

6 Surprising Cities Known for Their Culinary Creations

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While many towns around the world attract visitors for their history, culture, art, or architecture, a select few are worth a trip for their culinary creations alone. You don't need to be a foodie or chef to enjoy these destinations. The unique dishes and ingredients served here are remarkable enough to awaken and satisfy every palate. Here are six cities around the world that will entice you through aromas and flavors you won't soon forget — or find anywhere else.

Parma, Italy: Prosciutto and Parmigiano Cheese



Tucked into the verdant Emilia-Romagna region of northern Italy and a short train ride from bustling Bologna, the town of Parma is noteworthy for its contributions to both Italian and global cuisine. At the top of the list: its luxuriously fatty and salty ham, [prosciutto di Parma](#), which has

been preserved since the time of the ancient Romans using only ingredient — sea salt — and served razor-thin alongside sweet melon and figs or atop bread and pasta dishes. Second is the region's extra-sharp, hard [Parmigiano-Reggiano](#) cheese, still made today as it has been for the last 800 years — a labor of love and patience requiring no less than 13 separate steps to complete, followed by time to age.

While many of the pre-grated versions of the cheese sold under this name (or some iteration of this name) in the United States are permitted to include additives such as wood pulp, the trademarked, [authentic Parmigiano-Reggiano](#) is strongly regulated in the EU and may only be produced within a handful of provinces around Parma from a rare breed of cows whose population numbers only 3,000, and whose feed must be almost exclusively locally grown. The best wheels are kept for local sale and consumption, so the freshness and quality of the cheese on breakfast, lunch, dinner, or aperitivo menus in Parma is both unparalleled and unforgettable.

Valencia, Spain: Paella



There are plenty of reasons to travel to this Mediterranean port, where the sun shines year-round and the gentle sea breezes and surrounding citrus groves infuse the air with a salty-sweet freshness. But above all, you'll want to stop here for *the* paella. Although the national dish of Spain is served around the country, Valencia is likely to be the only place where you can feast on the original recipe. From the rice grown in local potties along the shore to the rabbit, snails, chicken, and various types of beans that flavor and enrich this hearty, one-pot

meal, every ingredient is local to the area. The resulting dish, cooked over an open, orangewood fire, has a unique smoky flavor and delicious, meaty quality to it, which none of the other spin-off versions hold a candle to. [Valencianos](#) are fiercely dedicated to the art and tradition of cooking their rice, so when you visit, you're sure to have plenty of opportunities to savor this dish around the city and the entire region.

Rabat, Morocco: Couscous



You might have tasted instant couscous from a box before; it's a minuscule form of wheat-based pasta that looks like granular, dry sand and cooks quickly in water or broth. But until you visit the ancient capital city of Morocco, which is famous for its hand-woven rugs, artisan pottery, and delectable food infused with numerous spices, you probably won't have a true understanding of what couscous should taste like.

While the dry wheat referred to as couscous tastes plain, it's well worth crossing an ocean (or several) for the dish of the same name that's cooked for hours with no fewer than seven types of vegetables, stewed slowly with succulent, local lamb, flavored with nearly a dozen different spices and herbs, and served with a sweet raisin sauce and hot sauce on the side. Couscous is traditionally eaten in homes on Fridays, but you'll have no trouble finding it available in various forms (vegetarian, chicken, or "royale" lamb) in most [restaurants](#) around the city and country at large anytime you visit.

Memphis, United States: Dry-Rubbed Barbecue Ribs



The South is synonymous with barbecue, but no place has mastered the art of slow cooking pork over wood quite like this vibrant, musical Tennessee city. Memphis is so famous for its mouthwatering [ribs](#) that there's a whole *style* of cooking meat slabs named after the place. What sets Memphis barbecue apart is the way the meat is prepared. Here, the dish gets its explosive goodness from the city's signature dry rubs, a mix of spices including black pepper, paprika, cayenne, and a hint of brown sugar that is rubbed, or rather massaged, into the meat at least 12 hours before cooking time.

The mixture is then sprinkled on the ribs once again at the end, creating a double-punch of rich flavor that melts into the meat. Many believe the taste of these ribs far exceeds that of any lathered in sticky sauces often served in barbecue joints elsewhere, since sauce masks the flavor of the meat instead of celebrating it. A vinegar or mustard mop, which is an acidic, thin sauce literally mopped over the ribs as they cook, is also sometimes used in Memphis to add one more layer of depth to the final dish. Check out legendary [Rendezvous](#) restaurant, which has been serving ribs since 1948, for a taste of authentic Memphis barbecue.

Osaka, Japan: Takoyaki Octopus Balls



When you think of Japanese food, sushi or ramen probably comes to mind first. But head to Osaka, and you'll find yourself smack in the historic birthplace of [takoyaki](#), sometimes called octopus balls. The name might not sound enticing, but don't be put off; the fresh, briny taste and doughy yet crispy texture of this beloved street food is sure to surprise and delight. And because takoyaki are served in hundreds of food stalls around Osaka, you can indulge in different variations of the treat, like slathered with gooey mayonnaise or salty seaweed or cooked extra crispy. At [Kukuru](#), an iconic takoyaki haunt identifiable from its giant octopus signage, you'll find long lines of eager patrons waiting for their portion of aptly named "surprising" octopus balls served with octopus legs sticking out!

Appenzeller, Switzerland: Swiss Cheese



To visit the Appenzeller region of Switzerland is to step into a picture-perfect land for cheese lovers. Here, rolling green hills are dotted with barns, handcrafted wooden chalets dominate the landscape, and happy-looking cows graze in the meadows. The alpine air is fresh and grass-scented, but you'll also smell the aroma of cheese melting in a fondue pot over a small Sterno flame, beckoning visitors to dunk in a long fork and piece after piece of hearty bread. Here, the self-proclaimed strongest cheese in Switzerland was born and is still made in copper pots from local cows' milk in the same traditional way it's been done for hundreds of years. A visit to the inviting Appenzeller "[show-dairy](#)" offers a restaurant with a cheese-heavy menu (naturally), as well as tours, tastings, and cheese-making activities that inform and satiate curious and ravenous adventurers alike.