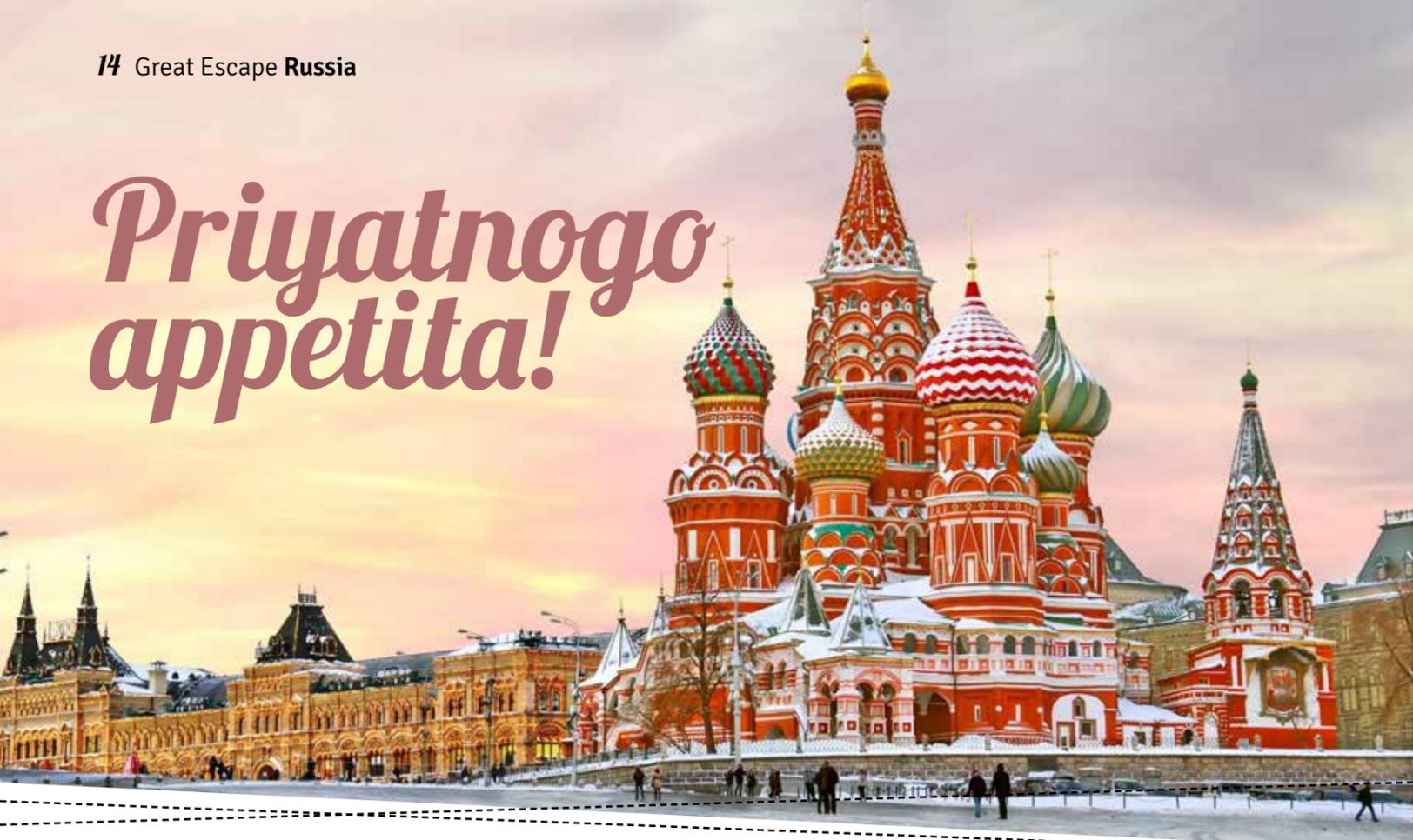


Priyatnogo appetita!



As one might imagine for a country spanning two continents, the food and drink of Russia is as diverse as its land and people. T&F spoke with two enthusiasts from the intelligentsia of Russian cuisine to learn more about its diversity and variety



“Russia is a multinational country, so when we speak about Russian food, we speak about a tremendous variety of foods from different regions of Russia, each with its own taste and specifics,” said **Khayrat Ahmetov**, director of the Russian Cultural Center in Beirut. Roughly 80% of the population of the Russian Federation is ethnically Russian, but the nation is home to some 160 different ethnic groups and indigenous peoples.

“My nationality is Tatar,” said Ahmetov. “It is the second biggest ethnic group in Russia, so its cuisine is quite known, and of course I’m

a big fan of Tatar food. It includes varieties of soups with meat, chicken and meat dishes with potatoes and rice, delicious pies with meat, dried apricots, prunes, etcetera.” One well-known Tatar dish is *kazy*, a handmade sausage of horsemeat, cut in slices and served with onions.



Friendship Association, and honorary consul of the Russian Federation in Lebanon, Sarraf’s ties

“Russian food is very diverse and rich in extraordinary flavors,” concurred **Jacques Jean Sarraf**, chairman of Malia Group. As the chair of the Russian-Lebanese Business Council, president of the Lebanese-Russian

to Russia run deep. “Considering my frequent visits to Russia, it has become my second home country, and obviously, I had the chance to taste most of its traditional and signature dishes.”

Mouthwatering multicourse meals

“I am fond of its thick soups and hearty meals, such as the *rassolnik* and *ukha* soup, which are comfort food and keep you warm while living in cold weather environments,” said Sarraf. *Rassolnik* is a traditional soup made from pickled cucumbers, pearl barley, and pork or beef kidneys. *Ukha* is made of fish – often sturgeon or cod – and root vegetables, cooked in a clear broth. The best-known soups are *shchi*, made with cabbage, and *borscht*, the beef and beet soup with its signature red color. “Exact recipes vary from region to region and from cook to cook,” said Ahmetov. Soup also makes it to the table in summer, in the form of *okroshka*, a cold soup which is a finely chopped mixture of different kinds of meat or fish, vegetables and pickles.

Ahmetov explained that “for the second course, we usually like to have meat (chicken or fish) with potatoes, less often with rice. Another important thing on the table for Russians is bread. There’s even a proverb saying ‘There’s no dinner without bread.’ Usually we prefer brown rye or wholegrain bread.”



Beef stroganoff



Sochivo



Rassolnik



Vatrushka

“During my visits to Russia, I had the opportunity to taste some exquisite meals such as the smooth and creamy beef *stroganoff*, garnished with sour-cream, onions and mushrooms,” said Sarraf. “For dessert, I crown my every Russian meal with the mouth-watering *vatrushka*, which is a soft bun made with cheese, milk, sugar and jam.”

For Ahmetov, on the other hand, a meal is not complete without a plate of *chak-chak*. “Made of pastry with honey, *chak-chak* is a must at every Tatar table.” Unleavened dough is rolled into hazelnut-sized balls and deep-fried, then stacked into a mounded cake and drenched with hot honey. The cake hardens as it cools, and is sometimes decorated with hazelnuts or dried fruit.

Holiday fare

Orthodox Christianity is the most widely practiced religion in Russia, and Christmas is celebrated on January 7. The devout observe a 40-day fast excluding meat and dairy from their diets in the days leading up to Christmas. The fast is broken on Christmas Eve, with a special porridge known as *sochivo* or *kutya*, prepared from wheat, walnuts, poppy seeds and honey.

A feast follows on Christmas Day, starting with soup (often mushroom), followed by *zakuska*, the Russian equivalent of *mezze*. Goose cooked in sour cream sauce, duck and roast piglet are popular main courses, often accompanied by savory pies of meat, fish or vegetables, and stewed kidney beans. Honey spice cookies called *pryaniki* finish off the meal.

Bottoms Up!

In Russia there is a “panoply of methods for drinking vodka,” said Sarraf. “Some people enjoy sipping vodka focusing on savoring the taste rather than getting drunk, while others prefer drinking it plain, ‘bottoms up’ in small tumblers, after freezing the bottle for few hours.” Note that when toasting, draining your glass is considered the polite thing to do, and Russians insist that eating a few bites of food after every shot is the trick to avoiding getting inebriated. “Not many people know the importance of *zakuska*, the appetizer or snack that is served with vodka, as it can influence the purity of taste,” said Ahmetov. A well-crafted vodka cuts through creamy textures, brings out the sweetness in rich foods, and provides an acidic counterbalance to a salty dish. According to Ahmetov, “pickled cucumber is considered an ideal snack for vodka,” while caviar is another classic pairing.



FAVORITES

Jacques Jean Sarraf’s restaurant recommendations

MOSCOW

White Rabbit is a modern upscale restaurant and gastrobar. The restaurant’s menu is brimming with delicious Russian meals such as fish and seafood, soups, appetizers and desserts. White Rabbit has been named among the 50 top restaurants in the world.



Smolenskaya Square 3
whiterabbitmoscow.ru

Turandot offers an international menu in a very classic and luxurious architectural setting.



Tverskoy Boulevard 26
turandot-palace.ru



Café Fresco serves Italian and Russian cuisine in a relaxed, cozy and elegant atmosphere.

Frunzenskaya 1st St., 8
cafe-fresco.ru

ST PETERSBURG

Palkin for fine dining. It is considered the most lavish restaurant in the region, serving traditional Russian gourmet dishes in a sophisticated interior.



Nevsky Prospekt



By Chef Patisserie Nina Tarasova

Serves

Prep/cooking time

INGREDIENTS

Cookie

- 250g flour
- 25g cocoa
- 100g icing powder
- A pinch of salt
- 200g butter
- 2 eggs yolks
- 5g baking powder

Soft caramel

- 120g sugar
- 115g orange juice
- 35g glucose
- 1 vanilla pod
- Pinch of salt
- Butter 100g
- 5g gelatin
- Glaze
- 700g dark chocolate 64%
- 200g oil (grape or apricot)
- 200g toasted pieces of almonds

Apple chips:

- 3-4 apples
- 100g sugar
- 300g water
- Icing sugar

PREPARATION

Make pate. Roll 0.5 cm. Bake in the oven at 180° for 10 minutes. For the caramel, in a saucepan caramelize the sugar. Pour the hot cream with vanilla, glucose. Cool to 45°C. Blend with butter for 2 minutes. Chill overnight.

Make the zefir. Pipe a little bit on the cookie, put frozen caramel and again a lot of zefir. Freeze. Cut the apple very thinly. Put on the hot syrup for 15-20 minutes. Bake in the oven at 100°C for 1 hour.

Dessert with “zefir”

Russian marshmallow

