

Growing trend

Home-grown goodies can be a key selling point for a hotel stay, writes Laura French

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There's a curious trend taking over the hotel world, and it's nothing to do with virtual reality headsets or robot butlers. In fact, it's quite the opposite – edible gardens and on-site farms that hark back to the days when home-grown produce was all the rage.

From cocktails made with home-farmed mangos to chocolate, gin, honey and organic spa treatments produced from scratch, it's not just a case of chucking a few leeks and tomato plants into the garden – these hotels are getting inventive.

It's part of a wider response to a trend towards healthy, locally sourced produce, and interest is on the up. "These activities are more in demand than ever from guests including couples, groups and families," says Marina Papatsoni, who has worked with The Westin Resort, Costa Navarino, in Greece, which offers various farm-to-table experiences from its vegetable garden. "Clients are looking to learn more about the destination they are visiting and to immerse themselves in the culinary traditions of the region."

So use our handpicked guide (excuse the pun) to get some inspiration on where to send gastronomy-loving, nature-seeking guests, and see your commission grow too. ➔

Agreco Farm, Cr te

FARMVILLE

For families after a fun, immersive experience, nothing beats a day out on a farm. Fortunately, there are a few properties that offer just that.

Among the most comprehensive is Agreco Farm in Crete, open to guests staying at any of Grecotel's seven properties on the island. Olive oil, wine, cheese, eggs, meat and honey are all produced here – and used in the hotel's restaurants and body care products – and there's an array of activities ranging from vegetable picking to goat-milking, wine tasting, baking and beyond.

"Our goal is to give Grecotel guests, farmers and students a first-hand experience of the original production methods of traditional Greek products," says Alexia Kaklamanou, head of sales promotion for the farm.

It's not the only brand getting in on the game. In Thailand, Six Senses Samui has a Farm on the Hill, where goats and chickens graze among an abundance of crops, providing organic eggs, milk and vegetables which can be enjoyed over a barbecue, following a private sunset tour of the grounds.



At Hunter Valley Resort, there's even a candy school where guests can learn to make alcohol-infused sweets

And it's not just about the eating part – resorts offer plenty of opportunity for guests to get hands-on. In northwest Greece, Aristi Mountain Resort & Villas has opened a greenhouse offering cooking courses which teach guests how to prepare a traditional, three-course meal with seasonal, home-grown ingredients – from beets and broccoli in winter to basil and cucumber in summer.

Then there's Villages Nature Paris, the sprawling eco-resort that has just opened as part of a joint venture with Disneyland Paris. Operated by Pierre & Vacances and with nature as its core theme, it teaches visitors how to use its home-farmed vegetables via everything from beekeeping classes

and butter-churning workshops to gardening courses offering green-fingered types a tip or two.

On that note, there's news closer to home. Raymond Blanc's renowned hotel and restaurant, Belmond Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons in Oxfordshire, has just started a gardening school, teaching participants how to grow crops during day courses through the summer and beyond in the resort's expansive grounds (from £185).

It adds to an already comprehensive roster of cooking classes including 'my garden to your plate', where guests tour the gardens and harvest their own produce before turning it into a lunch extraordinaire (from £365).

GETTING INVENTIVE

A handful of resorts take things a step further. In Saint Lucia, Jade Mountain and Anse Chastanet share a 600-acre farm which supplies 40% of all food served in the latter's restaurant – think coconut, cinnamon, nutmeg and more than 2,000 cocoa trees.

But the highlight has to be the Discover Chocolate Festival – this year from December 5-10 – when a chocolate

cocktail party kicks off a week that would make Willy Wonka proud. Guests can partake in chocolate and wine pairing sessions, truffle workshops, cocoa-themed dinners and more.

Things get even sweeter each August when the resorts celebrate Chocolate Heritage Month, providing guests with a pass to the Chocolate Laboratory and offering special packages featuring the likes of chocolate spa treatments, sensory tasting experiences and, at Jade Mountain, a chocolate lover's breakfast.

The treats needn't be limited to certain months, though. Hotel Chocolat's Boucan resort, also in Saint Lucia, is dedicated to all things cocoa throughout the year, offering tree-to-bar experiences which begin with a walk through its on-site cocoa groves and culminate with a homemade chocolate bar (tasting is mandatory, of course).

HOME BREWING

If it's more alcohol that piques your clients' interest, however, suggest a stay at Hunter Valley Resort in Australia, two hours from Sydney. This

family-owned abode is home to 70 acres of sprawling emerald vineyards, alongside a brewery for beer lovers which ferments 12 types of craft beer.

"Guests can enjoy meals made from seasonal ingredients grown in the Brewhouse's own garden," says Rachel McMurdo, Travel 2's assistant product manager for Oceania. "There's even a candy school where they can learn to make alcohol-infused sweets."

Carrier recommends the five-star Vila Vita Parc Resort & Spa, set amid a forest in the Algarve, Portugal. The resort has its own wine estate two hours inland, complete with expansive vineyards, flowering gardens and olive and orange groves, alongside a working farm producing organic ingredients. They're served up at eight restaurants – one of which boasts two Michelin stars – and in the hotel's underground wine cellar, where tastings await.

Those caught up in the gin trend might be more swayed by Bella Luce in Guernsey, which distils the stuff in traditional copper stills. The hotel will be launching tasting sessions for 2018, so highlight this as a new hook for

those wanting a beverage-filled break without a long-haul flight.

SPA TIME

You don't just have to limit these selling points to food and drink, however. Spa treatments made with home-grown ingredients are catching on too. At Aleenta Hua Hin in Thailand, ginger, lemongrass, mint, ylang ylang and other products are grown on a 25-acre organic farm for use in treatments, from scrubs and wraps to full-body massages, at the Ayurah Spa.

Over in Germany, Jumeirah Frankfurt mixes things up with a Skyline Honey Treatment, a 60 or 90-minute indulgence using honey produced in its 28th-floor rooftop apiary (from €120), where more than 40,000 bees reside. The honey is also served at breakfast and in cocktails.

A similar approach is taken at the Fairmont Royal York in Toronto. Here, 300,000 rooftop bees produce around 800 pounds of honey a year – a significant portion of which goes into Honey Cream Ale, produced by the Mill St Brewery round the corner. Now that's sweet. **tw**

CLOCKWISE FROM FACING PAGE:

Jumeirah Frankfurt, Germany; Aleenta Hua Hin, Thailand; Aristi Mountain Resort, Greece; Jade Mountain and Anse Chastanet, Saint Lucia; and Belmond Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, Oxfordshire



Premier Holidays offers four nights at the Bella Luce, Guernsey, from £425 per person by air, valid for travel from October 1-30. trade.premierholidays.co.uk

A week's B&B at Boucan by Hotel Chocolat costs from £2,029 with the [Inspiring Travel Company](http://InspiringTravelCompany.com), based on two adults sharing a lodge, and including BA flights from Gatwick and private transfers. inspiringtravelcompany.co.uk



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