

# Feed your curiosity

With plenty of new food-themed escorted tours on the menu, Adam Shaw rounds up some of the tastiest offerings



Street market in Tbilisi, Georgia

PICTURE: Shutterstock/LiliGraphie

Whether it's sampling tasty treats at a bustling street food market or enjoying a traditional home-cooked meal with the locals, a country's cuisine is one of the best ways to experience a destination – so it's little wonder that food-themed tours are on the rise.

Intrepid Travel reported a 55% increase in bookings for its culinary range compared with 2022, while several operators have expanded their food and drink offerings this year too.

Explore has introduced six food-themed packages for 2023, spanning Peru, Japan, India, Jordan, Italy and Georgia. Programme manager James Adkin says: "I think one of the best things about travel is the food – it allows you to fully engage all your senses and gives you a deeper understanding of the culture.

"And locals love it when visitors are enthusiastic about their food. Even if there's a language barrier, you can still appreciate great food."

Although such tours cater primarily to those with an interest in food and drink, operators are keen to stress that they can

offer much more. "It's never 100% food; you get all the other highlights that you would expect on a regular tour," says Adkin. "We want to make sure there's at least one food experience each day, but we also want to showcase the people, history and culture of the places we visit."

#### BEST FOR: CHEESE LOVERS

*A Taste of Georgia: Tbilisi to the Caucasus Mountains* – Explore Shared borders with Turkey and Armenia ensure some real treats for gastronomes and wine lovers alike in the cradle of wine. And it all comes together in this Explore tour, a highlight of which is a *khachapuri* masterclass in Tbilisi, where they'll be taught about the regional varieties of this warm cheese-filled bread, considered Georgia's national dish.

But there's plenty more to Georgia's cuisine besides cheesy bread. "When I visited, I hadn't appreciated how much of a foodie destination it is. There's so much for visitors to try that they might not have been aware of," says Adkin.

In the country's wine region of Kakheti, guests can taste wines made in large



ASK THE expert

“Food tours are a great option for anyone embarking on a solo travel adventure for the first time or who has never been on a group trip before. You will automatically have things in common with your fellow travellers – a love of delicious food.”

**Hazel McGuire, general manager UK & Ireland, Intrepid Travel**



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Khachapuri, a cheese-filled bread, Georgia; traditional cooking in Georgia; dining out in South Korea capital Seoul on a tour with Intrepid

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Timolina; Ben Mac

earthenware vessels, before sharing a traditional *mtsvadi* (barbecued kebabs) lunch with a local family. More hands-on activities include making aubergine rolls stuffed with walnut paste as part of a cookery lesson in Mtskheta.

Georgia’s cultural heritage is just as compelling as its food and wine, as evidenced by visits to the Narikala and Gremi fortresses, the Jvari Monastery and the birthplace of Joseph Stalin.

**Book it:** Explore’s eight-day tour starts at £1,908, including flights, accommodation, internal transport and some meals, departing on September 30. [explore.co.uk](http://explore.co.uk)

**BEST FOR: VEGANS**

**South Korea Real Food Adventure – Intrepid Travel**

Veganism is on the rise, with about 3% of the UK population now vegan (up from 2% in 2019), according to a YouGov poll in January. Last year, Intrepid Travel decided both to keep up with this growing trend and promote eating habits that have less impact on the planet, adding vegan experiences to all its culinary tours.

Chiming with a recent poll that saw the country’s cuisine ranked as the world’s favourite,

“Georgia’s shared borders with Turkey and Armenia ensure some real treats for gastronomes and wine lovers alike in the cradle of wine

Intrepid’s Hazel Maguire, general manager for the UK and Europe, recommends heading to South Korea, where one of the operator’s bestselling foodie tours includes a plant-based celebratory dinner during a stay at Golgusa Temple.

Other vegan-friendly culinary experiences on the tour include a kimchi cooking class, where guests make pancakes out of the spicy fermented veg; a demonstration on how the traditional red chilli paste *gochujang* is made; and a craft brewery tour in Jeonju. For tour meals, participants who would prefer plant-based alternatives will be catered for with meat-free substitutes and a range of other local vegan dishes, including soybean and sprout soup or aubergine dumplings.

**Book it:** The eight-day tour with Intrepid Travel costs from £2,480 for a September 18 departure. The price includes accommodation, most meals and internal transport, but not international flights. [intrepidtravel.com](http://intrepidtravel.com)

**BEST FOR: ART AND CULTURE**

**Parma to Florence: Italy’s Culinary Highlights – Exodus Travels**

Southern Italy’s *cucina povera* (kitchen of the poor) and its many meat-free dishes make it a favourite with vegetarians, but it’s good to ➤



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Italian balsamic vinegar and Parmesan; the Uffizi Gallery, Florence; Whitby, Yorkshire; antipasti with wine; fish and chips feature on a Shearings itinerary PICTURES: Shutterstock/Giancarlo Polacchini, canbedone, beats1

## DIETARY ADVICE

- Flag any allergy or dietary requirements early so the company you book with is aware of customers' needs. This gives them more time to prepare or make any alterations.
- Ask whether the operator can provide a paper note, written in the local language, highlighting clients' dietary requirements.
- Check if the operator you book with has guides who are trained in first aid, and advise the client to let guides know where they keep any necessary medication.
- Any destination can be suitable for those with dietary requirements, but a little research into traditions will help you find somewhere that's easier for clients. Vegetarians, for example, will be well catered for in India, which has a strong veggie culture.

see provinces farther north getting in on the act, offering visitors the chance to eat globally popular cuisine while experiencing Italian culture at its best through Renaissance art and architecture.

A new tour from Exodus combines these via a journey through Emilia Romagna and Tuscany, mixing a range of classic food-themed experiences with visits to the arts-rich cities of Parma, Bologna (named world capital of food by *Condé Nast Traveller* last year), Modena and Florence. Food experiences include sampling classics such as Parmigiano Reggiano cheese, balsamic vinegar and Brisighello olive oil with local producers, taking part in a Sangiovese wine tasting and joining a cooking class led by a local chef to make a traditional Bolognese dish.

"We visit small-scale authentic producers who are always happy to evangelise about local produce and its place in regional life," says Tom Wilkinson, senior product manager at Exodus.

**Book it:** The seven-day trip with Exodus is priced from £3,349, including flights, accommodation, transfers and most meals (including wine with dinner), departing on October 3. [exodus.co.uk](http://exodus.co.uk)

“Visitors have the chance to eat globally popular cuisine while experiencing Italian culture at its best through art and architecture

## BEST FOR: WALKING UP AN APPETITE Tapas Trails – Ramblers Walking Holidays

If clients want to combine walks through spectacular scenery with stops for equally stunning food, this new trip mixing countryside strolls with food and wine experiences in northern Spain and the Basque Country – home to more than 20 Michelin-starred restaurants – should prove irresistible.

Highlights include tapas trails in Logrono and Barcelona and a pintxos tour in Bilbao, where, by visiting a series of bars, clients can try typical bites such as salted cod and veal cheek alongside Rioja wines. Wine figures large, with a tasting session at Vivanco, one of the world's largest wine museums, in the Rioja region, as well as the chance to sample cava at the Caves Llopart winery on the outskirts of Barcelona. The Basque Country walks take in the high points of the Tolono and Pagasarri mountains, along with ancient forests outside Bilbao and rolling vineyards near Laguardia.

**Book it:** Prices for the 10-day tour start at £2,050, including flights, transfers, internal transport and half-board accommodation, based on a September 26 departure. [ramblersholidays.co.uk](http://ramblersholidays.co.uk)





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Tapas and pintxos, Spain; wine tour, Venice; Moroccan lamb and vegetable tagine PICTURES: Shutterstock/Radiokafka, Food Shop, MisterStock

**BEST FOR: A NO-FLY FEAST**

**A Taste of Yorkshire – Shearings**

Cheese, ales, confectionery and stunning scenery don't have to involve overseas trips – the UK has plenty for clients to sink their teeth into, including a new tour from Shearings that explores the best that Yorkshire has to offer.

A visit to the Wensleydale Creamery gives guests a chance to sample this king of English cheeses, freshly made, while real ale fans will be able to sup bitters, IPAs and stouts at the Black Sheep Brewery. The tour also takes in a gentle meander around the cobbled streets of York – home of the Rowntree's and Terry's brands – to learn about its longstanding relationship with confectionery, plus the chance to make chocolate, and enjoy a classic fish and chip supper in Whitby. But it's not all about the food and drink – exploring picturesque Dales villages such as Ripon, Aysgarth and Hawes, and climbing aboard a steam train to ride the North Yorkshire Moors Railway, are experiences as moreish as the region's cheeses.

**Book it:** Shearings' five-day trip can be booked from £529, including half-board accommodation and coach travel, for an August 28 departure. [shearings.com/agents/login](http://shearings.com/agents/login)

“ In York, visitors can learn about the city's longstanding relationship with confectionery, and have the chance to make chocolate

**BEST OF THE REST**

**BEST FOR: WINE LOVERS**

**A Taste of Veneto – Jules Verne**

Clients can take in the best of the Venice region's wine alongside cheese and meat boards in a classic *bàcoro* (a typical wood-furnished tavern), as well as sampling some of the area's best grappa in traditional wine cellars.

**Book it:** Bookings cost from £1,985, including flights, transfers, accommodation and some meals, departing on October 3. [vjv.com](http://vjv.com)

**BEST FOR: A QUICK BITE**

**Four Days in Marrakech – G Adventures**

Customers who are short on time can experience an immersive foodie trip with this brief Moroccan tour that includes making an authentic *tanjia* – a tagine cooked in a special clay pot overnight – and a visit to a bakery to sample *khobz*, a thick, round loaf that is similar to pita.

**Book it:** The three-night tour starts from £379, including accommodation, most meals and internal transport, departing on October 5. International flights not included. [gadventures.com](http://gadventures.com)