

# Pack your knives for a foodie vacation

By Christine Muhlke, Bon Appetit

For those who travel to eat, visits to farmers' markets, butchers, and cheese stores are part of the grand tour. But at a certain point, it's masochistic: You can look, but you can only snack. So after years of envying the residents of San Francisco, Paris, Venice, and even Madison, Wisconsin, who get to actually make things with all that gorgeous stuff I could never put in my carry-on, I was ready to travel to cook.

Rent-to-eat vacations are possible around the world. The right destination offers access not only to great produce, bread, wine, and staples but to terrific restaurants, too. (After all, who wants to cook every meal, every day?) There should be enough daytime activities to entertain friends and family—hiking and antiquing a plus. And, of course, a beautiful house or apartment with a well-equipped kitchen.

Thinking about where you want to cook is easy—Sicily! Provence! Mexico? Finding the right house with a great kitchen requires sleuthing. My mother-in-law once rented a breathtaking place in Big Sur. But when it came time to make her birthday dinner, there were two eager cooks, but just one dull knife and not much else. To make garlic-scape pesto, I had to improvise a mortar and pestle using a mug and a bowl.

The food tasted better for our MacGyver teamwork, but when my husband, Oliver, and I were looking for a place to stay with friends last spring, I scoured the photos on rental sites for signs of cooks' kitchens (a dozen wineglasses is a nice decorating touch, but I'd prefer a dozen stainless-steel bowls) and made a list of essential tools to pack just in case.

The ideal spot and the ideal house came together by chance. Oliver and I love the area around Tomales Bay in Marin County, an hour or so north of San Francisco. After several unforgettable stays (and meals) at Manka's Inverness Lodge, we decided we wanted to grill the meat of the cows that graze on the surrounding hills, and try making our own version of the Marshall Store's oysters Rockefeller using the just-harvested bivalves from Hog Island Oyster Company. Then one day, Quince chef Michael Tusk was in the Bon Appetit Test Kitchen, talking about a weekend he'd spent cooking in a rental house on the bay in Marshall, right next to Hog Island. The phrase "most perfect house in the world" was used. Sold.

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