

AFAR

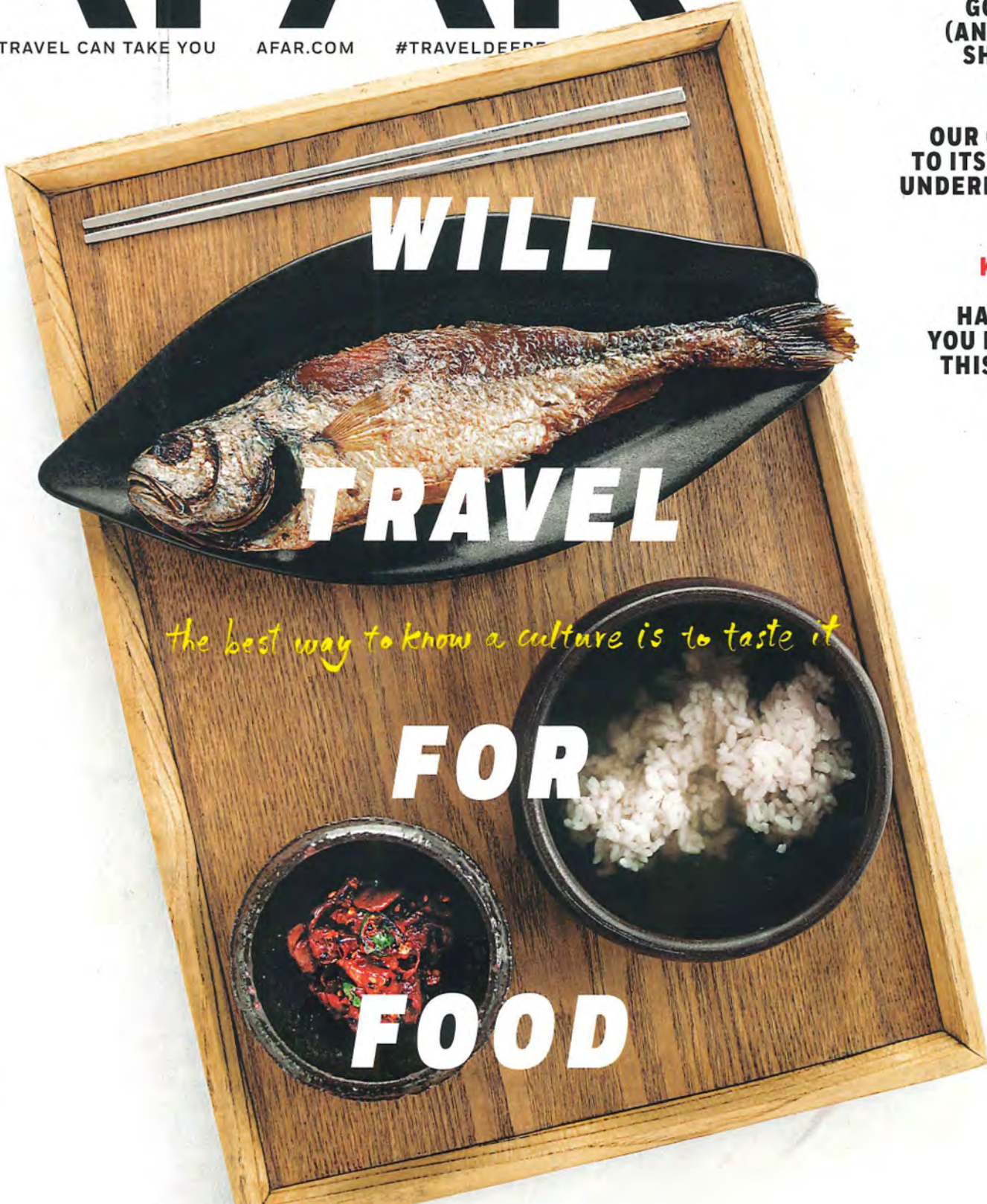
WHERE TRAVEL CAN TAKE YOU AFAR.COM #TRAVELDEEDS



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YOU CAN GO NOW (AND YOU SHOULD)
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OUR GUIDE TO ITS MOST UNDERRATED CITY
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WILL TRAVEL

the best way to know a culture is to taste it

FOR

FOOD

MAY 2015



**BABYLON-
STOREN**
South Africa

Back to the Land

Since the farm-to-table phenomenon hit, plenty of travelers want a hotel with fantastic meals, yes, but also the chance to help plant, pluck, and prepare them. These retreats, from an organic farm in Japan to an Italian vineyard estate, will let you live out your farming fantasies.

by JEN MURPHY



1
CARMEL VALLEY RANCH
Carmel, California

The chicken coop is nearly as popular as the spa at this family-friendly resort in the foothills of California's Santa Lucia Mountains. Guests are invited to visit the coop to learn about the resident Rhode Island Red and Barred Plymouth Rock chickens, whose eggs are found on the breakfast table

each morning, along with produce grown in the two-acre garden. During weekly tours, resident farmer Mark Marino explains the basics of composting and prepping an organic vegetable bed, and the ranch's beekeeper helps guests suit up to meet the 60,000 resident Italian honeybees. *From \$335. carmelvalleyranch.com*

2
WILD THYME
Palamartsa, Bulgaria

Four years ago, Claire Coulter and Chris Fenton (Irish and English expats, respectively) fell for the sleepy charm of Palamartsa. "All the little old ladies in this rural, traditional village have fantastic gardens," says Claire. The duo learned the locals' gardening secrets, layered on organic principles, and then opened an

eco-retreat on a working farm with a cottage and a four-room guesthouse. Guests help collect eggs from the hens, take goats to pasture, and feed the pigs. The truly hard core can help slaughter pigs in June, take a butchering workshop, or learn how to make the tasty sausages served at breakfast. *From \$20. wildthymefarm.org*



3
BABYLONSTOREN
Cape Winelands, South Africa

About an hour outside of Capetown, Babylonstoren is one of South Africa's oldest *werfs*, or farmyards. In 2010, Karen Roos, a former editor at South Africa's *Elle Decoration*, reimaged the property as a fantasy farm stay with an eight-acre garden that grows 300

varieties of fruits and vegetables. Guests are welcome to help the head gardener prune and plant and to join the chef in his daily harvest. Some of the 13 laborers' cottages that have been rebuilt for guests also have kitchens for those who want to pick and prep their own meals. *From \$240. babylonstoren.com*

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF CARMEL VALLEY RANCH, COURTESY OF WILD THYME ORGANIC FARM & ECO-RETREAT, COURTESY OF BABYLONSTOREN



THREE
FARM-
MEETS-CITY
STAYS

ST. ERMIN'S HOTEL

London

In April, May, and September, St. Ermin's hosts beekeeping workshops on its third-floor wildflower terrace, home to some of the hotel's 300,000 Buckfast bees. Workshop \$38. Rooms from \$319. sterminshotel.co.uk

TIERRA SOUL

Portland, Oregon

A hippy-ish guesthouse at an urban farm with honeybees. Guests learn permaculture and biodynamics at the farm school. From \$115. tierrasoulpdx.com

HOTEL DANIEL

Vienna

Tomatoes, cucumbers, pumpkins, grapes, and herbs overflow from the enormous garden out in front of this funky hotel. From \$110. hoteldaniel.com



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5

HACIENDA HOTEL VIRA VIRA

Pucón, Chile

Dairy cows, chicken coops, and paddocks may look a bit out of place against the backdrop of the Villarrica volcano. But guests quickly get used to the stunning scenery at Vira Vira, which opened last October in Chile's Lake District. Each of the 21 rooms is crafted from local woods and decorated with handwoven rugs and wall hangings.

4

HOTEL FELLAH

Marrakech, Morocco

An oasis so idyllic, you might first think it's a mirage, Hotel Fellah is an eight-acre retreat that fuses Moroccan culture with a hipster design aesthetic and a farm-to-table ethos. Locals, artists in residence, and guests mingle in the art center and library, and at the educational farm, kids groom donkeys, milk goats, or collect

eggs that are sold in neighboring villages. The small café opposite the swimming pool is run by Touco, a resident of nearby Tassoultante village. Don't miss his tagine, or—even better—pick ingredients from the garden and ask him to show you how to make it. From \$194. fellah-hotel.com

Nearly all the ingredients featured in the meals come from the working farm and an on-site dairy that hosts cheese-making workshops. Activities included in the rate range from climbing the volcano to hiking the nearby forest of monkey puzzle trees. Minimum three-night stay from \$1,475, all inclusive. hotelviravira.com



6

For more farm stays, go to afar.com/farmstay.

7



6

CASTELFALFI
Tuscany, Italy

Back in the days when the Medici family owned Castelfalfi, servants did the cooking and gardening. But since 2013, when the estate's former tobacco workshop was turned into a 31-room hotel, guests have helped out in the kitchen, garden, and vineyards. Depending on the season, visitors harvest grapes for wine or olives that

get pressed at the on-site mill. There are also guided foraging expeditions around the 2,700 acres to search out truffles, berries, mushrooms, and wild asparagus. It all comes together in Tuscan dishes during two-hour lessons at Rosso Toscano Cooking School, which opened last year in a castle on the estate. *From \$225. castelfalfi.co.uk*

7

BLACKBERRY FARM
Walland, Tennessee

America's dreamiest luxury farm retreat is not in California or upstate New York, as you might expect, but on a 9,200-acre estate in the Great Smoky Mountains. No roughing it here: Rooms, cottages, and three- and four-bedroom homes all come with fireplaces and feather beds. Still, a big draw is spending time

with overalls-clad master gardener John Coykendall, who tends to wax poetic about heirloom vegetables and seed saving, and with the chefs who offer cooking demonstrations in the Barn restaurant. After indulging, guests can detox with green juice and Pilates at Blackberry's year-old Wellhouse Spa. *From \$795. blackberryfarm.com*

8

JJI NO IE COUNTRY INN
Isumi, Japan

Ninety minutes east of Tokyo on the Boso peninsula, the Jiji No Ie Country Inn is run by U.S. photojournalist Everett Kennedy Brown and his Japanese wife, Deco Nakajima. The couple had been living on the two-acre organic farm for 15 years when, in 2013, they decided to open a six-room country inn with modern

comforts. Their goal: to give visitors a taste of Japan's agrarian lifestyle. Guests can get their hands dirty in the garden, and—in the spring—plant rice. At dinner, Nakajima uses farm-fresh ingredients to prepare a multi-course, mostly macrobiotic meal paired with locally fermented sake. *From \$92. jijinoie.com*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF TOSCANA RESORT CASTELFALFI, COURTESY OF BEALL + THOMAS PHOTOGRAPHY/BLACKBERRY FARM (2)