

HUNGARY

WANDERINGS

Feast your little heart out in **BUDAPEST**, where Ishay Govender-Ypma discovered a heady mix of **UNUSUAL WINES, DECADENT PASTRIES,** characterful “ruin” bars, and **A FOOD MARKET** you’ll never want to leave



PHOTOGRAPHS ISHAY GOVENDER-YPMA, JAN RAS AND GETTY IMAGES FOOD PRODUCTION ABIGAIL DONNELLY TEXT ISHAY



GOULASH SOUP

Opposite: The sweeping view from Castle Hill over the iconic chain bridge that links Buda and Pest, with the mighty Danube flowing underneath.

THE BRIDGE TO GULYÁS

At dusk, the chain bridge suspended between Buda and Pest – the two cities that were united in the 19th century – casts an incandescent glow over the sapphire Danube. Like much of the grand architecture in Budapest, the bridge, guarded by imposing carved lions, is magnificent. The Four Seasons Hotel Gresham Palace is directly across and it's here that I learn more about *gulyás* from executive chef Leonardo di Clemente. This dish, popularly known to the world as goulash, which means “herdsman”, is probably the first one foreigners associate with Hungarian cuisine.

“*Gulyás* is always a soup and never a stew, as travellers commonly expect,” says Carolyn Bánfalvi, cookbook author, founder of Taste Hungary food-and-wine experiences, and owner of The Tasting Table wine cellar and deli. It isn't a winter meal either, as it's eaten all year round and is best, locals say, when made outdoors in an open-air cauldron called a *bogrács*, which was used by the nomadic Magyars who settled here in the 9th century.

In the Four Seasons' kitchen I'm told that *gulyás* is a simple dish, but you need to apply a measure of patience when preparing it. Leonardo explains that the onions must slowly sweat in fat (traditionally lard) to sweeten but not burn, and then the soup must simmer. Earlier versions contained beef, garlic, water, a little tomato for colour and sweet paprika, but carrots and potatoes are also used today. “For a proper Hungarian *gulyás*, you must resist the urge to add a bunch of random ingredients,” Carolyn says.

Unlike *halaszlé*, a fiery fisherman's stew that is rust-red in colour from the quantity of spicy paprika used, just a hint of the sweet variety is added to a goulash. At the Four Seasons, it is served with hot paprika paste on the side and remains one of the most requested dishes all year round.

A WILD GASTRONOMIC ADVENTURE

To understand the food of Budapest, and to sample a fair share in one go, it's wise to begin at the source, or as close to it as you can get in the city. The Central Market Hall in Pest is a grand three-storey building that may attract large numbers of tourists but, Carolyn tells me, remains a food landmark for the locals. You'll find an enticing selection of fresh produce, meat, seafood, cheese, pickles, fast-food stalls and souvenirs. Hungary's gastronomy is a result

of 1 000 years of conquest and cultural amalgamation, and prominent influences remain Italian, Turkish, Jewish, German and French.

Budapest has a prolific legacy of old-fashioned coffee houses but you may be tempted, as I was, to start the day with something stronger, like a shot of Unicum, a herbal bitters made with a recipe tightly guarded by the Zwack family. Incidentally, the recipe escaped with the family at the start of communism and returned with its fall in 1988. It's often swigged as an apéritif, digestive or medicinal tonic and makes for a hair-of-the-dog breakfast paired with all-weather *langós* – golden doughnut-like discs of fried pastry smothered in thick sour cream, raw garlic and white cheese.

A huge selection of smoked and cured meats, including horse, grilled sausages, pickles and alcoholic beverages, from *pálinkas* (fruit brandies) to *fröcs* (white-wine spritzers) and beers can be savoured at a leisurely pace at the market.

My ultimate discoveries remain the crackly chocolate-coated lemon curd cheese sticks called *Túró Rudi*, a communist-era invention that has endured, and the mushroom-identification kiosk, indicative of the popularity of mushroom foraging as a hobby in the city.

MEATY MATTERS

Onions, fat and paprika (which can also refer to the mild waxy green peppers, stuffed with meat and rice in the Turkish manner) form the backbone of Hungarian cookery and nowadays sour cream, vinegar, cabbage and pickled vegetables – brined when plentiful in season – are used to add flavour. Bread, potatoes, dumplings and egg-based pastas may accompany many dishes, though there has been a drive to steer clear of such dense fare. You'll notice this at the restaurants serving classic dishes adapted for the modern palate, such as *Fioka* on the Buda side and *Klassz* in Pest.

Nose-to-tail eating and preparing bone broths such as *húsleves* (currently *en vogue*, see page 38) have purely been a means of survival in Hungary. While communism may have stunted culinary development, it encouraged creativity. “When you have just two or three ingredients, you'll be amazed at what you'll come up with,” Réka Cser-Palkovics, a private guide with Budapest Underguide, tells me over artisanal cured meats at Szalami Bolt, a two-tabled deli.

While Hungarian country food is still prepared with animal fat, not oil, “grandmother's style” she says, there has

been an effort by her peers to consume less meat. But if it's meat you're after, the first port of call is surely the heritage-breed, longhaired black Mangalica pig. Its meat is extravagantly marbled and succulent. A Hungarian braai often involves slow-roasting a slab of bacon and onions over a fire, while soaking bread in the fat that sizzles off. Hungarian grey cattle, duck and geese are also staples, and foie gras production is said to be higher than that of France. Also popular are freshwater fish such as perch and pike from Lake Balaton, mild cheeses and a staggering variety of desserts such as *dobos torta* (sponge cake with chocolate buttercream and caramel) and the multi-layered walnut and poppy seed *flódni* – Rachel Raj of Café Noe Cukraszda in the rapidly gentrifying Jewish district makes one of the best in the city.

DON'T FORGET THE WINE

Judit Szöllosi, a food guide who runs tour company Budapest 101, tells me about the slow revival of Jewish cuisine in Budapest. “My generation may be the first to be free of the effects of the anti-Semitism of the 1930s and 1940s and the oppression of all religions during communism,” she explains. Israeli restaurants and delis have blossomed across the city. “The trend is towards rediscovering old Hungarian Jewish classics like matzo ball soup, slow-simmered cholent stew and *flódni* cake.”

Hungary's reputation as a wine-producing nation has also been on the rise. It was on the strength of the popularity of Carolyn's countryside wine tours that her wine education cellar The Tasting Table was born. When I pay it a visit, she recommends the excellent Cabernet Franc from Villány, wines made with the Furmint white varietal, and *szamorodni* (similar to sherry) from Tokaj.

While they aren't new, the “ruin” bars – bars that sprouted in once abandoned buildings – have taken on a more permanent character in Budapest. Ramshackle Szimpla Kert, one of the oldest, now runs as an eclectic organic market over weekends, but the current move in these establishments is towards stark design and an ultra-modern menu.

As with its architecture and cultural heritage, elegant and magical Budapest continues to navigate the bridge between the culinary traditions of the past while embracing contemporary trends – an intriguing mix of old and new that will entice me back before too long.

Read more from Ishay at www.foodandthefabulous.com



Clockwise from above left: Orchestras and musicians give free concerts in public squares over weekends; the bustling Central Market Hall, where locals and visitors shop for fresh produce; the markets offer the best variety and fresh, inexpensive ingredients; many produce stalls sell a variety of hot and sweet paprika peppers; indoor and street markets serve fast food classics – grilled meat is very popular in Hungary; the author with a large *langós* – deep-fried pastry with raw garlic and cheese, a favourite Hungarian snack.





BUDAPEST BASICS

VISAS Hungary is part of the Schengen states and South Africans require a visa.

Call the Hungarian Embassy in Pretoria on **012 430 3030** or **012 342 3288**.

FLIGHTS KLM and Air France fly to Budapest daily from Cape Town and Johannesburg.

CURRENCY R1 is equivalent to roughly 23 forint. Expect to pay in large denominations, but prices are cheaper than most other European destinations.

FOOD TOURS Get some insider info and book a tour with Taste Hungary www.tastehungary.com;

Budapest Underguide www.underguide.com and Budapest 101 www.budapest101.com.

EAT AND DRINK Four Seasons Hotel Gresham Palace www.fourseasons.com/budapest;

Szalami Bolt www.szalamibolt.hu; Fioka www.fiokaetterem.hu; Klassz www.klasszetterem.hu;

Café Noe Cukraszda www.torta.hu; The Tasting Table www.tastehungary.com;

Central Market Hall www.budapestmarkethall.com;

Szimpla Market and Ruin Bar www.szimpla.hu.

GOULASH SOUP

Recipe courtesy of the Four Seasons Hotel Gresham Palace Budapest.

Serves 6 to 8

EASY

GREAT VALUE

Preparation: 20 minutes

Cooking: 1 hour

- sunflower oil** 2 T
- onions** 2, finely chopped
- beef topside** 1 kg, diced into 1 cm cubes
- garlic** 3 cloves, minced
- ground caraway seeds** 1 t
- sea salt and freshly ground black pepper**, to taste
- good-quality chicken stock** 4 cups
- celeriac** 1 T finely grated
- tomatoes** 3, finely diced
- sweet Hungarian paprika** 2 T, plus extra for serving
- yellow pepper** 1, finely diced
- celeriac** 165 g, diced
- carrots** 3, diced
- large potatoes** 2, diced
- home-made bread**, for serving

1 Heat the oil in a large saucepan and sauté the onion until light golden. Add the beef, garlic, ground caraway seeds and season to taste. Cook slowly, reducing the juice. Add the stock. **2** Add the grated celeriac and cook for 10 minutes. Add the tomatoes and

cook for a further 5 minutes. When the meat is almost tender, remove from the heat and stir in the paprika. Wait until it dissolves, then add the pepper, diced celeriac, carrots and potatoes. Add more water if necessary. Cook until the vegetables are tender. **3** Sprinkle with more paprika and serve with home-made bread.

FAT-CONSCIOUS, HEALTH-CONSCIOUS, DAIRY-FREE

WINE: Hartenberg Merlot 2013

BREAD PUDDING WITH APPLES, BLUEBERRY JAM AND MERINGUE

Serves 6

EASY

GREAT VALUE

Preparation: 15 minutes

Cooking: 40 minutes

- Granny Smith apples** 5, peeled and thickly sliced
- lemons** 2, juiced
- sugar** 50 g
- mosbolletjies** 1 loaf or 6 raisin buns
- milk** 5 cups
- free-range eggs** 6, separated
- caster sugar** 150 g
- vanilla extract** 1 t
- ground cinnamon** 2 t
- butter** 4 T

blueberry jam 6 T
icing sugar, for dusting

For the meringue:
free-range egg whites 2
caster sugar 150 g

1 Preheat the oven to 160°C. Place the apples, lemon juice and sugar in a saucepan over a medium heat. Add enough water to cover the apples. Cook for 5 minutes in the simmering liquid. **2** Break the *mosbolletjies* or raisin buns into pieces and place in a large ovenproof dish with the apples. **3** Mix the milk, egg yolks, caster sugar, vanilla and cinnamon in a separate bowl, then pour into the dish. Allow the *mosbolletjies* or buns to absorb some of the liquid, then dot with butter. **4** Bake for 40 minutes or until the top has turned golden brown and the centre is still a little soft. **5** To make the meringue, place the egg whites in a mixing bowl and beat using an electric hand-mixer until soft peaks form. Add the sugar a little at a time, while beating, until the meringue is smooth and glossy. **6** Increase the oven's temperature to 180°C. Top the pudding with the meringue and bake for a further 5 minutes, or until the meringue is golden. **7** Spoon the jam over the pudding and dust with icing sugar.

WINE: Woolworths Ken Forrester Noble Late Harvest 2013

BREAD PUDDING WITH APPLES, BLUEBERRY JAM AND MERINGUE



Search for Siba Mtongana's beef goulash recipe at www.taste.co.za to try her interpretation of this delicious Hungarian classic.