

STRASBOURG: GERMANY MEETS FRANCE

Discover the world's oldest wine, exotic desserts and a cathedral for penance in the capital city of Alsace.

BY TIFFANY THORNTON



Above: Heavenly spire: Strasbourg Cathedral commands the landscape.

It is dusk in Strasbourg, France. The sun begins to set, casting an iridescent glow on the River Ill. A tour boat glides past half-timbered homes that line the water's edge and 13th century guard towers surrounding an area known as "Petite France." Each moment evokes a sense of stumbling into a fairytale dream.

Strasbourg dates back to 1262. It is the capital of Alsace, a region of France that borders Germany, carrying with it a long history of German influences felt throughout the city.

It is known for certain foods. Scrumptious *tarte flambée*, which consists of Alsatian flatbread, melted white cheese and a variety of other ingredients, can be found just about everywhere. For dessert, *Kougelhopf* is a necessary indulgence. It is a German raisin and almond cake dusted with sugar that tempts the palette with each bite.

THE PASTRY HOTEL

Hotel Suisse is an idyllic boutique-style hotel located at the foot of the serene Strasbourg Cathedral, France's second most visited cathedral after Notre Dame in Paris. The hotel boasts a lovely café that serves up the famed *Kougelhopf* cake, which is baked fresh in the morning, and decadent croissants that accompany the perfect café au lait.

The proprietor of Hotel Suisse is Edith Becker and it is the workplace of esteemed pastry chef Christophe Felder.



Top Left: A box of *Madeleines*.

Top Right: Pastries at *Au Fond du Jardin*.

Above: A barrel of Alsatian white wine.

Felder recently published a glossy pink pastry cookbook in English called *Pâtisserie*, which features 3,200 colour photos of divine desserts. You can peruse or purchase this delightful book in the hotel reception.

PROUST'S FAVOURITE

Adjacent to the Hotel Suisse is the Victorian-inspired *Au Fond du Jardin*. This sweet spot, known for a superb brunch, is also home to the exquisite *Madeleines du Voyage* (little cake-like cookies). *Madeleines* have been a delicate treat for centuries; they were a favourite of author Marcel Proust. Perhaps it is the unique ambience that *Au Fond du Jardin* has cultivated that makes them exceptional. The madeleines are filled with tastes like pistachio, rose, almonds and oranges, creating a magic that keeps many visitors lingering outside the colourful front window display.

THE OLDEST WINE

The world's oldest wine is made in one of the most unsuspecting places. A historic wine cave lies in the medieval cellars of Strasbourg's hospital, *Historiques des Hospices de Strasbourg*, built in 1395. Tucked away at the end of a damp vaulted tunnel, a large handmade wooden barrel holds 3,000 litres of an Alsatian White from 1472. It is said to have an infusion of honey, hazelnut and vanilla spice in its tannins.

The wine has been officially tasted three times. The last time the barrel was tapped for tasting was in 1944. Deep behind the cellar walls is a 13 km tunnel that linked the city's 14 defence towers centuries ago. Drop into the store and pick up a bottle of wine emblazoned with the historic emblem reflective of such a distinctive place.

THE TOP OF THE TOWER

Strasbourg Cathedral commands the landscape. Its spires can be seen from miles away as they jut upwards towards the sky. Built between 1015 and 1439 and inspired by late gothic architecture, the cathedral is made of red sandstone. Many of its intricate stained glass windows date back to the 13th and 14th centuries. Those without vertigo can climb the 332 steps to the top of the tower, which offers up an astounding view of the city's rooftops and the topography below. 📍

GETTING THERE

Strasbourg, France

Fly to London Heathrow or London Gatwick airports to connect at Paris' Charles de Gaulle airport where you can fly to Strasbourg's Entzheim airport.