origin claim, not settled history. Order one at a Louisville bar and compare.
- Hot Brown: an open-faced turkey and bacon sandwich tied to the Brown Hotel in Louisville. Derby-Pie is a trademarked Kentucky chocolate walnut pie.
- Louisville tours: Evan Williams was listed at about \$20 to \$23, Angel's Envy at \$30 for its signature tour and Old Forester around \$32. Check each booking page.
- Buffalo Trace's visitor center lists complimentary tastings daily without a reservation. Four Roses requires reservations for tours but its bar and patio can be visited without one.

## How to do it well

- Base in Louisville for city dining and Whiskey Row tours, or in Bardstown for the Heaven Hill, Barton 1792 and Willett area. Do not split days across both without a plan.
- Keep it to two or three distilleries a day. Tours run about an hour, and the drives between rural stops add up.
- The old passport program ended July 1, 2025. Visit by interest, not for stamps or completion rewards.
- Book a driver or tour. Rideshare is not reliable outside Louisville and Lexington, and the limit is not a plan.

## Heads up

- Kentucky has a patchwork of dry, wet and moist counties. Jefferson County (Louisville) is wet, and Nelson County (Bardstown) is not completely dry, but check specific venues.
- Derby week and Keeneland weekends sell lodging out early and raise prices sharply.
- Tour prices and availability vary by source. Use the distillery's own booking page for the final number.

**My take.** Bourbon country is easier than people think and harder to drive than it looks. Book the tours you care about, hire a driver, and give yourself one slow evening in Louisville.

# Drinking well, wherever you land



A flight of cocktails



Espresso martinis



Rooftop pour

## Before you go

- Decide your must-book table and book it the day your dates are firm.
- Read cancellation terms. Some counters charge half the day before and all of it for a no-show.
- Tell restaurants about dietary needs when you book, not at the table.
- Check dress codes. Several classic New Orleans rooms have them.

## At the bar

- Ask about cover or seat charges before you sit, especially in Tokyo.
- Ask what's local before you ask for what you know.
- Follow no-photo rules in small bars, and ask before photographing people.
- Alternate every drink with water.

## On tasting days

- Eat first and sip small. You are not obliged to finish a pour.
- Hire a driver or book an organized tour. Never plan around the legal limit.
- Book cellars and palenques ahead. Walk-ins are not guaranteed.
- Budget for pairings separately. They are rarely included in a basic flight.

## On the ground

- In New Orleans, use plastic go-cups and leave glass inside.
- In Oaxaca and Lima, stick to bottled or purified water.
- In Japan, tipping is not customary. Read the bill instead.
- Confirm that places haven't closed. Several famous names on older lists have.

# Ten mistakes that quietly ruin food trips

## 1 Picking by the photos

A pretty hotel tells you nothing about whether you can get a table. Start with how you want to eat.

## 2 Booking the wrong season

Cape Town in July is not harvest. Oaxaca at Day of the Dead is not quiet. New Orleans in peak hurricane weeks needs flexible bookings. Tokyo in August is hot and humid.

## 3 Trusting an old list

Original Test Kitchen closed in 2021. SALON stopped operating as a regular restaurant in March 2026. Pujol is in Mexico City, not Oaxaca. Tujague's moved. Galatoire's take reservations in some rooms and Friday lunch, despite older advice.

## 4 Stacking tasting menus

Two in a row is a lot of food. Mix one headline dinner with markets, bars and lunches.

## 5 Self-driving a wine day

Distances add up and tastings add up faster. Hire a driver.

## 6 Skipping the fine print

Deposits, card holds and cancellation windows can cost real money at counters and top restaurants.

## 7 Ignoring dietary needs

Fish-based dashi and hidden animal products can sit in dishes that look safe, and fixed menus often can't adapt on the day.

## 8 Treating estimates as quotes

One tasting-menu lunch or a private driver can double a day's cost. Decide where to spend before the hotel.

## 9 Over-scheduling

The best meals often come from the gap in the itinerary. Leave a few evenings open.

## 10 Booking everything yourself and hoping

Every place here has booking quirks. You can learn them, or you can hand them to someone who already has.

## What a travel advisor actually does here



*The kind of table you plan for*

*You could book the flight yourself. The harder part is knowing which table to hold, which to skip, and what the fine print says.*

A food and drink trip has dozens of small decisions where one wrong call costs a meal or a day. This is where an advisor earns the fee.

### Match the traveler to the place

Wine person, bar person or market person? I steer you toward the destination that fits how you actually travel.

### Know the booking systems

I know where counters release seats, which platforms take deposits and when to book, and I track the dates for you. I can't guarantee any table, and anyone who says they can is overpromising.

### Vet the logistics

Drivers, guides, transfers, wine-day pacing and a hotel in the right neighborhood. The things that quietly decide whether a day works.

### Read the fine print

Cancellation terms, deposits, dress codes, entry rules and seasonal risks, so nothing surprises you after you pay.

### Use supplier relationships

Where preferred perks or upgrades are available through hotel and supplier partners, I use them. They vary by property and are never guaranteed.

### Stay in your corner

If a flight changes, a table disappears or a plan falls apart mid-trip, someone is working on it with you.

## Questions people ask before they book

**Can an advisor get me into a restaurant I can't book myself?**

Not as a promise. I know how each system works and when to try, and I tell you honestly when a table is unlikely. Where a hotel or supplier relationship helps, I use it.

---

**How far ahead should I book?**

For sought-after counters and tasting menus, as soon as your dates are firm, and a few months out for the most competitive. For everything else, planning a few months ahead gives you room.

---

**Which is best for a first food trip?**

Italy or New Orleans: easy logistics, forgiving pace, strong payoff.

---

**Are the prices in this guide accurate?**

They're planning estimates from current sources in October 2026. Menus, exchange rates and seasons change, so I rebuild numbers when I plan your trip.

---

**Is this a fit if I'm not much of a drinker?**

Yes. Every destination here has a food-first version. Tell me and I'll build around markets, tasting menus and non-alcoholic pairings.

---

**Can I combine two destinations?**

Combine neighbors, not far-apart pairs. Paris with Burgundy works. Italy and Spain in one trip usually means too much transit.

---

**What if I have dietary restrictions?**

Tell me before I book. Some places adapt easily, some can't, and Tokyo and Oaxaca need extra planning.

---

**How do I get started?**

Send a trip request through the inquiry form. It takes a few minutes and tells me what I need to start.

---



## Ready to plan the trip?

Tell me where the quiz landed you and when you want to go. I'll take it from there, and the planning will be done right.

**START PLANNING YOUR TRIP**

[travelelegantescapes.com](https://travelelegantescapes.com)

---

Elegant Escapes Travel · Travel Done Right. Travel is personal, and so is my approach.

Facts in this guide were checked against current sources in October 2026. Prices are planning estimates and not quotes. Restaurant availability, schedules, entry rules and safety advisories change, so confirm details before booking.