


Executive Pastry Chef Nick Malgieri Article



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Nick Malgieri is the national spokesperson for the Switzerland Tourism Gastronomy and Wine program. After culinary school in the United States, he apprenticed in Switzerland and has maintained close ties with the country ever since through frequent visits. A frequent traveler to other destinations, he collects recipes everywhere. Below is a sample of some of the recipes from his book, *A Baker's Tour: Nick Malgieri's Favorite Baking Recipes from Around the World* (HarperCollins, October 2005).

Additional information on Nick Malgieri: www.nickmalgieri.com 



Christmas in Switzerland

The Christmas season begins early in Switzerland, officially on December 6, the feast day of Saint Nicholas. Known to Swiss children as Samichlaus, he still makes the rounds in some villages, accompanied by his two dirty-faced assistants, the Schmutzli (dirty guys). Samichlaus and his helpers distribute goodies to children, who eagerly anticipate his arrival every year.

Goodies are the key to the Swiss Christmas celebration, though, and these mostly take the form of Guetzli, traditional cookies, first served on December 6 and available throughout the holiday season. Though I think a lot of families like to bake their own Guetzli, especially in the German-speaking part of Switzerland where this cookie tradition is strongest, pastry shops and bakeries abound with tins and baskets of Guetzli adorning windows, counters and every available spare place in the shop. See below for a recipe for a traditional Christmas Guetzli. Another fun tradition that marks December 6 is the baking of the Gritibaenz, a doll made from the same dough as the typical Sunday Zopf, or braided butter loaf. An ancient pre-Christian tradition tied to the beginning of winter, baking the Gritibaenz may be done at home, though many Swiss purchase them in simple or elaborate versions at local pastry shops. See below for more information on the Gritibaenz.

In many parts of Switzerland, the pre-Christmas season is marked by Christmas markets, selling tree ornaments, other decorations, traditional treats, and small gifts. Here is a sampling of some of them:

Zurich: Main Railway Station (Hauptbahnhof) and the pedestrian mall below it, Friday November 28 until December 24; the largest market of its kind in Europe.

Buerkliplatz (the head of the lake where the river starts; same location as the Saturday flea market); December 6 and 7, all day.

Lucerne: Main Railway Station, November 28 to December 22, weekdays 11AM to 9PM, weekends 10AM to 8PM.

Franziskanerplatz: December 4 to 21, 11Am to 8PM every day

Liechtenstein: Vaduz, pedestrian zone, December 13, 11AM to 6PM; over 100 stands with Christmas merchandise, the largest Christmas market in eastern Switzerland.

Whether you decide to shop in a Christmas market or just stop by a pastry shop and enjoy a tin of Guetzli, Christmas in Switzerland is always a memorable experience. If you intend to go, don't forget to ask about special Christmas week hotel rates, which can even include a free night's stay in some cases.

Frohe Weihnacht, Joyeux Noel, Buon Natale, Bialas Fiastas da Nadal

Panettone in Ticino

That deliciously buttery and sweet Christmas cake, panettone, originated in Milan, just a hop from Ticino, and of course, Ticinese bakers have their own versions for the holiday season. In fact, over the course of the past few years, panettone has become serious business in Ticino. The bakery guild of Ticino has introduced special rules and regulations that cover its production and sale.

Though there are many (pretty preposterous) legends that surround the origin of panettone, it is a typical enriched yeast dough, made with lots of butter, eggs, flavorings, and candied and dried fruit. These types of cakes (they are really cakes because of their richness) exist in so many European countries, and Poland's babka, Austria's Gugelhupf, and France's Baba, are just further examples. What distinguishes panettone from many other delicate yeast-risen cakes is the fact that it is usually made from natural sourdough, and not with standard yeast used for everyday bread making. Sourdough imparts a special moisture and ability to retain freshness to the panettone, making it unlike any other cake in its class. Though excellent panettone from Italy is widely available in the United States, you probably won't find one from Ticino in your local fancy food store. To order one from Ticino (you'll have to navigate these websites in Italian if you decide to) see the following:

www.alporto.ch 

www.panetteria-poncini.ch 

Best Gritibaenz in Zurich

Some pastry shops are noted for the quality of their cakes or chocolates; others for their croissants or other delicate pastries; and some are famous for their tarts and other fruit preparations. Last summer, I started asking around to see if anyone was famous for Zopf, that buttery braided bread that almost everyone in Switzerland eats for breakfast on Sunday. The reports were unanimous – Conditorei Baeckerei Hausamman in Zurich. So, early one September morning I set out to visit Reto Hausamman and his head baker Guenter Kinost. On the agenda was a demonstration of the preparation of Gritibaenz, that typically Swiss bread doll used as a gift and as a tasty breakfast bread on the fest of St. Nicholas, December 6. Everything was ready to go in the immaculate production area of the bakery. I wasn't surprised to learn that the Hausamman Gritibaenz are made from the same dough as their Zopf – so that they are delicious as well as beautiful. The dough was ready and we went through all the steps for forming the lifeless piece of dough into the sprightly character with raisin eyes and a jaunty twisted dough tie. If you're in Zurich, this fine pastry shop is worth a visit.

Conditorei Baeckerei Hausamman

Universitaetstrasse 88

CH 8006 Zurich

Phone from the US: 011 4143 362 1917

Fax from the US: 011 4143 362 1967

www.zopfbeck.ch 

Geneva Festivities

In mid-December 1602, the city of Geneva was under siege by an army raised by the house of Savoy, the same family who became the rulers of a united Italy about 2 1/2 centuries later. On that fateful night, la Mere Royaume, wife of a night watchman on the city walls, was preparing a large pot of vegetable soup, keeping her husband company while he made his rounds and cooking her soup on an outdoor open fire. Noticing an uncharacteristic noise, la Mere Royaume took a look and saw soldiers scaling the city wall. She quickly dumped her pot of boiling soup on them, followed by the pot itself and routed the soldiers from the wall. At the same time she sounded the alarm and another Geneva matron, la Mere Piaget, opened the city gates so that the Geneva army could attack the intruders from behind, sending them into retreat.

Immediately after this successful defense of the city a religious service was held in thanksgiving for the victory. A banquet for the defenders followed, and the tradition of eating the same menu of rice soup, turkey, and potatoes persists to this day.

Nowadays the Escalade, as it is called in Geneva (referring to the scaling of the walls by the enemy), has become an annual Geneva tradition. In the nineteenth century an enterprising confectioner made a nougatine (caramel and almond candy) replica of la Mere Royaume's pot and it has persisted in various forms to this day. Though some old-line confectioners in Geneva still make nougatine ones, these have been almost entirely replaced by chocolate marmites, as the pots are called. Filled with tiny marzipan vegetables as the original soup was, every Geneva family celebrates the escalade with a marmite of its own. Collective chocolate use by Geneva confectioners in marmite production equals close to a ton. After the children of the family sing the traditional Escalade song, originally a hymn sung at the first thanksgiving service, they're allowed to shatter the marmite and enjoy the shards of chocolate and the marzipan inside.

Confiserie Sprüngli

If I had to give up going to all pastry shops save one for the rest of my life, then the one I would choose to keep would be Sprüngli. I first peered through its hallowed windows in the early seventies when I was but an apprentice at a hotel just outside the city. I would come into the city on my days off and head for Sprüngli, making sketches of the cakes and pastries in the window and wondering with a combination of hope and dread if I would ever learn to make things as beautiful. The chocolates, cakes, pastries and other sweets at Sprüngli's main store at Paradeplatz and their dozen odd stores scattered around the rest of Zurich exhibit the benchmark of quality and exquisite flavor for all things sweet and delicate. Christmas is a special time at the shops where refined versions of Christmas cookies, Stollen, and molded chocolates mark the holiday season.

Founded by David Sprüngli and his son Rudolf in 1836 at another location, the pair made history several years later when they started making chocolate (it has now become the famous Lindt chocolate company) in 1845. In 1859 the pastry shop moved to its present headquarters at Paradeplatz, the traditional center of Zurich.

No visit to Zurich is complete without a visit to Sprüngli (I usually manage to fit in several) and it's easy to do because there are many Sprüngli boutiques sprinkled around the center of the city, and one conveniently placed in the main train station for a last minute treat to take along on a visit to friends.

Sprüngli's chocolates would be enough to make it famous, but all the other goods are just as wonderful. A favorite of many are the Luxemburgerli, an ethereal cross between macaroons and meringues that are coupled with a dab of buttercream. Eating Luxemburgerli can only be compared to having a bite of a pink cloud at sunset – they are meltingly delicate, perfectly sweet and never too rich.

The website is easy to navigate, but is not in English. If you want to order something for the holidays, don't hesitate to phone – the friendly and efficient staff speaks English as well as many other languages.

Confiserie Sprüngli am Paradeplatz

Bahnhofstrasse 21

CH 8022 Zurich

Phone from the US: 011 411 224 4646

Fax from the US: 011 411 224 4735

E-mail: kundendienst@spruengli.ch

www.spruengli.ch 

Scarnuz Grischun

Throughout Canton Graubunden there is a tradition where farm wives each make a specialty and gather to group their wares in picturesque gift sacks known as Scarnuz Grischun. I recently visited one of the five groups making these at Maya Fravi's immaculate farm in Donath outside Chur. Their tiny cellar "warehouse" was filled with goodies such as Totebeinli (dead men's bones, a kind of biscotti!), Engadiner Nusstorte, a cake with a caramelized walnut filling enclosed in sweet, crumbly pastry, and Birrebrot, a kind of dense fruit bread made from dried pears. Caramels, dried fruit, fruit syrups, cheese and salsiz, a local cured sausage are also included, each farm wife preparing one of them. The packaging nestles the different foods in a straw-filled bag and they are then decorated with wheat sheaves. The prices for a Scarnuz delivered within Switzerland's runs from \$30.00 to \$120.00, postage included, and is a perfect gift for your Swiss hosts after a visit.

Scarnuz Grischun Viamala

Maya Fravi-Loringett

CH 7433 Donath

Phone from the US: 011 4181 661 1688

www.scarnuz-viamala.ch 

Spirits: Kirsch, the Real Thing

The holidays always make me remember to take out the liqueurs after dinner – the first cold weather suggests a warming nip with a cup of espresso. Though we all know how wonderful Kirsch, Swiss cherry brandy, can be in desserts of all kinds, we don't necessarily think of it as a drink. Good Kirsch is every bit as nuanced and delicate as the best Cognac. Sipped slowly from a snifter, the aroma builds into a heady scent of pure cherries.

It wasn't until I had a chance to visit prize-winning Kirsch distiller Hermann Roellin at his farm and distillery in the Notikon region of the village of Baar, near Zug, that I really understood what Kirsch actually is. I had always had the mistaken notion that Kirsch was made from sour cherries, but actually the varieties used are sweet. They aren't like the big, juicy eating cherries, though. Good cherries for distilling have a fairly low water content (water makes eating cherries crisp) so that the flavor develops quickly without having to wait for gallons of water to evaporate. Roellin's Kirsch is available at stores in Zug, but if you can't get there to buy a bottle, good Swiss Kirsch is easily available here. Just look for brands such as Fassbind or Etter, the most widely exported ones. Sometimes Kirsch may be designated as Zuger Kirsch (Kirsch from Zug) or Rigi Kirsch (from the Rigi area south of Lucerne, another large cherry-growing area). Whatever its provenance, Swiss Kirsch gives the best flavor.

Recipe: Chocolate Mousse Cake Scented with Kirsch

This is really easy and fast to whip up during the holidays. Serve with some sweetened whipped cream.

Makes one 8-inch cake, about 12 servings (it's very rich)

1/2 cup water

1/3 cup sugar

8 tablespoons (one stick) unsalted butter, cut into 8 pieces

12 ounces Swiss bittersweet chocolate

6 large eggs

Pinch salt

3 tablespoons Swiss Kirsch

One 8-inch diameter cake pan, 2 inches deep, buttered and the bottom lined with a disk of buttered parchment, cut to fit; a small roasting pan to hold the cake pan while baking

1. Set a rack in the middle level of the oven and preheat to 350 degrees.
2. Combine the sugar and water in a medium saucepan and place over medium heat. Swirl the pan occasionally to make sure the sugar melts. At the boil, add the butter and continue cooking briefly until it melts.
3. Remove from heat and add the chocolate. Shake the pan to submerge the chocolate and allow it to melt for a couple of minutes.
4. In a mixing bowl, whisk the eggs with the salt and Kirsch. Whisk the chocolate mixture smooth, then whisk it into the egg mixture, whisking just enough to combine. Pour the batter into the prepared pan and add about a cup of water to the larger pan containing the 8-inch pan.
5. Bake for about 40 minutes, or until slightly firm in the center. Remove the cake pan from the water and cool on a rack. Cool to room temperature and invert to a platter. Remove pan and peel off paper, if necessary. For advance preparation, unmold, double wrap in plastic and refrigerate or freeze. Bring to room temperature before serving.