

Foraging tours let travelers savor a destination's flavor

[Nevin Martell](#) 2:00 p.m. EDT



A selection of wild morel mushrooms. (Nevin Martell for The Washington Post)

If you want to get a real taste of the place you're visiting, don't make a reservation at the hippest-looking locavore restaurant you find on Instagram. Book a tour with a local forager instead.

Foraging is a practice essentially as old as humanity itself — and has long been popular with chefs, who are always looking for new flavors to bring to guests. But interest in it increased during the pandemic as people turned to outdoor activities, took up new hobbies and tried to mix up their kitchen

routines to ensure their home cooking stayed interesting.

These family-friendly expeditions through woods, valleys and urban spaces reveal a wealth of wild edibles. A tour will allow you to learn about, gather and sometimes even eat these hyperlocal, super-seasonal foods, which are a revealing glimpse into an area's environment, history and traditions. No matter what you find, a foraging excursion promises to be a lot more exciting than sitting down in a restaurant. Here are some tours recommended by foraging enthusiasts and experts.



The Willamette Valley in Oregon. (iStock)

Truffles don't grow just in France and Italy. Many species can be found across the United States, including in this verdant stretch of the Pacific Northwest, home to Oregon black truffles and two varieties of Oregon white truffles. "Oregon white truffles have this beautiful earthy, garlicky, blue cheese thing going on," says Will Craigie, owner of [Prestige Wine Tours](#), who leads the forages with his dog, Maeva. She's a Lagotto Romagnolo, an Italian breed renowned for its truffle-hunting abilities; her training began when she

was a newborn.

"Oregon black truffles also have a great earthiness to them as well, but there's also a sweet component," Craigie says. "They can come across as fruity, sometimes reminiscent of pineapple."

For an additional fee, foragers can end their one- to two-hour hunt with a meal and wine tasting at one of two local vineyards, Silas Wines or Bryn Mawr Vineyards. Dishes might include truffled frittata topped with microgreens and freshly shaved truffles, shiitake mushrooms sautéed in truffle with fresh rosemary and shaved Grana Padano, and a grazing board showcasing truffle-infused charcuterie, cheeses and nuts. Depending on seasonal weather, the tours generally run from mid-December until April or May.

Starting at \$650 for two people; 503-851-1491; bit.ly/oregon-truffle.



Natalie Angstreich, left, and Jonah Tully search for edible plants on a tour by Steve Brill in New York's Central Park in 2006. (Stan Honda/AFP/Getty Images)

Believe it or not, Central Park is full of edible plants. “Wildman” Steve Brill knows its potential well; he began foraging in the heart of Manhattan in the 1980s. In 1986, he was famously arrested for picking and eating dandelion greens from one of its meadows. The charges were dropped, and since 1986, Brill has been allowed to give foraging tours there, which he sometimes leads with his 17-year-old daughter, Violet. The four-hour expeditions are available from the start of March until the beginning of December. Depending on the season, guests could go home with wild greens (field garlic, chickweed); mushrooms (enoki, oyster); berries (red mulberries, Juneberries); or herbs (epazote, purslane). His sprawling, information-dense lectures focus on plant identification but swerve into discussions of mythology, poisonous plants, recipe ideas and environmentalism, and they are peppered with a healthy dose of dad jokes to keep the atmosphere upbeat.

Suggested donation of \$10 for children under 12 and \$20 for adults; 914-835-2153; wildmanstevebrill.com.

Dave Odd spent more than a decade foraging for some of Chicago’s most renowned restaurants before he pivoted to leading foraging tours full time. There are many potential configurations to his forays, which are available April through October. The most straightforward last roughly two hours and usually only stray a quarter-mile from their starting point, which might be somewhere in the city or on its outskirts. “My guarantee is that, no matter where you put me, I will find at least 50 different edible or medicinal plants and mushrooms,” Odd says. “The goal is to demonstrate to people how much is right in their own backyard.”

There’s a lot to find. Wild asparagus, pheasant back mushrooms and edible flowers in the springtime. Summer brings a bevy of berries — Juneberries, raspberries, blackberries — along with chanterelle and hen of the woods mushrooms. Autumn ushers in more mushrooms — giant puffballs, chicken of the woods and honey mushrooms — along with apples, pears, hazelnuts

and walnuts. After some tours, guests have the option to enjoy a meal featuring wild foods seen on the foray, and at immersive events at Odd's property in Beaverville, Ill., about a two-hour drive from Chicago, guests get to gather, prep and cook with a chef.

Starting at \$35 per person; 847-409-8623; eattheneighborhood.com.

Depending on the amount of rain the region receives, Forage SF runs mushroom tours November through May. The three- to four-hour trips with one of its highly qualified [teachers](#) take place in nearby Santa Cruz, on the Sonoma coast and in the Sierras. Potential fungi finds include turkey tail, chicken of the woods, porcini and morels; other possible goodies include miner's lettuce, wild radish and pine pollen. At the end of the trip, guides double-check everything to ensure it is safe to eat, then guests can take home their bounties to savor as they see fit.

Starting at \$90 per person, plus booking fee; hello@foragesf.com; foragesf.com.

There are more than 300 edible plants in the fertile western region of the Tar Heel State. In spring, it's common to uncover ramps, black morels and onion grass. Summer brings chanterelle mushrooms, blackberries and lambsquarters. Persimmon, hen of the woods mushrooms and black walnuts are frequent fall finds. Even in winter, there's food to discover, including onion grass, sassafras root and nettle.

These three-hour tours with one of No Taste Like Home's highly skilled [guides](#) end with a cooking demo and tasting session. Guests then have the option to take their finds to one of nine local restaurants, where they will be transformed into a complimentary appetizer. (Purchase of one meal per person required.) Starting this fall, the company will offer a wild-truffle-hunting tour led by a guide with a trained truffle dog.

Children 4 and younger free, children 5-11 \$35, teens 13-17 \$60, adults

\$75; 828-209-8599; notastelikehome.org.

The City of Brotherly Love is rich with history — and edible wild plants. Lady Danni Morinich, who has been foraging for five years, leads tours through FDR Park in South Philadelphia and the Lemon Hill area of East Fairmount Park running along the eastern edge of the Schuylkill River. The self-taught forager and herbalist shares preparation tips and recipe ideas for what she finds on her approximately two-hour tours, which generally run from spring until December. No matter the season, there is a wealth of material to be found. Garlic mustard and chickweed at the start of spring, elderflower and nettle in the season; serviceberries, mulberries and mugwort in summer; and pawpaws, persimmons and crab apples in fall.

Although Morinich gets her biggest turnout when fruit is on the proverbial menu, she is most jazzed about introducing budding foragers to the edible possibilities of less-obvious options. "I want to get people excited about the plant they've stepped on a thousand times and yanked out of the garden saying, 'Oh, it's just a weed,' " she says. "If I can show you the benefit of that plant — how instead of weeding it, you can eat it or make medicine — then it ceases to be a weed. That is a major mind shift."

Costs \$10 per person; ladydanni@landedgentress.com; landedgentress.com.

Longtime forager and nature guide Sarah Kelsen leads 90-minute hikes into Buttermilk Falls State Park, generally between May and October. In spring, expect to come across dandelions, watercress, day lily, gallium and more. Once summer starts swinging, there are raspberries, Cornelian cherries and common milkweed. And as fall descends, wild grapes, acorns, walnuts and chestnuts are ready to harvest. While she points out plants, Kelsen discusses the ethics of foraging, how to do it safely, the best outdoor gear to use, ways to incorporate what you find into your diet and how to honor the native people on whose land you're walking.

Costs \$60 per person; sarah@wildflx.com; wildflx.com.

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