



Australian travelers at Marguerite's Elegant Home Cooking prepare a French meal, and then dine on Marguerite's garden patio. photos by Michele Peterson

Home-Based Cooking Classes

SLAP ON AN APRON AND EXPLORE THE WORLD

Slaving over a hot stove might not sound like much of a holiday, but in a kitchen overlooking a picturesque half-moon bay south of Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, there's a waiting list of travelers who want to do just that. They're ready to roll up their beach towels, slap on an apron, and spend a few hours creating culinary concoctions in a group cooking class. Whether you join a class in Mexico or anywhere else in the world, cooking classes offered by local residents are a fun and affordable way to get an insider's look at a destination. Here are a few to try:

MEXICO'S PACIFIC COAST

Join Eileen Zack in her beautiful kitchen in the seaside village of La Manzanilla, on the *Costa Alegre* (Happy Coast) of southwestern Mexico, for a culinary adventure. Eileen, who has been cooking professionally for more than 35 years, puts a modern spin on the region's bounty of local ingredients. Fresh seafood, vegetables, and fruit make an appearance in recipes such as spicy Shrimp Dip, Roasted Poblano Guacamole, and Shrimp Ceviche. As the founder of the Annapolis School of Cooking in Maryland, Eileen's years of teaching experience and love of cooking make the "hands on" classes fun as well as instructional. You'll learn to prepare dishes from her international repertoire, which includes an ever-evolving menu of Middle Eastern, Thai, Indian, and Mexican dishes. After you work together creating the meal, you head to the private rooftop *palapa* to enjoy lunch overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Cost is 200 pesos (around \$20) per person and includes recipes, lunch, and beverages. For more information: <http://eileenslamanzanilla.com>.

PARIS, FRANCE

Master the art of everyday French cuisine with classes at

Marguerite's Elegant Home Cooking. Located in Suresnes, a suburban neighborhood a short subway ride from downtown Paris, these classes will have you rolling up your sleeves and making culinary creations with French flair. Your teacher is owner Muriel-Marguerite Focher, who has converted the top floor of her home, a former farmhouse, into an instructional kitchen complete with four fully-equipped cooking stations. There, you'll learn how to make tasty French cuisine such as cherry clafouti, crispy orange duck, or pumpkin soup with wild mushrooms. The lesson may start with an open air market visit to shop for menu ingredients and are often followed by a gourmet wine or chocolate tasting. After experiencing the pleasures of French cooking in the kitchen, which offers a panoramic view of Parisian rooftops, you'll be ready for the delicious group luncheon on the lush garden patio. Cost is €90 per person (around \$125) and includes recipes, lunch, and beverages. The market visit option costs extra. Maximum number of participants is eight. For more information, see www.elegantcooking.com and Victoria Cooksey's article on page 15 of this issue.

No matter where you choose to travel, why not consider adding a cooking class to your itinerary? In addition to providing an opportunity to mingle with local residents, it will offer instant camaraderie and a culinary education. Best of all, you get to enjoy the fruits of your labor. ■

Michele Peterson is a Toronto-based writer who contributes to many international publications. Watch for her writing in travel anthologies such as *Go Your Own Way: Women Travel the World Solo* released in May 2007.