

Article written by Nick Malgieri about some great places to experience the specialties in Canton Graubunden and one of his delicious pastry recipes -Engadiner Nusstorte

Whether you're after an elegant resort such as St. Moritz or Davos, or you just want to explore some beautiful mountains, Canton Graubunden holds many charms for the traveler. With its own unique language, called Rhaeto-Romanish (actually there are half a dozen principle dialects that can differ widely from each other), comes an outstanding and sometimes ancient food tradition. Simple, flavorful foods based on available vegetables and whole grains dominate the traditional food of the canton, giving the traveler an interesting variety of dishes from which to choose. Here's a partial list of the traditional dishes you'll find in Canton Graubunden and some of the places where they're available:

Buendnerfleisch: Traditional air-dried beef, often served along with Buendner Rohschinken, a kind of local prosciutto, cured with garlic, herbs, and salt. Parma, move over!

Buendner Gerstensuppe: Traditional barley soup with root vegetables. Fairly hearty, it can also be pleasant on a cool summer or fall evening.

Capuns: Swiss chard leaves enclosing a rich pasta dough studded with ham. Usually served in a light, creamy sauce.

Maluns: Hash brown potatoes cooked into tiny separate golden crumbs, usually served with applesauce and grated local cheese.

Pizzochel: Buckwheat flour dumplings usually served as a pasta course

Pizzocheri: Similar to the Italian dish of the same name, flat buckwheat noodles with butter, cheese and vegetables.

Roeteli: Cherry and spice liqueur served as a digestif
Hotel Stern, Chur

One of the best places to experience the specialties in Canton Graubunden is the Hotel Stern in Chur. If you're on your way anywhere in the canton, you'll probably have to stop and change trains in Chur, anyway. If you really want to experience this delightful small city, stop your travels for a day and explore, eat and drink in the canton's charming capital. I've had some lovely meals at the Stern over the years, and I love the fact that it clings to the traditional foods of the area in an age when there is so much updating, modernizing and watering down of local cuisine all over the world. You'll have a great opportunity to taste local specialties, prepared by native cooks, and right in the heart of the area where they developed. Don't miss this one:

Romantik Hotel Stern

Reichgasse 11

CH-7000 Chur

Phone from the US: 011 4181 258 5757 (from within Switzerland it's 081 258 5757)

Fax from the US: 011 4181 258 5758

Website: www.stern-chur.ch

E-mail: infostern-chur.ch

Restaurant Calanda, Chur

Great grilled chicken and a host of other specialties are available at this large restaurant with streetside terraces in the heart of Graubunden's capital, Chur. A popular gathering place for locals and tourists alike, Calanda is named for a mountain peak near the city and it's also the name of a popular local beer.

Open from 9AM to midnight every day, the restaurant serves breakfast, lunch and dinner and is also a perfect place to stop in for a coffee, a light snack or a random drink at any time of the day. And there's a blues or jazz evening every month if you need more entertainment than people watching and excellent food.

Chef Stephan Ineichen hails from the Lucerne area, but he has had no trouble adapting to the local fare. There are also great grilled lamb, pork and shrimp dishes as well as creative pastas and garden-fresh main-course salads. Swiss wines are well represented, especially those of the Buendner Herrschaft, made nearby. When in Chur, eat like a native and give Calanda a try.

Restaurant Calanda

Postplatz 1

CH-7000 Chur

Phone from the US: 011 4181 253 0880

Recipe: Engadiner Nusstorte

This is a Graubunden specialty you'll enjoy making at any time of the year, but especially in the Fall when the new crop of walnuts appears.

One 9-inch pie, about 12 servings

CARAMEL WALNUT FILLING

1 1/4 cups sugar

1 teaspoon water

2/3 cup heavy whipping cream

1 tablespoon honey

2 cups (about 8 ounces) walnut pieces, coarsely chopped

PASTRY DOUGH

3 cups all-purpose flour (scoop flour into dry-measure cups and level off)

1/2 cup sugar

1 teaspoon baking powder

16 tablespoons (2 sticks) unsalted butter, cold, cut into 16 pieces

2 large eggs

1 large egg yolk

One 9-inch round pan, 2 inches deep, buttered, and the bottom lined with a disk of buttered parchment

1. For the filling, combine the sugar and water in a large saucepan and stir with a wooden spoon until the mixture has the consistency of wet sand. Add the honey to the cream and place near the pan on the stove. Place over medium heat and stir occasionally until the sugar turns to a deep amber caramel. Off heat, immediately pour in the cream and honey mixture, a little at a time, to avoid having the caramel boil over. Return the pan to the heat and cook, stirring occasionally for 1 minutes.

2. Stir the walnuts into the filling and scrape it into a buttered bowl to cool slightly.

3. For the dough, combine the dry ingredients in the work bowl of a food processor fitted with the metal blade. Pulse several times to mix. Add the butter and pulse about 10 times, to mix it in finely. Add the eggs and yolk and pulse repeatedly until the dough forms a ball.

4. Invert the dough to a floured surface and carefully remove the blade. Form the dough into a rough cylinder and use a bench scraper or knife to cut off 2/3 of it.

5. Place the large piece of dough on a floured surface and flour the dough. Roll it to a 13-inch disk. Fold the dough in half and transfer it to the prepared pan, lining up the fold with the diameter of the pan. Unfold the dough into the pan and press it well into the bottom and sides of the pan. Use a bench scraper or the back of a knife to trim away the excess dough at the top rim of the pan.

6. Scrape the filling into the dough-lined pan and spread the top smooth.

7. Roll the remaining piece of dough to a 9-inch disk and slide a cookie sheet or 12-inch tart pan bottom under it. Slide the dough off the cookie sheet onto the filling. Ease the dough from the bottom crust off the top rim of the pan and fold it over onto the top crust. Press the folded over dough down against the top crust with the ends of the tines of a fork. Use the fork to poke a dozen vent holes in the top crust at 2-inch intervals all over the top.

8. Bake the pie for about 45 minutes, or until the dough is baked through and deep golden and the filling is firm.

9. Cool completely on a rack and wrap in plastic. Wait until the next day to serve the pie or the filling will be runny when you cut into it.

Serving. Invert the Nusstorte to a rack or flat plate and remove the pan and paper. Replace the pan with a platter and invert everything with the Nusstorte in between. Remove the rack or plate. Serve the Nusstorte in wedges – it needs no accompaniment.

Storage: Keep the Nusstorte wrapped in plastic both before and after serving.