



EUROPE'S SECRET FOOD HOTSPOTS

Venture off the beaten track this autumn and alongside placid lakes, gentrified docklands and Alpine valleys you'll find oyster brioches, new-wave fish and chips and mutton rolled in juniper. But shhh... don't tell everyone!

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Read more about Slovenia at olive-magazine.com



Why Slovenia isn't overflowing with tourists is hard to fathom. Perhaps it's because this scenic little country – with a population of just over two million – is so well hidden, tucked between Italy, Austria, Hungary and Croatia.

SLEEP *Nebesa*, a cluster of mountainous chalets just five minutes from the Italian border, means 'heaven' in Slovenian, and it lives up to its name. Peaceful and blissfully quiet, its rooms are sleek and comfortable, with glass-fronted living spaces, private terraces and views of the turquoise Isonzo river below.

Nebesa is also home to a spa and all-you-can-eat pantry (the latter is open 24/7 and comes stocked with local prosciutto, cheeses, bread and homemade wine). There's no real reason to leave *Nebesa* – just enjoy it for the zen-like haven that it is.

EAT At *Majerija* restaurant with rooms, just outside the village of Slap, herbs and flowers

mould the menu – you can pick up to 40 different herbs within 1km of the dining room. Chives are served whole to create a bitter explosion of flavour, and basil liquor is made from five different types of basil. Try mutton rolled in juniper and coffee (you can see the mountain it once grazed on from some of the tables) with a creamy sauvignon vert made just a 45 minutes' drive away (majerija.si).

For something special, head to **Dvorec Zemono** run by Tomaž Kavčič, a charismatic chef who's often praised for modernising his homeland's cuisine (prilozetu.si). Food here is playful: deconstructed beef soup with test tubes (literally) of rich reductions; and a hilarious 'whoops!' ice-cream bomb that (spoiler alert) your waiter will intentionally smash onto your plate. Another must-visit restaurant is **Hiša Franko**, where chef Ana Roš champions the same eat-local, eat-seasonal principles so revered

by the Slovenes (hisafranko.com). Typical five-course menus include dishes such as a colourful bowl of young beetroot, sunchokes (Jerusalem artichokes) and tiny meadow plants, with snails (juicy, soft, rich) and a 'melting egg yolk' that has only the slightest film on it – a credit to its freshness.

DON'T TELL EVERYONE... The Mesesnel family has been making wine for generations at **Cejkotova house and cellar** in Goče (their candle-lit wine cellar is 700 years old). Pop in for lunch – Davorin Mesesnel, who shows guests round, makes a mean *frtalja* (basically a fat pancake, loaded with herbs) – and a taste of *ribolla* wine (00 386 31 398 496).

Return flights from London Luton to Ljubljana cost from £49 (wizzair.com). *Double rooms at Nebesa* start from €186 b&b (nebesa.si). *One week's car hire* costs from around £70 (sixt.co.uk).

MORE INFO slovenia.info »



ROTTERDAM

From underdog to top dog: a tidal wave of urban regeneration has swept across Holland's second biggest city recently. Europe's busiest port has emerged crammed with art, culture and an exciting, experimental, food scene. The city's once down-at-heel docklands has sprouted a futuristic skyline, and the whole city has been threaded with state-of-the-art architecture, from the sleek Centraal Station to the country's first indoor food market, **Markthal** (markthal.nl).

In the basement of the abandoned Tropicana water park, there's a gourmet mushroom farm, **RotterZwam** (mushrooms-at-home.com), supplying local restaurants and bakeries. And a disused warehouse in the old red light district of Katendrecht is now the **Fenix Food Factory**, a food hub buzzing with bakers, brewers and baristas, their punters sipping beer in the sun on a neighbouring quayside (fenixfoodfactory.nl). **SLEEP Mainport Hotel** is a smart 215-room design hotel on the revamped waterfront of the Maritime District. Street-side there's a quayside where you can hop into a water taxi. A glass elevator hurtles up to rooms with floor-to-ceiling windows and, on the waterside terrace, you can reflect on the Netherlands' position as the spiritual home of gin with a Dutch Sylvius gin, served with a slice of apple and cinnamon.

EAT This is a city for grazing. Head to **Hopper** an industrial-style café, roastery and artisan bakery for breakfast and a Chemex-filtered coffee (hopper-coffee.nl). After mooching round the Markthal, climb up to the roof for lunch at **Op Het Dak** (ophetdak.com). Tuck into sea bream and mackerel tartare with cream of garden peas and green bean dressing.

For dinner, **FG Food Labs** is where François Geurds' alchemy takes place, in a tunnel-like space designed for tapas-style, high stool dining (fgfoodlabs.nl). Dishes are as theatrical as the surroundings, the starriest course a mortar (with pestle) of mint, dill and red peppercorns pounded and topped by liquid nitrogen, plus a scoop of yogurt ice cream, grated lime, sweet potato cream, garlic foam, mushrooms and tofu.

DON'T TELL EVERYONE... Flowers and Sours is a new blossom-based bar and kitchen that also hosts workshops, founded by two friends, one a fermenter, the other an organic cordial-maker and fan of hand-picked flowers and foraged ingredients (flowersandsours.nl). *Return flights from London City to Rotterdam cost from £106* (klm.com). *Double rooms at the Mainport Hotel start from €157.50 b&b* (mainporthotel.com).

MORE INFO holland.com

For a memorable road-trip, explore Denmark's most northerly region over four days – start in the city of Aalborg, then head north towards Lønstrup, Skagen and the Grenen sandbar, where the North Sea and Kattegat Sea collide in a tumult of frothy waves. White beaches lie undisturbed, the sea is as clear as it is cold, and immaculately presented seafood is the region's speciality.

SLEEP Brøndums Hotel in Skagen may have shared bathrooms, but the sumptuous 1840s building – adorned with oil canvases painted by a community of bohemian artists who flocked to Skagen in the 1920s – is breathtaking. It isn't a big stretch to imagine that bedrooms here might once have been slept in by romantic poets (broendums-hotel.dk).

For something even more back-to-basics (but

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refreshingly so), try **Badehotel Lønstrup**. Clean rooms bathe in sunlight during the day and there's an honesty bar for late-night drinks. Expect a good breakfast: homemade jams and juices, local cheeses and rye bread (villavest.dk). **EAT** Aalborg's **Tabu** specialises in modern Nordic cuisine – green tomato with raw scallop and sorrel; buttermilk sorbet with sweet pickled cucumber; and caramelised nutty brown butter on warm rye bread (ta-bu.dk). Further west, **Svinkløv Badehotel** in the quiet coastal town of Fjerritslev is split into pretty pastel-coloured spaces, its shiny white wooden floors repainted every year. Try a plate of ox heart carpaccio, or scallops wrapped in smoked cheese (svinkloev-badehotel.dk).

Villa Vest in Lønstrup looks as if it's floating on the sea and makes the most of its happy

situation with panoramic windows. Watch the sun set alongside a beautiful plate of grilled oyster brioche – food worthy of recognition, though the chefs here say they only want to make 'ordinary people' happy (villavest.dk).

DON'T TELL EVERYONE... At the **Lindholm Høje**, a Viking burial site overlooking Aalborg, real-life Viking Jesper Lynge will cook you bowls of seafaring sustenance (including mussels in cider) while recounting the terrible tales of his ancestors (lindholmhoeje-cafe.dk).

Return flights from Gatwick to Aalborg cost from £79 (norwegian.com). *From there, Skagen can be reached by car in just over an hour* (europcar.co.uk), *or by train in under two hours* (rejseplanen.dk).

MORE INFO visitdenmark.co.uk >>



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GALWAY



This bohemian city on Ireland's west coast has quietly become one of the country's most interesting culinary spots thanks to a trail-blazing band of local chefs. Taking their inspiration from Galway's rugged Atlantic surroundings, their passion for local produce is reflected in a vibrant new wave of places to eat and drink.

SLEEP With one of the city's loveliest settings, just next to the Spanish Arch, **Ard Bia at Nimmo's** has become one of Galway's most enduring favourites. Visit the restaurant for Killary Bay mussels and Galway-reared beef, then stay overnight in the owner's arty b&b next door.

EAT At the heart of the city's streets you'll find Galway's centuries-old Saturday market (galwaymarket.com). Pick up freshly-plucked oysters from Galway Bay, homemade falafels and Boychik's doughnuts before heading to nearby cheesemongers and wine bar, **Sheridan's** (sheridanscheesemongers.com), or grocery store, **McCambridge's** (mccambridges.com).

For finer dining, **Loam** is one of the city's

standout restaurants. Chef-owner, Enda McEvoy, takes a hyper-local approach to his ingredients using only produce from the West of Ireland in dishes such as squid with seaweed and shiitake (loamgalway.com). At another of Galway's hottest tables, **Kai** you can lunch on buttermilk and panko crumb pollock fish fingers with kohlrabi and cucumber salad (kaicaferestaurant.com).

Simpler pleasures are on offer too; try wood-fired pizzas that would make any Neapolitan proud at **The Dough Bros** (thedoughbros.ie), new-wave fish and chips at **Hooked** (hookedonhenry.com) and superior coffee at **Badger & Dodo** (badgeranddodo.ie). For all the new arrivals, however, don't miss one of Galway's oldest haunts. **Moran's of the Weir** is set in Kilcolgan, on the watery fringes of Galway Bay, 20 minutes' drive from the centre of the city. At this historic cottage with its tiny bar and dining room, people crowd inside (and out on sunny days) for the native oysters, as well as mussels, smoked salmon, crab claws and fish – all accompanied by slices of warm, homemade brown bread (moransoystercottage.com).

DON'T TELL EVERYONE... Flame-haired chef, JP McMahon, is one of the poster boys for Galway's gourmet gallop, and the name to drop in these parts. A passionate advocate for seasonal eating he runs Michelin-starred, farm-to-table restaurant **Aniar** (its name comes from the Gaelic for terroir; aniarrestaurant.ie), is one of the chief organisers of the annual **Galway Food Festival** (galwayfoodfestival.com) and is also the architect of the **Food On the Edge** symposium held in the city each October and attracting stars like Massimo Bottura, Elena Arzak and Pierre Koffman (foodontheedge.ie). *Return flights Stansted, Gatwick and Manchester to Shannon start from around £50* (ryanair.com). *Car hire costs around £30 per day* (europcar.co.uk). *Ard Bia sleeps two and costs from €150 per night* (ardbia.com).

MORE INFO ireland.com

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LAUSANNE

Sitting on the edge of Switzerland's Lake Geneva, close to the French border, Lausanne drapes itself prettily over three hills before cascading down to the water's edge at the former fishing village of Ouchy.

SLEEP The newly renovated **The Royal Savoy Hotel** is an elegant, contemporary base in the city. The bar opens out onto a broad terrace and the restaurant is chic without being showy. **The Brasserie du Royal** is overseen by chef Marc Haerberlin (who owns three-Michelin-starred Auberge L'III in Alsace). Despite the formality, it feels relaxed and is a great place to sample a refined version of Papet Vaudoise stew, using the local pork and cabbage sausage.

EAT Beside the city's Wednesday and Saturday morning farmers' markets, locals flock to gourmet haunt **La Ferme Vaudoise**. One of Lausanne's best addresses for local Swiss produce, its shelves are ripe with cured meats, cheeses, oils, fruit syrups and sweet, curled bricélet biscuits (lafermevaudoise.ch).

Set in one of Lausanne's leafy lungs, tables at the **Brasserie de Montbenon** come with great views of the lake (brasserie-demontbenon.ch). Try relaxed local cooking such as a salad of smoked freshwater fish from Lake Geneva followed by the house specialty of roast chicken.

Wine is also a big deal here. It's a chug on a vintage steamer from Ouchy's marina to the tiny hamlet of Cully in the heart of the Unesco World Heritage-listed Lavaux vineyards. A short stroll from here you can try five different wines at the 400-year old home of the **Longet-Voruz** family (cavedemoratel.ch) before setting out on walking trails. Or, stay in Lausanne and order a glass of local chasselas from one of its newest hangouts, crowd-funded wine bar, **Ta Cave** (tacave.ch). The **Agora Swiss Night** hotel is also home to a wine bar specialising in Swiss wines. If you overdo it book into one of its bedrooms and wake up to spectacular views from its top-floor breakfast room (byfassbind.com).

DON'T TELL EVERYONE... When Mercedes Assal learned that the proprietor of her local chocolate shop was retiring she persuaded him to take her on and teach her his craft. The result is **La Chocolatière**; buy a flight of eight pralines and see if you can get them home without giving in to temptation (lachocolatiere.ch). *Return flights from various UK airports to Geneva cost from around £80* (flybe.com; ba.com). *Doubles at the Royal Savoy Lausanne cost from £269, room-only* (royalsavoy.ch).

MORE INFO lake-geneva-region.com

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EXPLORE

