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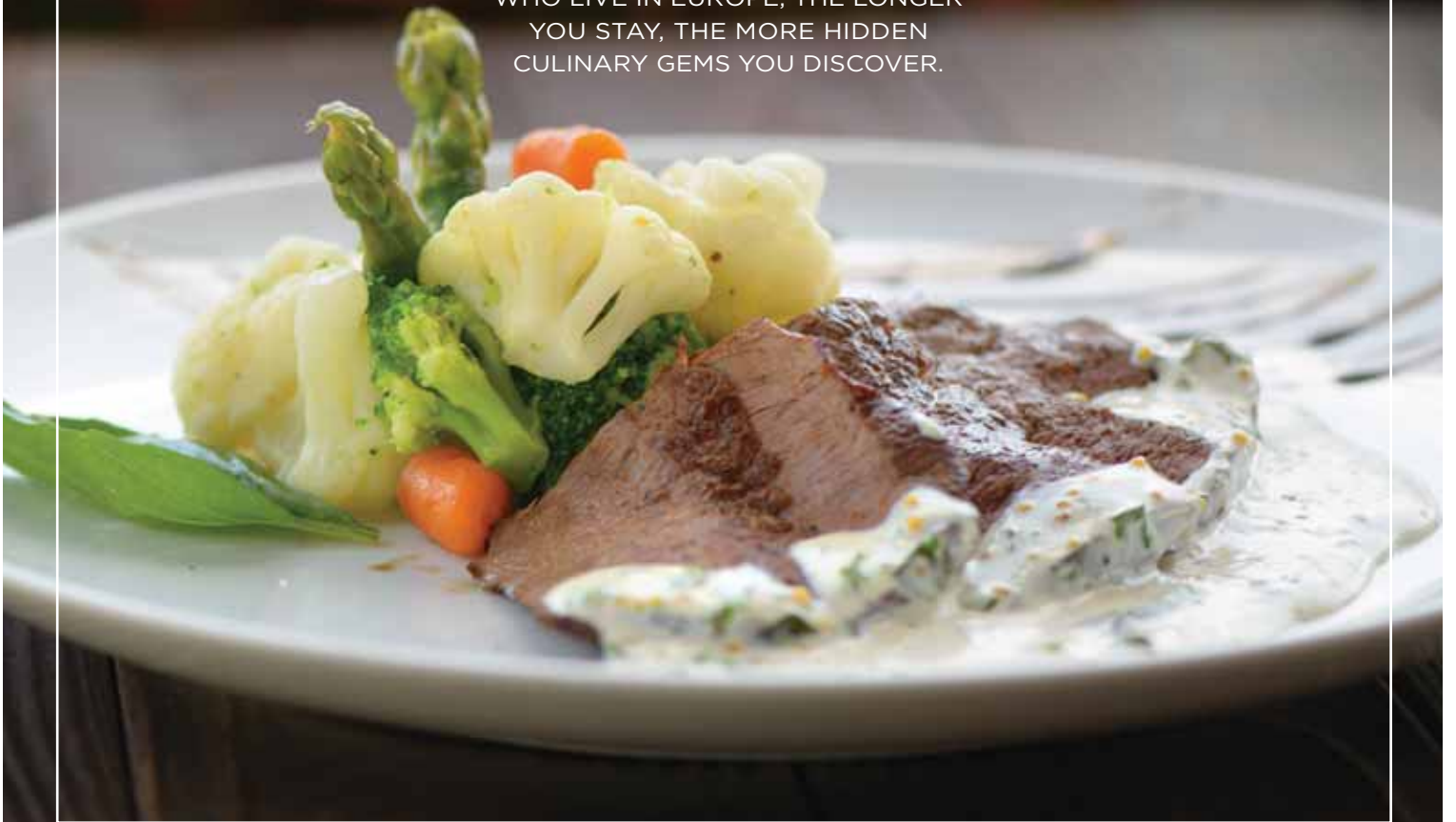


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TAFELSPITZ

By Carrie Farrell

I DIDN'T LEARN ABOUT "TAFELSPITZ" UNTIL AFTER 10 YEARS OF LIVING IN GERMANY. LIKE MANY AMERICANS WHO LIVE IN EUROPE, THE LONGER YOU STAY, THE MORE HIDDEN CULINARY GEMS YOU DISCOVER.



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The word “tafelspitz” refers to the tasty cut of beef from the end of the sirloin, commonly known in the United States as tri-tip. Eventually, the term simply became the generic description for boiled beef. Despite any preconceptions you might have about boiled beef, let me assure you that nothing is dry or gray as you might expect in an authentic “tafelspitz.” Despite the name, the beef isn’t actually boiled. The meat is only slowly simmered.

Boiled beef was a favorite dish of Franz Joseph I, the Emperor of Austria. It’s rumored that he ate it every day. Local stories suggest that, as the laws dictated, the emperor started his meal before his soldiers, but the soldiers could not continue eating after the emperor had finished. This caused many of the soldiers to remain hungry at the end of the meal. In response to this problem, Anna Sacher, the landlord of Hotel Sacher, invented “Tafelspitz,” which could be cooked for several hours and served as soon as everyone was at the table. It is still very popular today and is considered the national dish of Austria and is similarly popular in Germany.

Still wondering why I’m crushing so hard on this dish? The secret is in the sauce. This potentially bland-sounding entrée is traditionally plated in a rich beef broth and topped with a creamy apple-horseradish sauce. Typically accompanied by crispy fried potatoes and steamed vegetables, “tafelspitz” has a lot going on. It’s hot, cold, spicy, creamy, crunchy, soft and highly addictive. My love affair with this unique meal began in St. Wendel at a typical German restaurant I happened upon. Now I look for it wherever I go. ■

The horseradish root possesses a potent flavor, commonly described as hot, spicy and peppery. Unlike hot peppers that burn the tongue, the intense spice of the horseradish is experienced through the nose and sinuses.



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ITALY

“Bolito misto” is the Italian answer to boiled beef. Although there are many regional versions, it is typically a stew of mixed meats.

FRANCE

The French “pot-au-feu” is a similar take on “Tafelspitz.” “Port-au-feu” is a beef dish with root vegetables served in the style of a hearty stew.

ENGLAND

England’s boiled beef recipes are similar to the Austrian version. However, sometimes the traditional root vegetables are replaced with cabbage.

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GERMANY'S HIGHLIGHT

By Karen Bradbury

Landau

Along the German Wine Road, a hilly and picturesque strip of land close to the Rhineland-Palatinate's eastern border, you'd have to work hard to stumble across a city or village devoid of charm. The region's mild, almost-Mediterranean climate, rolling hills dotted with vineyards and half-timbered towns make it worthy of a visit throughout the year. While wine drinking and ooh-ing and aah-ing at all the picture-perfect surroundings are pursuits most enjoyed by grown-up visitors, the city of Landau and its local area can boast of plenty to capture the imaginations of younger day-trippers too.

Landau's name has traveled far beyond its borders thanks to its namesake, a luxurious horse-drawn carriage with a folding convertible top.

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Portrait of a town

Landau in der Pfalz, a university town and cultural center, is home to some 46,000 residents. A Free Imperial Town for a short time in the Middle Ages, the town bounced back and forth between French and German possession later in its history. The town's name has traveled far beyond its borders thanks to its namesake, a luxurious horse-drawn carriage with a folding convertible top. The heart of the town is its spacious central square, the Rathausplatz, overlooked by the Town Hall and the Altes Kaufhaus, a gabled market hall turned cultural center.



Talk to the animals

Not far from the city center amongst the remains of a French fortress, the Landau Zoo is found. The zoo, founded in 1904, is lauded for keeping its animal residents in natural enclosures and the efforts it makes to protect endangered species. In addition to the seals, kangaroos, penguins and flamingos kept here, the zoo's more exotic denizens include Siberian tigers, single-humped camels and ever-vigilant meerkats.

If fur and feathers aren't your thing, go instead to the Reptilium, billed as the largest reptile zoo in Germany. Check out the likes of tortoises, alligators, lizards and frogs; watch the keepers feed the snakes or let spiders crawl up your arm. The indoor zoo is kept at a pleasantly warm 75-degree temperature year-round. Reptile lovers who can't tear themselves away don't have to, as a specially designed cube fitted with pillows and beds allows them to spend the night there.

Go down under

Landau's fortress, built in the time of Louis XIV, was once touted as "the largest and strongest fortress in Christendom." Above ground, hardly a trace of the structure is visible, but a visit to the Lunette 41 as part of a guided tour reveals the strength and magnitude of this edifice. The tour leads through fortified chambers connected by means of a 20-mile network of tunnels. The tours are offered on Saturdays at 2 p.m. from March through November.

Swing from the trees

The final stop on today's tour is found some 12 miles south of Landau. The Fun Forest Adventure Park in Kandel is a climbing forest built into the treetops. Once safely harnessed, climbers can choose from 24 courses, including some strewn with quirky obstacles and others designed to test the mettle of even the most experienced adventurers. To experience the course in another light, visitors can opt for a run-through at night, headlamps on helmets to guide their way. ■

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Aerial photo of
Sveti Stefan island
in Budva.



MONTENEGRO

A Little Known Must-See

By Anna Bagiackas

Montenegro, which means “Black Mountain,” is a country in the Balkans and situated on the Adriatic Sea. It is a smaller country, surrounded by Kosovo, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and across the sea from Italy. Its capital city is Podgorica, which is home to 30 percent of the population. Although Montenegro may not be as well-known among travelers, a little research of its gorgeous landscapes and unique culture will certainly put this country on the top of your travel bucket list.

“Montenegro is quickly becoming the spot to go, seen as a cheaper yet rewarding locale compared to the French Riviera, Monaco and other Mediterranean spots.”



LEFT: Bay of Kotor view from Lovcen mountain.

BOTTOM: Aerial view of Budva.



A Little Background

As with many nations in the Balkans, Montenegro has a long history of being under different rulers and influenced by various cultures. In recent history after World War I, Montenegro was part of Yugoslavia, followed by being in a federation with Serbia. In 2006 it separated from the federation to claim its independence.

The country's cultural influences are easily seen and felt. Architectural monuments and remnants of former rulers like the Illyrians, Romans, Dalmatians, Venetians, French and the Habsburg Austrians are sprinkled throughout the country. The culture has also been significantly shaped by religion, primarily Eastern Orthodox Christianity, and the primary language is Montenegrin.

In terms of tourism, Montenegro is quickly becoming the spot to go, seen as a cheaper yet rewarding locale compared to the French Riviera, Monaco and other Mediterranean spots. Although it was a popular travel destination in the 1980s, it fell off many travelers' radars after the Yugoslav wars.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Durmitor mountains at sunset, river rafting in Tara Canyon, Rijeka Crnojevic River bend at Skadar Lake National Park.

Enticing Landscapes

For being a small country, it packs a lot in terms of natural features, from its 295-kilometer-long coastline to rugged mountain ranges and gorgeous lakes. The coastline is full of charming stops, including well-preserved medieval towns. The mountains have some extremely rugged terrain and average more than 2,000 meters in elevation.

If spending time outdoors is what you seek, Montenegro has a plethora of national parks to visit.

- **Lake Skadar** – The largest lake in the Balkans, Lake Skadar and the park are shared with Albania, and it is home to the largest bird reserve in Europe.
- **Durmitor** – This UNESCO World Heritage Site is the home of 18 glacial lakes, known as “mountain eyes,” with the largest being Black Lake.
- **Prokletije** – Part of the 192-km Peaks of the Balkans hiking trail, you will find gorgeous views because it is part of the Dinaric Alps.

With Montenegro’s relatively small size, it’s worth renting a car so you can visit as many spots as possible. Drive along the coast and stop in towns like Kotor, Perast and Stari Grad, and make detours to some of these gems:

- **Sveti Stefan** – This fortified island village is worth a visit just to see it, but you can also check in to the five-star resort on the island for a bit of luxury.
- **Njego’s Mausoleum** – For some amazing views and to truly experience Montenegro’s name, visit this impressive mausoleum on top of Black Mountain.
- **Ostrog Monastery** – This is a holy Orthodox site that will give you a taste of the religion that has shaped the country’s culture.
- **Tara Canyon** – For the thrill seekers, a visit to Tara Canyon will warrant a rafting trip, as that will be the best way to get nice views of the canyon.
- **Ulcinj** – The southernmost town on the coast, this is where to go to relax and enjoy the longest sandy beach in the entire eastern Adriatic.
- **Bay of Kotor** – You might think you’re in Norway here, as this bay looks awfully similar to a fjord.

Good Eating

What treats and dishes pair with discovering these Montenegrin treasures? It depends what area you’re in, such as on the coast, in the mountains or somewhere in between. Although influenced by culinary traditions of Italy, Turkey and other Mediterranean cultures, Montenegro claims a food scene that stands on its own.

Naturally, you will find lots of seafood on the coast, including the dish “Buzara,” consisting of fresh seafood cooked in either a white or red wine sauce. Don’t forget that beach time also means doughnut time! Keep your eye out for a vendor selling sweet and fried doughy goodness while you sunbathe.

Deeper inland and in the more mountainous areas, foods consist of more comforting dishes such as lamb in milk or stew made of slow-roasted meat and vegetables. One of the country’s specialties is Njegusi prosciutto, which is served on its own and wrapped around steak. Cevapi sausages are also common; these are small sausages of pork or beef that you will find all over the country. Lastly, “burek” pastries are worth a taste, made of thin and crispy phyllo dough surrounding savory fillings.

For those interested in wine, be sure to taste some Montenegrin varieties like the red Vranac. You can even visit the Plantaze vineyard near Podgorica to learn more about it. ■



TIP: GETTING TO MONTENEGRO

You have a few different options for flying into Montenegro. Tivat or Podgorica are the two airports in the country or fly into Croatia’s Dubrovnik airport and rent a car. Lastly, fly into Italy’s Bari airport and ferry across the Adriatic.

Up Close and Personal *with* Porto Montenegro

by Stacy Roman

Set within the calmness of Boka Bay along the sun-drenched Montenegrin coastline is Porto Montenegro. At first glance, it appears to be a destination for well-heeled yacht dwellers. However, its rich and complicated past lends itself to the grandeur it has become today. Originally known (and sometimes still referred to) as Tivat, this enchanting area still showcases the influences of the various inhabitants over the centuries, including Serbians, Venetians, Yugoslavs, Romans and Greeks. This upscale neighborhood is a great spot to window-shop and explore, from super yachts moored in the harbor to exquisite fashion houses.



Beautiful aerial view of Porto Montenegro at dusk.

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A Little History and What To Do

Porto Montenegro has a long history of cultural refinement and high society. Archaeological digs around the region have unearthed artifacts belonging to the upper-class Greek and Roman civilizations. Because of its location on the water, this part of the city was also known for its sailing and trade community. Today, Porto Montenegro has kept the luxe sophistication of the past and relishes its high-brow status as the Monte Carlo of the Balkans.

Walking along the port itself gives an air of elegance without breaking your budget. Elbow rub amongst the elite at the Porto Montenegro Yacht Club, which boasts a stunning, crystal-clear infinity pool overlooking the bay. Once you've taken a few hours to unwind, head to the waterfront and check out some of the local museums. Many offer a fascinating look into the history of Tivat and Montenegro as they are located in the former homes of aristocrats, religious clergy and royalty dating back centuries. Take a stroll through the tall evergreens of Spomenik Spasiću i Mašeri Memorial Park and adjacent Veliki Gradski Park. Or head out on the water and take a glimpse of the golden colors of sunset from a boat cruise or rented boat.



Embankment of Porto Montenegro.

Today, Porto Montenegro has kept the luxe sophistication of the past and relishes its high-brow status as the Monte Carlo of the Balkans.



TOP: Seafood risotto.

BOTTOM: Linguine with shrimp scampi



Good Eats

For exquisite and expertly prepared dishes, make a booking at the Murano at the Regent Hotel. Freshly caught fish of the day, seafood risotto, handcrafted pasta and decadent desserts can be found on their menu. Looking for something a little less expensive yet still trendy and delicious? Head over to ONE Restaurant and Bar. Open from breakfast through late-night, the cafe offers a tasty and colorful twist on seafood dishes and Mediterranean fare. If you're feeling like a Balkan take on American favorites, head just up the road to Big Ben. Thick, juicy burgers and generous helpings of crispy chips (fries) will satisfy even the hungriest of appetites.

Although it may be a windy road from Kotor or Podgorica to this hidden gem, spending a day basking in the luxury of Porto Montenegro is worth the trip. ■

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48 HOURS IN PRAGUE

By Jessica Zen



The Czech Republic's capital city of Prague is a lovely place to spend two days. You can see just enough in this time to truly appreciate the intricacies of the city, but also leave enough behind to leave you wanting more. The city is split by the Vltava River and is brimming with Baroque churches, Renaissance architecture, medieval streets and tasty treats.

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Next up is Charles Bridge. A quick walk will take you to the edge of the Vltava River. The colorful buildings in the background plus the 14th-century bridge make for the perfect picture capturing the essence of Prague. Stroll across the bridge, stopping for photos along the way.

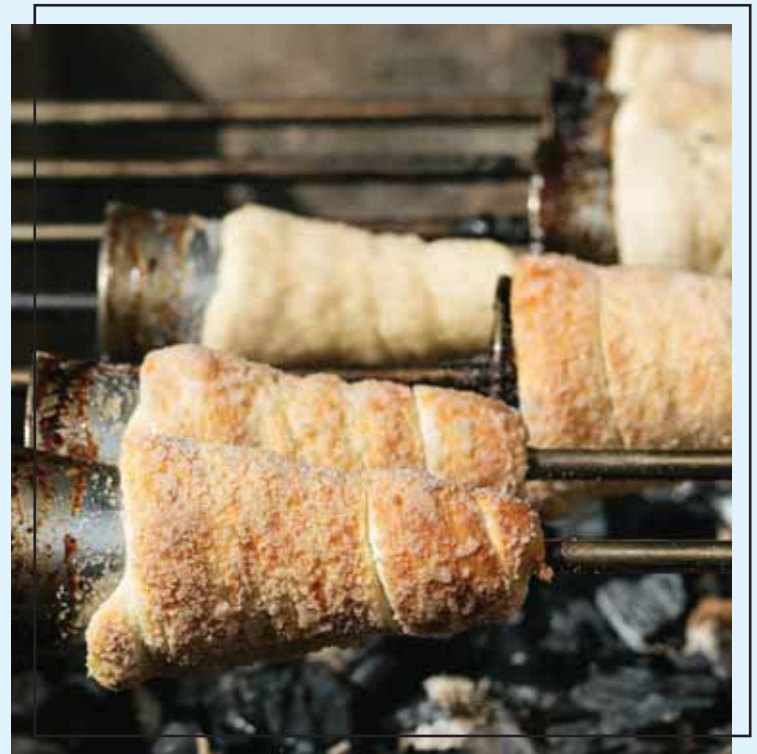
On the other side of the bridge you can make your way up to Prague Castle. It was once the seat of Czech rulers, but today, it is the residence of the president. The grounds are free to visit, but you have to pay to enter the St. Vitus Cathedral, Basilica of St. George and Golden Lane. It's worth the small fee as this massive structure is the largest coherent castle complex in the world.



DELIGHTFUL DELICACIES

Prague is the perfect place to sample as many new foods as possible. Add beef tartare to your list of foods to try, a raw minced beef dish often served with an egg. Eat it with bread and pair it with a Pilsner beer. Sample some of the local sweets, particularly the kolache. It is a small dough ball filled with jam. If you're on the go, grab a "trdelník." This is a rolled yeast dough wrapped around a stick and roasted over an open flame. The dough is then brushed with butter and rolled in cinnamon and sugar. Get them filled with Nutella and ice cream for an extra sweet treat!

Spend some time getting to know the winding streets, historical buildings and fascinating restaurants Prague has to offer. In just 48 hours, you're sure to fall in love with this magical city. ■



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