


Chef Jose´ Andre´s at the Cayman Cookout

# Culinary ESCAPES

## Pack your appetite for these flavorful cool-season festivals

**BY DONTAIRA TERRELL**

Winter has become one of the best seasons for culinary adventures, as travelers plan getaways around food festivals, chef collaborations, wine weekends and destination-dining events.

From warm-weather locales where outdoor dining from sunup to sundown is the norm to colder cities serving up seasonal specialties, food festivals give travelers a chance to experience a region one bite and one sip at a time.

Whether you're a wine lover, a seafood enthusiast or just in need of a tropical foodie getaway, these culinary festivals are worth planning a winter getaway around.

### ◀ THE RITZ-CARLTON CAYMAN COOKOUT

JAN. 14-17; GRAND CAYMAN

If you're ready for a Caribbean getaway inspired by top culinary talent, look no further. The Cayman Cookout, hosted by Eric Ripert, chef of Michelin three-star restaurant Le Bernadin in Manhattan, returns for its 18th year bringing together food lovers from around the world for a three-day culinary affair.

This year's festivities include Barefoot BBQ, complete with tasting stations, dancing barefoot in the sand and the opportunity to mix and mingle with prominent chefs. Chef Andrew Zimmern will take center stage for a showcase highlighting local ingredients, traditions and community of the Cayman Islands.

End the trip on a high note at the Late-Night Poolside Soirée, where food, music and island vibes keep the celebration going after dark. >



Chef Marcus Samuelsson at the Hilton Head Island Seafood Festival



Key West Food & Wine Festival

## ▲ KEY WEST FOOD & WINE FESTIVAL

JAN. 27-31; KEY WEST, FLORIDA

With its backdrop of breathtaking sunsets, Key West is the ultimate destination for the acclaimed Key West Food & Wine Festival. Now in its 18th year, the annual festival, produced by Dolce Events & Marketing International, returns with "Connected by the Oceans," a theme exploring how ocean currents have shaped culinary traditions across five continents.

Throughout the five-day celebration, guests can sip and savor their way through wines, specialty tastings and dessert pairings representing Europe, South Africa, North America, South America and Oceania. The lineup includes more than 20 events held at locations around the island, from waterfront tastings and chef collaborations to the Grand Tasting event bridging global flavors with contemporary art.

## ▲ HILTON HEAD ISLAND SEAFOOD FESTIVAL

FEB. 22-28

HILTON HEAD ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA

Come hungry and ready to immerse yourself in the Lowcountry traditions, culture and flavors that make the placed dubbed Golf Island one of a kind.

Celebrating its 20th anniversary, the Hilton Head Island Seafood Festival is a Southern staple offering everything from master classes designed to perfect your craft — cooking, mixology, baking or as a wine connoisseur — to chef-driven dinners with an emphasis on seafood.

The weeklong celebration brings together acclaimed chefs, local restaurants, winemakers and artisans, with events taking place across Hilton Head. The main event, held at Shelter Cove Harbour & Marina, serves up seafood, live entertainment and views of the Intracoastal Waterway, while intimate dinners and tastings offer festivalgoers another way to experience the region's culinary scene.

Each ticket sold is also part of a philanthropic initiative that supports organizations such as The Coastal Discovery Museum, Island Recreation Scholarship Fund, Port Royal Sound Foundation and Gullah Heritage Museum.

JORDAN MATTHIS (2); MARK FUNKHOUSER PHOTOGRAPHY; SOUTH BEACH WINE & FOOD FESTIVAL

South Beach Wine & Food Festival



Hilton Head Island Seafood Festival

## ▲ THE FOOD NETWORK SOUTH BEACH WINE & FOOD FESTIVAL

FEB. 25-28

MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA

This star-studded festival began in 1997 as the Florida Extravaganza before rebranding in 2002 into what is now the South Beach Wine & Food Festival. More than 105 events unfold over four days throughout Miami, stretching from South Beach to Historic Overtown, the neighborhood once known as the "Harlem of the South."

From celebrity chef dinners, seminars and walk-around tastings to late-night parties and signature events, the festival transforms the city into a massive culinary celebration. Grab your tickets early; a number of events sell out quickly.

Beyond the fun and festivities, the event supports the next generation of hospitality professionals, with net proceeds benefiting Florida International University's Chaplin School of Hospitality & Tourism Management. To date more than $45 million has been raised to give students hands-on experience while helping usher in the next wave of culinary leaders. >

## ▶ OJAI FOOD + WINE

MARCH 5-8, OJAI, CALIFORNIA

Bringing together more than 100 chefs, culinary experts and hundreds of visitors, Ojai Food + Wine is relatively new to the culinary festival scene. But since its inception in 2023, the event has quickly become one of the region's premier gastronomic gatherings, earning rave reviews from participants along the way.

Featuring dozens of events, including Michelin-starred dinners, book signings, tastings, cooking demonstrations and more, the festival offers plenty of opportunities to eat, drink, socialize and learn something new. Set against the backdrop of the historic Ojai Valley Inn resort, the four-day gathering blends exquisite dining with a relaxing western escape, making it the perfect excuse to spend a winter weekend in Southern California.



Ojai Food + Wine

JOHN TROXELL; MARJO WRIGHT; JARROD BROCK



Vancouver International Wine Festival

## ◀ VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL WINE FESTIVAL

MARCH 6-13

VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

What began as a fundraising event has transformed into one of Canada's marquee wine festivals. Now operating as a not-for-profit society, the Vancouver International Wine Festival's mission centers on three pillars: to inform, educate and entertain, while raising funds in support of the Bard on the Beach Theatre Society.

Winemakers, owners and senior representatives from wineries around the globe are known to attend, making it a rare opportunity for wine lovers to meet and mingle with some of the industry's leading names. During this eight-day celebration, the festival serves winery dinners, lunches and food-and-wine pairing experiences at some of Vancouver's top restaurants and hotel hotspots.

Beyond the pours, festivalgoers can take part in a host of events designed for everyone from the casual sipper to the seasoned connoisseur. A different theme country or region is selected each year, centering the seminars and other events on that region's wines and producers. ■

## ▶ LAKE OCONEE FOOD & WINE FESTIVAL

MARCH 19–21

GREENSBORO, GEORGIA

The Lake Oconee Food & Wine Festival offers plenty of reasons to pack your bags, expand your palate and bring your appetite. The festival puts the spotlight on a variety of restaurants, coupled with more than 200 wines from near and far. Patrons can indulge their way through a weekend of tastings, chef-driven experiences and events celebrating the region's growing food and wine scene.

Surrounded by the shores of Lake Oconee, the festival also offers an ideal excuse for an extended weekend getaway. The festival has donated more than $2 million to nonprofit organizations, giving guests another reason to raise a glass.




Lake Oconee Food and Wine Festival