

SUMMER TRAVEL

Sunday, August 4, 2024 | The AJC Travel team is dedicated to providing tips, tricks and stunning photos from around the world | Catch the latest at ajc.com/travel

10 tasty destinations for summer fun

Quaff a beer in Czechia, hunt for truffles in Italy, take a cooking class in Madison, Ga.

By Blake Guthrie | For the AJC

Atlanta-based gourmands with a travel itch have a plethora of delectable culinary adventures to choose from for a late summer or early fall getaway. Whether it's hunting truffles in Italy, exploring monastery breweries in Czechia or tasting Julia Child's favorite tacos in California, they can plan to learn a thing or two, make new friends and, best of all, savor some spectacular flavors.



Executive chef Jeb Aldrich grills on the patio at Switchback, the signature restaurant he helms at Cataloochee Ranch in the mountains of North Carolina. COURTESY OF BEN FINCH PHOTOGRAPHY

Maggie Valley, North Carolina

In the high country of Western North Carolina on the border of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Cataloochee Ranch is a mountain getaway known for its horseback riding adventures, among other activities, dating back to 1933. Recently reopened after a four-year transformation project under new ownership, the ranch is also a notable culinary destination under the stewardship of executive chef Jeb Aldrich. Atlantans may remember Aldrich from his

time at Canoe, Joël, 4th & Swift and Tiny Lou's at the Hotel Clermont. Switchback, the signature restaurant on the ranch, serves what it describes as "Southern Appalachian fare with European Alpine influences." Also on the property are the Hitch food truck during special events, the Forge for al fresco dining with an unbeatable view and the Tack Room, a wine and cocktail bar. ■ Entrees \$24 and up. Accommodations \$600 and up. 119 Ranch Drive, Maggie Valley, NC. 828-926-1401, cataloocheeranch.com.

Amelia Island, Florida

The inaugural Amelia Island Dining Month takes place throughout September with 24 restaurants participating, each offering a special prix fixe menu for the entire month. The dining scene on the island has lots of beachside and waterfront establishments serving seafood with a view of the ocean or the marsh, but it has evolved to include much more. In downtown Fernandina Beach, the charming historic heart of Amelia Island, Cafe Karibo has an eclectic menu of international cuisine, Arte Pizza serves authentic wood-fired pizzas and Baba's Mediterranean features classic

Greek specialties. For fine dining, Verandah at Omni Amelia Island Resort and Coast at The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island are also a participants in Dining Month. ■ Sept. 1-30. Prix fixe dinners \$35 and \$55. Amelia Island Welcome Center, 102 Centre St., Fernandina Beach, Florida. 904-277-0717, ameliaisland.com.

September is Amelia Island Dining Month, when local chefs' talents are displayed. Twenty-four eateries to participate. COURTESY OF DEREMER STUDIOS LLC

Charleston, South Carolina

Next month Charleston will host its first-ever Food & Wine Classic, an extension of a major annual event held in Aspen, Colorado, for the last 40 years. Coming to Charleston makes sense because the Holy City is widely regarded by some as the culinary capital of the South. Tastings, demos and seminars featuring renowned local and international chefs and media talent will take place at four locations – the Charleston Gailard Center, the Emeline Hotel, the Mills House Hotel and the Charleston Visitor Center. The latter location will play host to the Grand Tasting Pavilion, a centerpiece attraction with two-hour, twice-a-day tastings on Friday and Saturday. The event ends Sunday morning with multiple seminars between 10-11 a.m. ■ Sept. 27-29. Three-day pass \$2,450. Charleston Visitor Center, 375 Meeting St., Charleston, South Carolina. 800-774-0006, foodandwineclassicincharleston.com.

Madison, Georgia

Rusted tin roofs, old red bricks and forged steel beams make up the early-20th-century structures at Empire Mills, a former cottonseed mill now restored as a community gathering place in Madison. Owner and head chef Hallie Jane Zimmerman rescued the abandoned property and reopened it in 2017 as a wedding and events venue, but what she really loves doing is small-group cooking demonstrations and classes. These occur at least once a month and include wine tastings, a walking tour of the historic property and dinner. The next scheduled class is the Lamb and Fresh Sides Interactive Cooking Demo on Aug. 15. On Aug. 10 the venue will host its 2nd annual Crab Boil, a Lowcountry-style affair with yard games inside and out. ■ Cooking demo class \$75. 1290 Pennington Road, Madison. 706-342-2837, empiremillsga.com.

Czech Republic

Taste the classic flavors of beer brewed using the ancient monastic tradition in centuries-old monasteries in Czechia. In Prague, Břevnov Monastery, founded in 993 AD, was the first place beer was brewed in Bohemia and the Czech lands. The brewery tour, which must be booked separate from regular monastery tours, dives deep into the brewing history with a museum, a lecture and a film. There's also a beer shop and taproom on site. The Premonstratensian Monastery in Želiv, founded in 1139, also has a brewery that uses traditional methods. The beautifully preserved town of Žatec, known as a center for hop cultivation, is home to the Hop Museum and the Hop and Beer Temple. ■ Tours and tastings \$5 and up. B evnov Monastery. +420 602 885 660, brevnovskypivovar.cz/en.



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La Super-Rica Taqueria is one of the stops along the Santa Barbara Taco Trail. Julia Child's praise of the taqueria in the '80s made it an overnight success. COURTESY OF VISIT SANTA BARBARA

Santa Barbara, California

Julia Child once said in a TV interview how much she loved the food at Santa Barbara's La Super-Rica Taqueria, which made the taco and tamale stand an overnight sensation. This was in the 1980s, but even today the lines are long and the prices low. Aficionados of authentic Mexican food, particularly street-style tacos, will find plenty of other beloved spots at stops on the Taco Trail in this city with a rich His-

panic heritage. Mony's Mexican Food in the artsy enclave known as the Funk Zone is a popular spot serving unique salsas, including one made with pistachios.

Check out other taquerias with Taste Santa Barbara on their Original Downtown Santa Barbara Taco Tour. The 3.5-hour walking tour makes five stops and includes alcoholic beverages.

■ Tour \$148 and up. Taste Santa Barbara. 805-633-0707, tastesantabarbarafoodtours.com.



An Old Fashioned from Humble Baron, a bar and restaurant at the Nearest Green Distillery in Shelbyville, Tennessee.

COURTESY OF HUMBLE BARON AT NEAREST GREEN DISTILLERY

Shelbyville, Tennessee

Located on a former walking horse farm in central Tennessee, Nearest Green Distillery is more than a place for whiskey lovers. Founded by an African American woman and named after a man who was born a slave and is widely considered the godfather of Tennessee whiskey, it's a destination for history buffs, families and foodies. On tours you'll learn about "Uncle Nearest," as he was called, and the oral tradition that kept his mostly forgotten story alive through two centuries.

The 1.5-hour tour includes a tasting flight with single barrel choices and premium blends available only at the distillery. Enjoy elevated Southern fare, craft cocktails and world-class entertainment at Humble Baron where a 518-foot-long bar wraps around the music stage. Get your barbecue fix at Chuck's Barrel House BBQ II, home of the locally famous Grilled Cheese on Crack sandwich.

■ Tours and tastings \$35 and up. Nearest Green Distillery, 3125 US-231, Shelbyville, Tennessee. 931-773-3070, unclenearest.com.



In Abruzzo, Italy, Experience BellaVita offers immersive culinary experiences, including truffle hunting excursions with trained dogs. COURTESY OF EXPERIENCE BELLAVITA

Abruzzo, Italy

In central Italy's Abruzzo region, family-run Experience BellaVita specializes in immersive culinary tours highlighting the area's rich gastronomic heritage. A big part of that heritage is truffles – 40% of harvested Italian truffles come from Abruzzo. Truffle hunting is a secretive tradition. The rare, subterranean mushrooms take years to grow and require very specific conditions. They are difficult to find, requiring the keen snout of a trained dog.

That's where Experience BellaVita comes in. Their truffle hunting day tours with an expert guide and eagerly sniffing dogs will lead you to these tasty morsels in the dirt, ending with a tasting of local wines. The company also offers customized multiday experiences that delve deep into local culture with pasta and cheese making classes, wine tours and more.

■ Tours \$163 and up. Experience BellaVita, experiencebellavita.com.



The Richmond Night Market in British Columbia, Canada, has over 600 food booths with a wide array of Asian foods. COURTESY OF GRANT HARDER

Richmond, British Columbia

The Canadian city of Richmond – located just south of Vancouver International Airport – has a large Asian population with 50% of residents identifying as Chinese. Explore the best of Asian culture, including cuisine, all summer long at the Richmond Night Market, claiming to be the largest night market in North America. Running every weekend night (Friday-Sunday) through October, the market hosts more than 600 food booths serving a wide range of international fare such as kimchi bacon

rolls, Japanese poutine and the over-the-top Flying Cup Noodles with speared meats, eggs and more flowing over the rim of a bowl of steaming, stir-fried ramen noodles. The colorful market also has more than 100 retail shopping booths, a lively menu of cultural entertainment on the main stage and lots of big bouncy inflatables, among other amusements for the kids.

■ Admission \$8.50. Every Friday-Sunday through Oct. 14. 8351 River Road, Richmond, British Columbia. 604-244-8448, richmondnightmarket.com.

Columbus, Ohio

Columbus has blossomed into an unlikely culinary destination over the last few years. Celebrity pastry chef and cookbook author Christina Tosi told Condé Nast Traveler in 2022, "I'll fly to Columbus, Ohio, to eat." Essence magazine declared early this year, "Don't laugh. Columbus has gastronomical game," touting places like Modern Southern Table at Budd Dairy Food Hall (614-505-2630, budddairyfoodhall.com). The hall has 10 kitchens, including Hatch, an ever-changing space spotlighting rising chefs on the scene.

Columbus Food Adventures, which ranked No. 1 in the Best Food Tour category of USA Today's 10Best Readers' Choice Awards for 2024, offers walking and van tours of neighborhood hot spots. Tours last between three and five hours and include five to six tastings. The 21-and-up Summer Cheer tour has seven stops with adult beverages to complement all the nibbles.

■ Tours \$68 and up. Columbus Food Adventures, 614-440-3177, columbusfoodadventures.com.