

PASSPORT PASTRIES

OUR TICKET TO PASTRY PARADISE—NO TRAVEL REQUIRED. BY AMY NANCE PHOTOGRAPHY BY CAT HORTON

When you're counting down the days until you abscond to Paris or Rio de Janeiro or the Welsh countryside), the few weeks of your wait are a formidable barrier between the ordinary you of regular life and the ungovernable, unaccountable self you imagine will flounce through Stockholm, Prague, etc., enlivened by the new

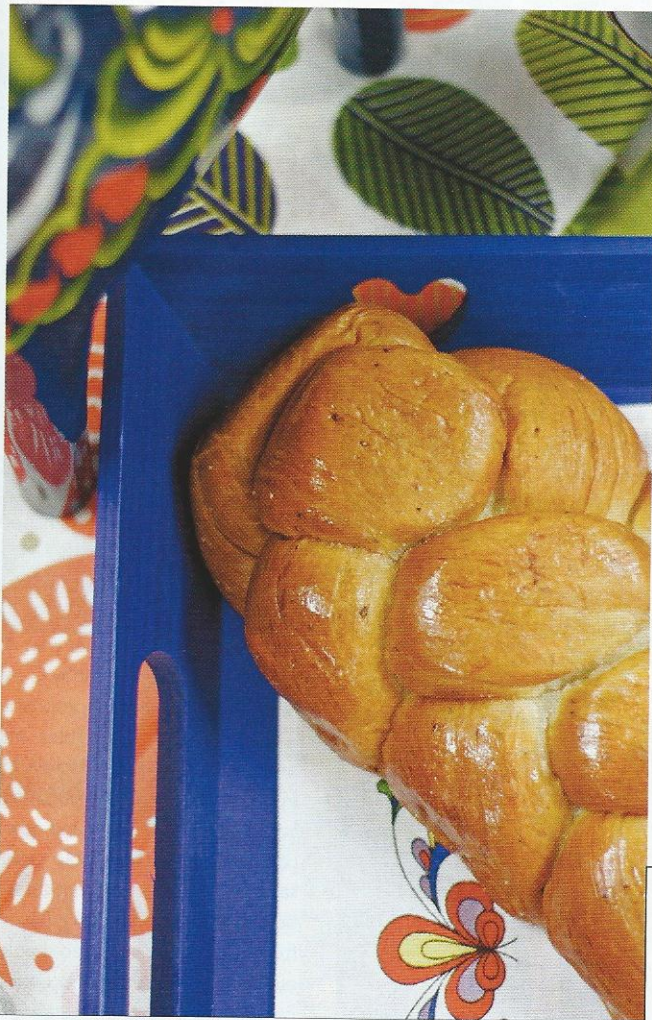
scenery, awakened to new places, inspired by the art and architecture and, of course, eating with total abandon.

So you plan your own personal Carnavale, this summer romp, as a stress reliever, escapist, excessive. But though you may spend a

month packing your suitcase and listening to language tapes in the car, you'll probably do little to prepare your appetite. By the time you get to London you're an old hand at negotiating the Tube, but you couldn't tell a Suet-crust pastry if it fell in your lap (which is unlikely to happen, so it pays to know your way around a country's particular brand of café).

There is a sweet, sweet remedy to this predicament, and it involves nothing more than a willingness to sample a few signature pastries from some authentic local bakeries and shops. In the interest of priming your palate for vacation, consider a visit to these global pantries.





DANISH KRINGLE

SCANDINAVIAN GIFTS, BAKED GOODS AND GROCERY

Here it's a Danish Kringle, but when you get to Copenhagen, call it wienerbrød. Scandinavian Gifts' kringle comes straight from Racine, Wisconsin, where immigrant bakers from Denmark settled in the 19th century. The shop's Pamela Stepsky describes a kringle—a term that signifies the pretzel shape—as thin and flaky. "We've got a dozen fillings, everything from almond and apricot to chocolate and cherry. They all come from the famous O & H Bakery in Racine, the kringle capital of the U.S."

The kringle and the Danish pastry, in general, reportedly arrived in Denmark with the Austrians, who came over to do the baking when Danish bakers went on strike. The Austrians had trained with the French, and when the Danish bakers returned to their

posts, they too added something to the yeast puff pastry. Typically made by hand, a kringle's dough is rolled, chilled and then filled with a sugar and butter concoction, then fruit or raisins. Stepsky sells frozen kringles and advises customers to bring the kringle to room temperature slowly before heating.

The tidy gifts and grocery also stocks sweet breads made with cardamom, which Stepsky praises for its "subtle spiciness." These come from a Finnish bakery in Lake Worth, Florida, where there's an extraordinarily large Finnish population. She's also got smoked salmon and flat bread from Norway and recently added some Ukrainian items to her inventory. Scandinavian Gifts, Baked Goods and Grocery, 2166 Gulf Gate Dr., Sarasota, 941-923-4313

CHOCOLATE MOUSSE TORTE

GABBY'S PATISSERIE

Gabby's is a perfect introduction to the European pastry cabinet—here you can get croissants, sticky rolls, coffee cake, cinnamon rolls and more, "sourced from around the world," says owner Michael Byrne. Byrne's wife Nancy, an experienced pastry chef with a background in food chemistry, keeps the shelves full of old-world delights like these, but the chocolate mousse torte rises above them all.

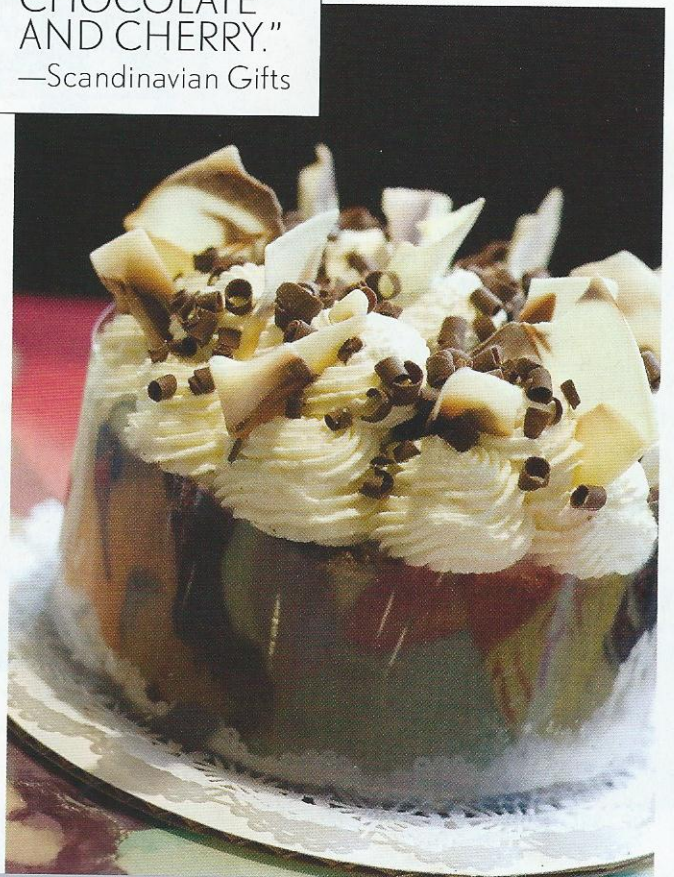
Surely you've heard of the Black Forest Cake, a German confection dating from the 16th century and from the region of the same name (torte is the German word for "cake," adopted from the Latin, which is why we've got so many "tortes" floating around in our languages). The chocolate

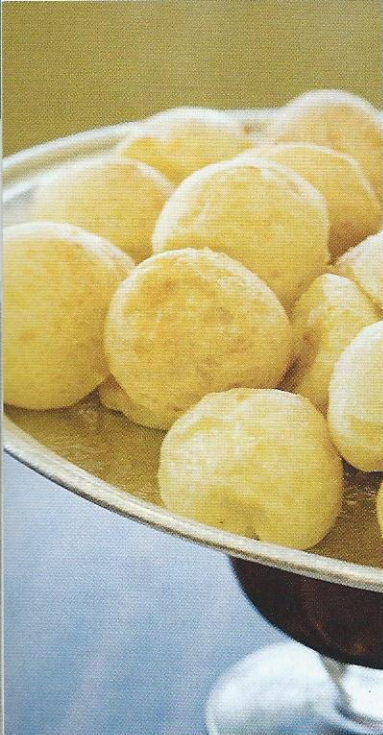
mousse torte abides by the same standards as the Black Forest Cake—you've got rich chocolate and an excessively creamy and moist center, minus the cherries. Gabby's take would impress any globe trotter. Imported from Belgium and Germany, the chocolate is top notch and combined with 40 percent butterfat whip cream in the torte, which makes for a singularly rich pastry. The patisserie offers white chocolate mousse torte as well as éclairs and cream puffs—the kind of pastries that are the stuff of fantasies about indulging in Europe.

Byrne has been bringing the morning pastries (among them brownies and scones made every day) to the downtown Farmers' Market for a few months now, as well as supplying the Van Wezel Founder's Room with Gabby's chocolates. Of the patisserie's range of plump sweets, Byrne says "we make them as we would want to eat them," pointing out that the ingredients are true to each pastry, always authentic and flavorful. *Gabby's Patisserie*, 106 N. Tamiami Trl., Osprey, 941-966-2253

"WE'VE GOT A DOZEN FILLINGS, EVERYTHING FROM ALMOND AND APRICOT TO CHOCOLATE AND CHERRY."

—Scandinavian Gifts





PASTY 4 AND 20 PASTY COMPANY

Take pastry dough, stuff it with savory meat and vegetables, crimp the sides and bake. The result is a kind of food purse. “Pasties originated in the British mines in Cornwall,” explains Richard Posner, owner, with his wife Barbara, of 4 and 20. “The miners got filthy, so their wives wrapped hot food in pastry to protect it. They could eat the pasties without getting their food dirty and, being superstitious, throw the crust away for the fairies.”

Namechecked in Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and rumored to have been carried long ago by traveling Irish priests, pasties are delightfully economical. A miner’s wife would mark his initials in the crust at the end of the pasty where the fruit was stored to prevent the miner from eating his dessert before dinner.

At Posner’s place, pasties run the gamut from traditional (steak and kidney, Shepherd’s Pie) to playful (Philadelphia Cheese Steak), with Indian fillings (no curry powder here, just authentic spices) and cherry chocolate cheesecake or pumpkin pasty for dessert. Posner’s pasties are made from butter, shortening, unbleached flour and salt and water—there’s no skimping and no shortcuts. 4 and 20’s sought-after sausage rolls sell alongside vegetarian pasty, so there’s something here for everyone. **4 and 20 Pasty Company, 5638 Swift Rd., Sarasota, 941-927-1421**

PAO DE QUEIJO SWEET TALK CAFÉ BRAZILIAN DELI

Along with caipirinha and açai berries, Brazil gives us pao de queijo—cheese bread in the form of bite-sized balls. This ubiquitous bread is typically made with fresh, local cheese and emerged in Colonial Brazil from a mix of Portuguese, aboriginal and African traditions. Served at breakfast or as an all-day snack, the gooey bread is just now coming into vogue here in the states. Sweet Talk Brazilian Café displays their pao de queijo proudly at the front of the shop just above the glass cases which hold salgadinho (savory goodies) on the left and sobremesas (these put the “sweet” in Sweet Talk) on the right. Really, you’ll want to sample everything, from the homemade donuts filled with guava paste to the meat croquettes.

In Brazil, bakeries like Sweet Talk are called padarias. There, customers devour hot rolls and empadinhas (not the same as empanadas—these tarte-like treats are often stuffed with heart of palm or shrimp), chat, have coffee and relax. Sweet Talk’s got the social angle just right, offering live bossa nova nights and special events. **Sweet Talk Café Brazilian Coffee House, 2704 Stickney Point Rd., Sarasota, 941-923-1467**



HOW TO MAKE A CAFEZINHO

This “little coffee” is big in Brazil, where the consumption of coffee is surpassed only by that of the United States. Cafezinho is enjoyed all day at botequim, a kind of gastro pub, where it is served in tiny cups. Those diminutive cups can be deceiving: This caffeine treat packs a serious punch and is stronger than espresso.

In a saucepan, bring water (3/4 cup of water for each serving) and sugar (a teaspoon for every serving) to just about boiling, stirring frequently. Add a heaping tablespoon of espresso ground coffee to the water for each serving and remove the saucepan from heat. Mix the coffee and sugar water by stirring well. Pour the coffee through either an authentic cloth filter or a paper filter straight into a small (demitasse) cup. Serve black and garnish the cup with an orange peel dipped in sugar.

CROISSANT C’EST LA VIE

The croissant’s colorful origin tale has been evaluated by scholars and often dismissed as myth. In a nutshell, a baker or bakers in either 17th-century Budapest or Vienna developed the croissant after alerting a sleeping city to the encroaching Turks. The baker’s reward was the honor of baking a crescent-shaped pastry to memorialize the incident. Whether it’s true or not misses the point: The croissant has achieved cult status either way. At cheery Main Street standby C’est la Vie, the sidewalk is appropriately crowded with café tables and leisurely diners basking in the sun. Inside, you’ll find baskets of fresh-baked baguettes, bread and other pastries, but it’s the noble croissant that requires your full attention. The café’s light, flaky, flavorful croissants can be paired simply, elegantly, with butter and coffee or with jam. The quintessential French pastry is, for some, even better filled with almond paste or pieces of chocolate, in which case, it’s a chocolatine or pain au chocolat, a variation on the butter croissant, with a devoted following. Practice makes perfect: Take your white bag with your crispy croissant in it down to Bayfront Park. Sit where you can see the bougainvillea at the park entrance and watch the dinghies bobbing in the harbor. **C’est la Vie, 1553 Main St., Sarasota, 941-906-9575**