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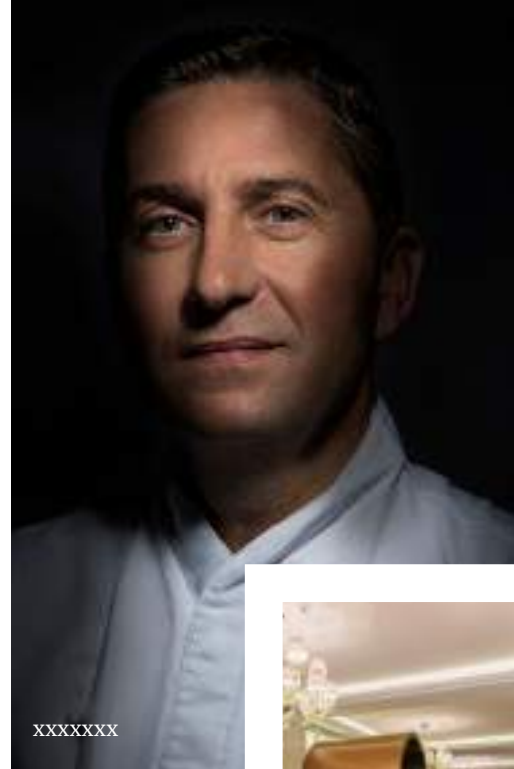
A Michelin-infused vegetarian outing

SWITZERLAND IS MAKING WAVES BY OFFERING VEGETARIAN MENUS THAT ARE NOW BEING SERVED IN MICHELIN-STARRED RESTAURANTS IN THE COUNTRY

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO

There is a rising trend of Swiss Michelin star restaurants constantly trying to up the ante as far as good food and sustainability are concerned with the help of immensely skilled chefs. Using their deep-rooted passion, innovation, creativity, originality that is rooted in sustainability, they are now giving vegetarians another reason to visit Switzerland with their elaborate nine to ten course vegetarian meals that are paired with beverages.

The vegetarian movement got an impetus on October 1, 2022, when Switzerland celebrated Swisstainable Veggie Day and 1200 restaurants across the country as well as the national carrier Swiss International Airlines (SWISS) went completely vegetarian to mark the World Vegetarian Day. This was also intended to set an example for sustainable gastronomy and showcase their local vegetable produce. And make no mistake, the dishes are all top-notch and can make non vegetarians forget their meat, even if it is for a while. And this is exactly what I saw as I stepped into several Michelin-starred restaurants who pulled out all stops as they served eclectic vegetarian fare. La Fleur de Sel in Cossonay Ville relies on its surroundings and forage for ingredients and herbs in the forests around them while Damien Germanier in Sion has democratised the process and invite diners into the kitchen as the chefs explain and demonstrate how they cook while serving appetisers almost in the middle of the kitchen and Le Chat-Botte in Geneva makes local seasonal produce the hero. At the end of it, it's not just a meal but a luxurious experience that satiates all the senses.



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Geneva - Le Chat Botté

Chef Dominique Gauthier helms this one-Michelin-star restaurant, Le Chat Botté and is inspired by the French roots of the region which is seen in his Vegetal Menu aptly called L'inspiration vegetale. When you book this meal (you need to make an advance booking), you can choose either four or six courses. And if you are vegan, the dishes can be adapted accordingly. The menu includes an entrée, dessert starter and main course or main course and dessert. We tried some winners like the Jerusalem artichoke, chestnuts, artichokes and hazelnut appetiser, Butternut and pumpkin squash, Fresh goat cheese ravioli from La Touvière, with ceps mushrooms, coffee and a meringue, pink grapefruit vanilla and yuzu cream dessert and Orfeve Esterre 70 per cent chocolate tart encased inside a blown sugar shell.

Chef Dominique Gauthier ensures that a large portion of the produce is sourced locally and the focus is to use seasonal vegetables that will determine the dish that will be on the table. "I grew up in France close to the Swiss French border and my home had a huge garden which meant that we grew our own vegetables." This is also why he focuses on having smaller menus and celebrating ingredients that are both seasonal and local. His menu sees an extensive use of local mushrooms and he believes it is a great ingredient to work with for the texture and flavour it gives to the dishes. They also have a dish of the day and you can be sure that this will be a meal to remember.

Cossonay-Ville - La Fleur de Sel

The one-Michelin-star restaurant helmed by François Gautier as its Director and Chef Sommelier La Fleur de Sel is in the quiet town of Cossonay. Alighting from the funicular train, a walk that takes us through picturesque countryside roads gets us to the restaurant where Gautier cooks his meals with a dash of passion. Known for his focus on all things local, Chef Sommelier dishes out a meal that has parsnips, ball celery and Calvados. For someone who observes and understands the local topography well, Gautier admits that he often goes looking for his ingredients. Even the desserts have a dash of local - we tried the clementine in a spiced consommé, savarin biscuit soaked in pistachio and arugula ice cream.

Offering to take us on a foraging trip, the Chef led us to a nearby wooded area where he showed us the common avens and good soldier's grass, a small shrub with yellow flowers, the roots of which can be dried to replace cloves or be used as a flavouring agent in drinks. The young leaves can also be added to salads. He also showed us the perennial hedge nettle or hedge woundwort that is used to heal wounds. "I regularly come to search for my ingredients. There is another place that is a little far away where I find more such local ingredients. I ensure I use them as they must not be

forgotten," says the Chef. So, on your next trip to Switzerland, explore the vegetarian side of this meat-loving country and there is no doubt that you will be left pleasantly surprised. **W**



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Sion - Damien Germanier

My first stop after a quick freshen up at Zurich Airport was to head to the charming city of Sion by train. Getting off at the train station, a short walk led us to the one-Michelin-star restaurant Damien Germanier, the eponymous place headed by Chef Damien, who welcomed us into his chic eatery that has an easy, airy vibe to it and a pleasing décor to match. "I have been in this wonderful profession for some years now, thinking about our work and our responsibility as cooks. I have been thinking about how to feed people and give them the most beautiful emotions possible. And the future of our world challenges me. That is why my way of cooking has changed and become more ethical and responsible, while still wanting to delight you with the work of my brigade," he explains. Hence, he now ensures that the origin of the products used in the restaurant must be as close as possible as they will be fresher, tastier and leave a smaller carbon footprint.

All the vegetables used are sourced locally and include a variety of local fare like salsify, ginger, parsnip, carrots, and cabbage. We are invited inside the kitchen to sample some starters and the place is abuzz with activity as the small team of chefs are busy creating magic on small plates. "We make a surprise menu every day as it depends on the fresh produce that we can procure for the day. We try to keep the food lactose and gluten free and avoid cream and butter," says the Chef. As

we nibble into the small bites, the burst of flavour and freshness is palpable. Back on our table we are served an eclectic selection of dishes that range from salsify broth garnished with juniper, red cabbage with hazelnut sauce and a hazelnut sable as well as the raisin, nut and kumquat ice cream and the juniper berry and cider sorbet. Interestingly, keeping food sustainability at the heart of his work, he ensures that all vegetables are used in entirety, from the leaf to the skin. The ethos is simple - keep the season in mind and not waste the farmers' effort to grow the produce. His focus is to use preservation techniques and lacto fermentation.

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