

THE 2026 HOTLIST

Our expert contributors have examined emerging destinations, significant events and evolving themes across global gastronomy and travel to bring you the places, flavours and ideas set to shape 2026

THE RISE OF REMOTE VACATIONS

In an ever-busier world, solitude, peace and quiet are increasingly becoming travel luxuries. A number of remote destinations are opening up to tourism, offering an antidote to the hustle and bustle of popular holiday hotspots. Launched in spring 2025, Tinajani in Peru is billed as the remotest retreat in the Andes: a tented hamlet in the Valley of Giants welcoming just 12 guests across six private *campamentos*. Set to open in April this year is Nihi Rote, a new hotel on an 'undiscovered' island in West Timor, Indonesia. The resort will offer an off-grid experience on an island known for its untouched landscapes and world-class surfing. Accommodation is in private, thatched pool villas located directly on the beach, with daily yoga, Pilates, fitness sessions and a recovery spa. And in May, Wildland opens in the Scottish Highlands. Founded by Danish billionaires and keen rewilders Anders and Anne Holch Povlsen, at the heart of the estate is Hope – a hotel and exclusive-use retreat. Guests are invited to immerse themselves in the rugged Scottish landscape via activities such as chef-led foraging walks, fire-cooked lunches on remote bothies on the shores of Loch Hope, guided cold water plunging and star gazing.



Words by Steven Short; Jo Davey; Alex Mead; Lauren Jade Hill; Marina Spironetti; Ben McCormack. Photos by Lachlan Gardiner; Unsplash; Jongsun Lee; Cameron Cope



ADVENTURES IN UNTAMED NATURE

The rising interest in responsible adventure travel to far-flung corners of the world has fuelled a sharp surge in expedition-style journeys. Whether land- or cruise-based, travellers are increasingly drawn to experiences that immerse them deeply in wild landscapes, fragile ecosystems and authentic cultural encounters. Micro-expeditions to the polar regions have become especially sought after, with small groups venturing into iceberg-studded fjords, watching wildlife at close range and stepping ashore on rarely visited islands, with the likes of Secret Atlas offering sustainably-run cruises (read more on p98).

Overland expedition routes are flourishing as travellers look to explore remote environments in ways that echo traditional nomadic travel. Operators are running overland adventures such as nomad tours across Mongolia, where guests stay with herding families, follow seasonal migration routes and learn ancient skills tied to the land. Look out for Himalayan trail itineraries and Central Asian horse treks – horseback expeditions through Kyrgyzstan's alpine pastures, where travellers enjoy an intimate vantage point on landscapes that are still shaped by nomadic lifeways. Destinations once considered extreme, such as Greenland, are increasingly attracting visitors to explore their deep fjord systems, paddle among drifting icebergs and trek across untouched tundra. These experiences are linked by a desire to explore 'new horizons' and connect meaningfully with place, while treading gently when visiting these remote holiday spots.



ECLIPSE CHASING

This August, a total solar eclipse will sweep across mainland Europe for the first time in nearly 30 years, and among the best spots for catching it is western Iceland. On parts of the Snæfellsnes Peninsula, totality could last close to two minutes and 10 seconds, among the longest on land. Nearby accommodation options here include Hotel Búðir, which sits on a lava field between the sea and the Snæfellsnes glacier and features a restaurant that Reykjavík residents drive two hours to visit. The eclipse will also cross a wide swathe of northern and central Spain, with León and other parts of Castilla y León set to enjoy good visibility, and the Balearic Islands are among the few Mediterranean land zones where totality may be seen. In Mallorca, Palma's Can Bordoy Grand House is a peaceful sanctuary that features an excellent organic restaurant and a roof terrace from which to enjoy the once-in-three-decades sight.



RAIL'S NEXT CHAPTER

The ability to engage – with fellow passengers, the world outside, restaurant cars and even onboard spas – continues to win us over, and with ever-greener credentials and new routes criss-crossing the globe, train tourism is only picking up steam over the coming year. This year sees the long-awaited launch of Belmond's Paris to Amalfi Coast route on the Venice-Simplon-Orient Express. Conserved 1920s carriages will slip chichly through French and Italian countryside, with guests disembarking in Pompeii before a two-night palatial stay in Ravello. In Spain, the elegant Al Andalus – formerly used by British Royals – winds from Seville to Madrid through sun-baked scenery on a new seven-day itinerary. Sleepers are getting more popular too: 2026 brings the Adriatic Express, which bounces between Warsaw and Rijeka via the Czech Republic, Austria and Slovenia; and in Saudi Arabia, the five-star Dream of the Desert launch takes a page out of La Dolce Vita Orient Express's ornate book. Further east, The Golden Eagle Silk Road Express is reviving its jaw-dropping journey between Beijing and Tashkent, having been shut since the pandemic. Across the pond, the world-famous Rocky Mountaineer is launching a limited-edition route, Passage to the Peaks, through the glacial valleys and pine-covered mountains of Alberta and British Columbia, Canada.

This page: Visitors to Abu Dhabi will be able to combine it more easily with other Gulf destinations. Opposite page, from top: The call of Namibia; Mexican style; Four Seasons Hotel Mexico City

DISCOVERING GEMS OF THE GULF

It's a rare day when the sun isn't shining on the Gulf, glinting off skyscrapers and scintillant sands alike. Yet 2026 is set to be a truly glittering year in the Middle East, with game-changing new travel, tech and culture launches. The Gulf Cooperation Council's new aviation authority is at the forefront of this boom, introducing smooth multi-country travel between its six members: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain and UAE. This means new routes, cheaper flights, better inter-state coordination, and a single-point immigration procedure. Visitors will soon be able to combine Abu Dhabi, Salalah, Riyadh and Doha into one itinerary with streamlined ease.

The Gulf destinations are also keen to swerve away from their luxury shopping image. Bahrain is turning to its pearl diving and boutique hospitality, Qatar to immersive stays and cultural heritage tours, and Oman its nature and conservation. Meanwhile Saudi, one of the world's fastest growing destinations, is focusing on local community-led experiences and stays for visitors. But it's the UAE that's going supernova in 2026, with a multitude of remarkable launches. The new Etihad Rail will connect its seven emirates, Dubai's futuristic flying taxis will take off, and the world's biggest Guggenheim is set to join the armada of new museums at Saadiyat's Cultural District. This includes the freshly opened Zayed National Museum, Natural History Museum and TeamLab Phenomena, the world's largest digital art museum.

WELLNESS ROOTED IN NATURE

Immersion in the natural world is becoming an increasingly important element of wellness travel. An antidote to today's hyper-connected world, people are looking for interesting ways to switch off from it all via retreats that benefit both our physical and mental wellbeing (check out our pick on p92). Hotels are honing in on this growing desire, with both new and existing properties making nature a key part of their wellness concept. More wilderness lodges are improving their wellness offering too, while dedicated retreats use their surroundings as an integral part of therapies. The end of 2025 saw the launch of The Sanctuary at Wilderness Mombo in Botswana's Okavango Delta, and Laugarás Lagoon has marked a new chapter for Icelandic wellness tourism with the opening of a site featuring two levels of forest-enshrouded therapeutic pools and a bespoke skincare collection created from botanicals in the landscape. This year, we'll see the arrival of Eha, a hidden sanctuary on Hiiumaa island in Estonia, where Nordic and Estonian traditions permeate treatments. Expect the natural rhythms and biodiversity of the West Estonian Archipelago Biosphere Reserve to play a starring role, with thermal rituals, foraging and ancestral healing. Creative plant-based cuisine comes from chef Peeter Pihel, whose work in sustainability has earned him a Michelin green star.



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WILD NAMIBIA

Desert, salt pans and a rugged central plateau make up this geographically striking country, which is fringed by a dramatic coast known for centuries of shipwrecks.

It's inhabited by a diversity of ethnic groups and home to unique wildlife, including desert-adapted elephants. Noteworthy new lodges have started making their mark across Namibia over recent years. In 2026, though, the attention falls on the north of the country, home to Etosha National Park, Damaraland and the Skeleton Coast, among other extraordinary environments.

A new circuit of four lodges by Vestige Collection – Sorris Sorris in Damaraland, Omatendeka near the Grootberg Mountains, Sheya Shuushona on the border of Etosha, and Xaudum in Khaudum National Park – is set to debut across this stretch of the country from this summer through to the end of the year. Natural Selection, behind several existing lodges here – including the distinctive Shipwreck Lodge – will then open Hoanib Elephant Camp in Namibia's rugged Kaokoland as well as Nkasa Linyanti in the remote Nkasa Rupara National Park. Thitaka Lodge will add to 2026's northern Namibia arrivals when it makes its first appearance in Bwabwata National Park. Each of these soon-to-debut properties will provide travellers with a window into another of Namibia's remote wilderness areas.

Photos by Mark Parren Taylor; Gary Latham; Anders Schønnemann; Four Seasons; Christian Horan

MEXICO CITY SCORES A HIT

It takes just eight minutes to walk the leafy avenue between the two best restaurants in Mexico City. Separated by a mere 550m, Pujol and Quintonil are the darlings of this frenetic capital's food scene, with two Michelin stars apiece. Both feature consistently on the World's 50 Best Restaurants list, with Quintonil highlighting lesser-known Mexican ingredients like amaranth and insects, and traditional Pujol famed for its iconic *mole madre*, *mole nuevo* dish – two distinct sauces: one aged over 3,500 days and a seasonal, freshly made one. It isn't just food putting Mexico City on the global gastronomic stage. In 2024, its darkly beautiful Handshake Speakeasy was named the World's Best Bar for its hospitality, innovation and enduringly excellent fig martini. Now number two, it has been joined on the list by Tlecán, an intimate bar promoting Mexican culture and agave distillates under the eye of award-winning bartender and co-owner Eli Martínez Bello. Adding to the buzz this year, as Mexico gets ready to host the FIFA World Cup alongside Canada and the US, everyone from street vendors and boutique hotels to big names like Four Seasons Hotel Mexico City is gearing up for an estimated 5.5 million international guests.



Clockwise from top left:
Colombian dishes are
heading our way; an
Ecuadorian street
performer; the world
resets the clock for
dinner; berry-rich reds are
among Georgian wines
being lapped up

SOUTH AMERICA'S NEW WAVE

We've been talking about Peruvian cuisine for some time, but now that it's out on its own and literally top of the world – Lima's Maido was named No.1 in 2025 – followed by a bevy of other Peruvian beauties scattered throughout the list (fellow Lima restaurants Kjolle, Mérito, and Mayta also made The World's 50 Best), it's time for our eyes to wander elsewhere in Latin America. Colombian restaurants have made a dent on the global scene, through places such as Celele, a Caribbean-Colombia affair in Cartagena, and close to home we've had a little taste through Bogota-born Miller Prada. Downstairs at London's Humo, he brought us the flavours of his homeland at the intimate Abajo, before leaving to set up on his own, with Calle set to debut in 2026; and given it means 'street' in Spanish, a Latin accent is guaranteed in the cuisine.

Street food continues to play a key role in the burgeoning Latin America scene: every self-respecting market has representation from this part of the world and we're going to see more and more diverse countries from the region represented. Ecuador is no stranger in this sector, with its popularity growing by the day, and Venezuela now has bricks and mortar too – such as Arepa & Co, which launched in 2025, bringing with it the eponymous dish of traditional corn bread, *cachapas* (sweet pancakes) and assorted small plates (a trend that shows no sign of slowing), including *tequeños*, a puff pastry snack filled with cheese and guava. The diverse, vibrant flavours, with solid, crowd-pleasing, regional staples mean Latin America's rise will continue unabated.

UNCORKING GEORGIA

Georgia, widely regarded as the birthplace of viticulture, with an 8,000-year heritage, is emerging as Britain's most exciting wine discovery. The timing is perfect: new direct flights from London to Tbilisi with easyJet and British Airways launched in spring 2025, while 2026 has already seen DakaDaka, a new Georgian restaurant, open in London's Mayfair. What makes Georgian wine special? The ancient qvevri method – fermenting wine in buried clay vessels – creates distinctive amber wines from white grapes and deeply characterful reds. While traditionalists once found qvevri wines challenging, a new generation of winemakers is crafting more approachable styles that retain Georgian personality while prioritising food-friendly freshness. Key grapes include saperavi for inky, berry-rich reds, and rkatsiteli, kisi and mtsvane for the whites. Producers worth seeking include Pheasant's Tears, Teliani Valley, Orgo and Château Buera, alongside rising stars such as Baia's Wine and Mariam Guniava. With growing UK availability, prestigious competition medals and reasonable prices, Georgian wine offers adventurous palates something genuinely different – complex, savoury wines unlike anything from better-known regions.



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A NEW TIME TO EAT

Pre-theatre used to mean literally that, but now it's just the time people like to eat, as more diners are abandoning the classic 7-10pm dinner time. 'It's been really noticeable how people have been changing their dining habits and eating earlier,' says Ben Tish, chef director at Cubitt House, which runs eight gourmet pubs across London. 'I think there are a few factors: people drinking less or not at all means they want to eat early and go home; and younger generations simply want to be in bed earlier and get up earlier.' Staple, good-value three-cousers in theatreland are now showing far more creativity as a result. Dine before 6pm at Richard Corrigan's The Portrait and you can get three courses for £39, or head to Jamie Oliver Catherine Street and it drops to £31. Save money, indulge and get a good night's sleep – this is definitely a trend that is only going one way.

SHOULDER SEASON'S SWEET SPOT

Once travel agent slang for 'the quiet months when hardly anyone travels', shoulder seasons are being embraced by travellers who are keen, in particular, to avoid increasing peak-season temperatures. Year-round demand is high, with travel during the whole period from January to August 2025, for example, up 11 per cent on the previous year, according to tourism organisation ANTOR's Destination Trends Report 2025/26. Which means off-season travel is now becoming a strategic choice rather than a compromise, and short-haul destinations to hotter countries are proving popular from March to May. Portugal, perfect for a city break, is warm, with fewer crowds than later in the year, while Morocco has comfortable temperatures before the real summer heat kicks in. Further afield, Japan is a good option for late March and April, when you can enjoy cherry blossoms in many regions before the hordes descend. Turkey and Greece are now draws for autumn as the weather is still pleasant but the summer rush is over, as is Italy, where hotels are remaining open into winter and the Adriatic is often warm enough for swimming right up to November. And if the water is too chilly for a dip, cycling or hiking make for equally enjoyable pursuits. Autumn not only offers harvest festivals across Europe, with their seasonal food, wine and local traditions, but also quieter roads, perfect for scenic shoulder-season road trips.

YEAR-ROUND ALPINE ESCAPES

Canny travellers have long appreciated Europe's mountain resorts outside the winter-sports season; now more travellers than ever before are heading to the slopes in spring and summer for warm-weather escapes, with many resorts attracting record-breaking numbers during the warmer months. Rising global temperatures, the growth of wellness tourism and an increased focus on overland travel all contribute to this steadily growing trend. As more travellers swap a traditional beach holiday for a cooler-climate alternative, often travelling in by rail, outdoor pursuits become the focus, from hiking scenic alpine trails to ziplining, rafting and exploring the dramatic surroundings by e-bike – an innovation credited with revolutionising mountain biking, making hard-to-reach areas accessible. Chamonix, Verbier, Morzine and Megève are among the exceptionally scenic resorts bringing even more excitement to the Alps, with farmers' markets, cultural festivals and international sporting events taking place amid the verdant green mountainside, forest and lakes. Hotels are responding to the rise in visitor numbers at this time with stays tailored to wellness and seasonal experiences, like Swiss cheese-making, and the chance to dine al fresco. For a taste of the Alps in summer, join the Saas Gourmet Trail, a scenic hike with local food and wine stops, or the Taste of Zermatt, a gathering of top restaurants and producers against the Matterhorn backdrop.

MORE SPICE, PLEASE

Our love for spicy condiments is nothing new; gochujang and harissa have both been trending for some time now. But as the desire for fiery, and in particular 'swicy' (sweet and spicy), flavours flourishes, we're looking for new globally inspired condiments, including the new wave of 'fricy' (fruity and spicy) products. According to Waitrose, the trend-driven ingredients food lovers are most interested in adding to their cooking include zhoug, a spicy Yemeni paste incorporating coriander, parsley, garlic and chilli; the Mexican condiment chamoy, made of pickled fruit, chillies and lime juice; and Korean ssamjang combining gochujang



with fermented soybean paste, garlic, onion, sesame oil and sugar or honey. Sous Chef tells us they've seen Mexican Tajin chilli lime seasoning breakout to cult status in recent months, with yuzu kosho, the Japanese chilli-yuzu paste, proving popular for its bright citrus flavour.



SUMPTUOUS SOMERSET

Somerset has had something of a revival over recent years, thanks to the likes of the Hauser & Wirth gallery bringing cutting-edge art to the county and The Newt putting the place firmly on the luxury travel map. Visit West reports tourism-related visitor spending in Somerset hit a record £2.7 billion in 2024. There are 15 Michelin-recommended restaurants here, including Queen of Cups in Glastonbury, Root Wells in Wells, and Osip, which holds a Michelin star, in Bruton. Also in Bruton, The Newt hotel and estate is about to launch Yarlington Lodge – an exclusive-use Grade-II listed Georgian country manor house with 16 bedrooms. Neighbouring Hauser & Wirth not only shows world-class art but has a Piet Ouldolf-designed garden, restaurant and swish farm shop making it a year-round destination. Nearby Bath is equally buzzy with an ever-more cool restaurant scene, including chef David Hazell's opulent Emberwood for fire-cooked dining and Menu Gordon Jones, whose eponymous chef creates 'surprise' lunch and dinner menus that lean heavily into local, home-grown ingredients.

QUIETER SPAIN

Spain bubbles, feasts and flamencos its way on to bucket lists for good reason, but while the over-tourism of popular areas like Barcelona has some residents begging for relief, other less-explored parts of the country welcome attention. Away from the crowds, Spain is a cornucopia of food-centric destinations and, this year, the spotlight falls on coastal Andalusia, home to Jerez de la Frontera, named Spain's Capital of Gastronomy 2026. The sherry-producing city is replete with barrelled bodegas and gems like Juanlu Fernández's two-starred LÚ Cocina y Alma. Its neighbour, Sanlúcar de

Barrameda, held the title in 2022 and is worth a visit for its sea and river fish, *langostinos* and manzanilla – a sherry aged in salty Atlantic air. At the other end of the country, north-westerly Vigo hides in the shadow of Santiago de Compostela, but is known for one of the best-value Michelin-starred menu in Europe – Silabario's weekday Barbés 'market' menu showcases Galician produce in dishes like cuttlefish with toasted noodles and pork cheek empanadas. And, between León's vibrant tapas and Rioja's rolling vineyards, sits Burgos, renowned for its gooey whey cheese and rice-and-blood morcilla sausage.



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COOKING OVER FIRE

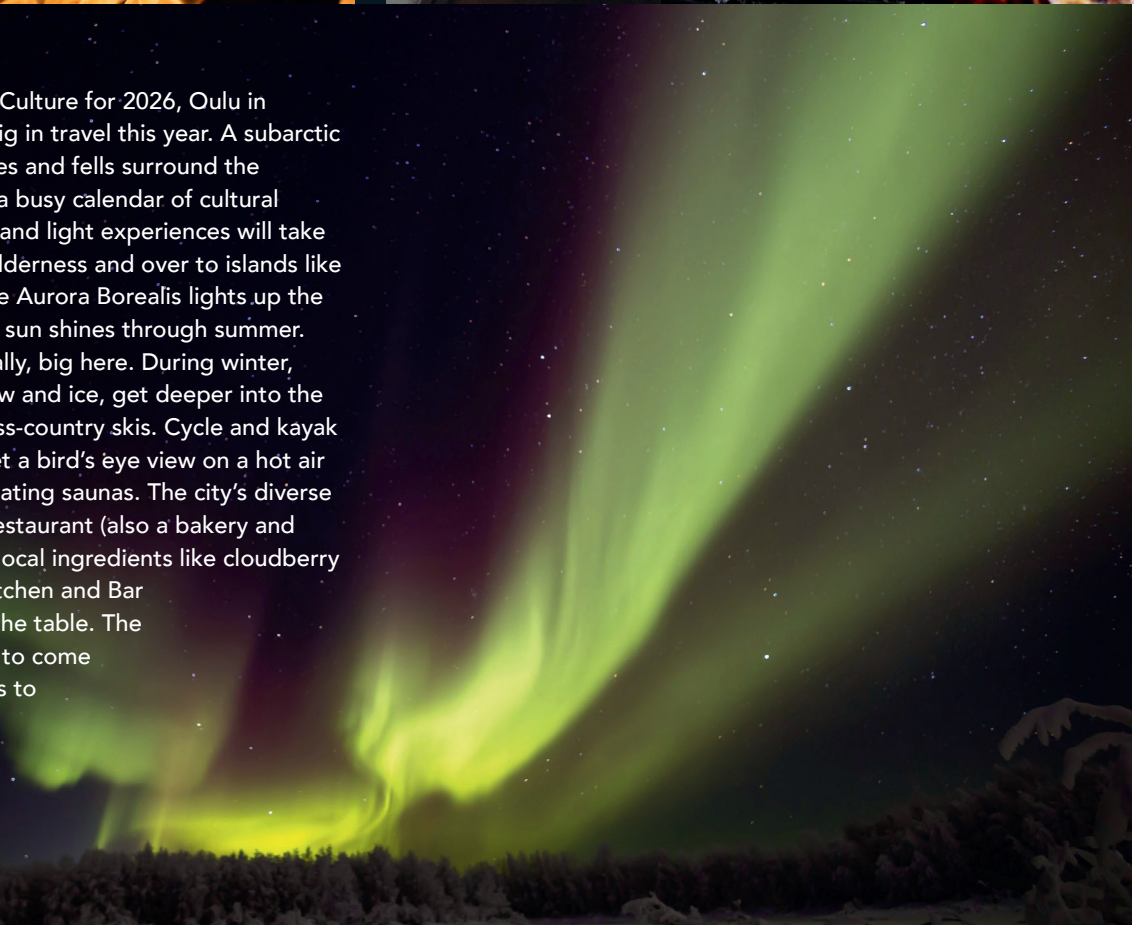
Flame-first cooking has been a big thing in restaurants for the past year (or five), and it's hotting up further in 2026, with plenty more openings. As Swedish wood-fire-lover Niklas Ekstedt cut a swathe across Europe – with his traditional techniques catching on here, as most Nordic trends do – Welsh chef Tomos Parry (right) had no less impact in London. 'It's just good produce cooked over fire,' says the man behind Brat and Mountain, and that sums up the trend. First came the understanding that good produce left to its own devices is more important than fancy flowers, fuss or unnecessary extras – and so it followed that we'd get down to the simplest way of cooking: with fire. The best bit about it is that it can spread to any region: just look at Japanese-Colombian Humo, which has earned a Michelin star for its efforts. Expect this trend – bolstered by more Greek, Spanish, Japanese and Korean restaurants coming in grills-blazing – to bring the heat in the year ahead.



FINNISH WONDERS

Named a European Capital of Culture for 2026, Oulu in northern Finland is set to be big in travel this year. A subarctic landscape of forest, rivers, lakes and fells surround the city, providing a backdrop for a busy calendar of cultural programming. Culinary, music and light experiences will take you across the city, into the wilderness and over to islands like Hupisaaret and Pikisaari, where Aurora Borealis lights up the sky in winter and the midnight sun shines through summer.

Outdoor pursuits are, naturally, big here. During winter, when land and sea turn to snow and ice, get deeper into the atmospheric landscape on cross-country skis. Cycle and kayak through long summer days, get a bird's eye view on a hot air balloon ride and swim from floating saunas. The city's diverse food scene includes Puistola restaurant (also a bakery and wine bar), which incorporates local ingredients like cloudberry in its set menus, while Oula Kitchen and Bar brings Lapland specialities to the table. The Arctic Food Lab, one initiative to come out of Oulu's 2026 status, adds to the city's gastronomic appeal, with events like the communal Summer Night's Dinner planned for August.



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TASTES OF TURIN

With Italian cuisine awarded Unesco cultural heritage status at the end of last year, expect food lovers to delve deeper into regional variations. As the latest must-visit food mecca, Turin's got what it takes. And more. Start with the vibrant chaos of Porta Palazzo, Europe's largest open-air food market, filled every morning with fresh produce, cheeses, cured meats, handmade pasta. Come lunchtime, head to one of the many *piùle* taverns – such as Madama Piola – where locals gather over the likes of *agnolotti del plin* and *vitello tonnato*. Piedmontese cuisine is elegant yet grounded – shaped by the legacy of the court, when Italy was a monarchy and Turin was the first capital of the newly unified country. The same grandeur is evident in old-world cafés, often the birthplace of local delicacies. Like the *bicerin*, a luxurious blend of espresso, chocolate and creamy milk, created in the eponymous Caffè Al Bicerin; or the *tramezzino*, a triangular sandwich invented at Caffè Mulassano in 1926; while the Liberty-style salon of Baratti & Milano produced the three-layer *cremino chocolate*. Every Turinese has a favourite local chocolatier – Guido Gobino and Guido Castagna are among the best.



ITALIAN STREET FOOD

Across the whole of Italy, street food has exploded: it's a dynamic scene of markets, fairs and food trucks, where heritage and modern flair collide. What's behind the rise? The rediscovery of informal eating – food that is accessible, immediate, emotional – yet still tied to place and memory. Add social media, new generations of artisans and a hunger for authenticity. Each region has a signature speciality worth travelling for. In Ascoli Piceno, stuffed *olive all'ascolana* are practically a local currency. Palermo's historic markets – Ballarò and Vucciria – champion the city's soulful offal-based panini. Roadside *porchetta* vans perfume the air for miles, from central Italy – where the tradition was born – to the Nebrodi mountains of Sicily, where a *suino nero* (black pig) version has gained cult status. In Trieste, the city's layered identity emerges in Lebanese-style wraps sold alongside classic *rebechin*, the traditional mid-morning snack that can include anything from boiled pork sandwiches to simple hard-boiled eggs. Rome has gone fully contemporary, with vegetarian mushroom burgers and reinvented *suppli* croquettes in Testaccio, Ostiense and the streets around San Lorenzo. Street food is the 2026 way to explore the country's cultural crossroads.



Photos by Unsplash; Evgheni Liuft; Roderick Field; Angela Dukes