



EATING OUT / BASEL

Fine art, finer dining

June marks the art world's shift towards the Swiss city of Basel but that's not the only reason to visit. Sandwiched between the Swiss, French and German borders, Basel brims with culinary delights. Here are our highlights.

PHOTOGRAPHER Samuel Zeller



FOR A HEARTENING BREAKFAST
La Fourchette

This is home-spun French food at its finest. The mercurial menu features the likes of beef bourguignon, savoury crêpes and homemade pastries. Lunch is served in a swift two-hour window but dinner is a lengthier, more languid affair. The buffet brunch on the first Sunday of every month gets booked up quickly so call ahead if you're joining the crowds at Art Basel. **Melkon Charchoglyan** lafourchettebasel.com

Basel's best venues

FOR A LIGHT(ISH) LUNCH
Volkshaus Basel

The man who gave us Zürich Hotel Helvetia and Helvti Diners is responsible for this Basel restaurant, which reopened in 2012. Its lively watering hole swells with deal-sealing Baslers and visiting revellers come nightfall. The brasserie out back, meanwhile, serves dishes that merge Swiss home cooking with French fine dining. Try the *frejolletila à la meunière* (trout fillet) and beef tartare for a taste. **Mikaela Altken** volkshaus-basel.ch



FOR A FILLING SUPPER
Zum Goldenen Fass

There are three menus here. The first changes fortnightly and offers starters, mains and desserts; one highlight is the *skrei* (Norwegian cod) served with a cassoulet of white beans, chorizo, celery and fennel. It also includes the Menu Surprise by head chef Gilbert Engelhard. The second, available until 23.30, offers seasonal classics. The third, the monthly Banquet, caters for large groups. **Chloé Ashby** goldenes-fass.ch



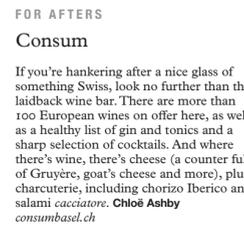
FOR SEALING THE DEAL
Roter Bären

Pendant lights are de rigueur in Basel but Roter Bären, which is only open for dinner, pulls them off better than most – the dining room has the feel of an enchanted forest. The menu is equally beguiling, with a selection of small plates such as kohlrabi and crab with apple and Brazil nuts. This is also a fine spot to grab a pre-dinner drink, with friendly staff and comfy bar stools. **Melkon Charchoglyan** roterbaeren.ch



FOR AFTERS
Consum

If you're hankering after a nice glass of something Swiss, look no further than this laidback wine bar. There are more than 100 European wines on offer here, as well as a healthy list of gin and tonics and a sharp selection of cocktails. And where there's wine, there's cheese (a counter full of Gruyère, goat's cheese and more), plus charcuterie, including chorizo Iberico and salami *cacciatore*. **Chloé Ashby** consumbasel.ch



Comment



Food for thought

Donald Trump enjoys a dangerous diet but what about other world leaders?

WRITER Michael Booth

It is wrong to pass judgement on people we don't know but based on what we have seen of him up to now, I am prepared to stick my neck out and declare President Trump to be paranoid, impulsive, intolerant and

aggressive. He's also obese – the first US president to be diagnosed as such.

We're often told that we are what we eat so could the problem perhaps lie with the president's diet? Here's my diagnosis. Trump is famously fond of fast food: burgers, fried chicken, pizza and so forth. He even did TV commercials for Pizza Hut and McDonald's. He likes red meat and even had his own brand of steak, selling American-origin beef unlikely to be from organically reared grass-fed cattle. For dessert Trump is said to enjoy cherry-vanilla ice cream in sizeable portions.

The health consequences of the president's obesity are obvious but this kind of diet can also lead to volatile energy levels, characterised by the sudden surges you get from



FOOD NEIGHBOURHOOD / PALERMO

MARKET FORCES

On the colourful stalls of Mercato di Ballarò, Palermo's ancient past entwines with its future through an unlikely medium: fast food. Here you'll find third-generation vendors selling snacks with 1,000-year legacies alongside a 21st-century diaspora that's spicing up Sicilian cuisine, making this a one-stop souk for the city's growing number of curious and hungry tourists.

WRITER Laura Rysman PHOTOGRAPHER Beatrice De Giacomo

The cobbled heart of Palermo is once again beating with optimism. As 2018's Italian capital of culture and the site of this year's Manifesta, the European Biennial of Contemporary Art, the storied but long-stagnant city is alive with the thrum of tourists. First settled nearly three millennia ago by the Phoenicians, this port town at the centre of the Mediterranean was later invaded by ancient Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, North African Arabs, Norman Vikings, the Spanish and the French, each of whom left ingredients, predilections that can today be tasted at the city's oldest market, the Mercato di Ballarò.

Within this souk of winding alleyways you'll find stalls stocked with a selection of tourist take-homes, local produce, fresh fish and calorific meals – little has changed, then, in the 1,000 years since visiting Baghdadi merchant Ibn Hawqal wrote about the Ballarò in his journal. Now, just as then, hawkers attract passers-by to their stalls by broadcasting their litanies, the pervasive propaganda for their merchandise known as *abbianate* in Sicilian (a language apart from Italian that is still spoken and equally reflective of the island's many visitors over the years).

"Over here, fish so fresh that it can still swim!" crows a man in front of a rough-and-ready wood-and-cardboard table adorned with sliced swordfish and pyramids of small sardines. Meanwhile, his neighbour lits

"Palermians like to eat. Where you might have tea and cookies for a snack, we have 'stigghiola'"



about the arrival of seasonal almond fruits and cherries; nearby a plant-dealer chants about his pleasant-smelling lemon trees and rosemary bushes. All of their goods spill out from open shopfronts shaded by corrugated metal roofs or colourful plastic tarps.

At Enzo Pappa's stand, blanketed by plastic plates bearing seafood, he and his teenage son dish out traditional *polipo bollito* (boiled octopus topped with oil and red onion) "the same way my father served it here for 30 years", says Pappa. Most of the market stalls are passed down from one generation to the next and Pappa's is no different. Down another street, patrolled by stray cats cruising for scraps, Da Orazio del Ballarò doles out all manner of delicacies, from *arancini* (deep-fried balls of stuffed saffron rice) to cannoli fried in lard and filled with sweet ricotta and candied orange peel – a treat supposedly invented by prostitutes as a pointedly phallic symbol for the guests who patronised their brothels. Owner Orazio Cusimano, a fedora-adorned 22-year-old

cook, says he started working here as a child at what was then his family's fruit stand. He took over when he was 15 and transformed the humble market stall into the street-side trattoria it is today. Not far from Cusimano's plastic tables, Davide Ferrara's pushcart sells *sfincione* (oil-soaked focaccia topped with a thick layer of tomato sauce, caciocavallo cheese, anchovies, and oregano), an indulgent bread supposedly invented centuries ago by nuns as a way to spice up the holiday table.

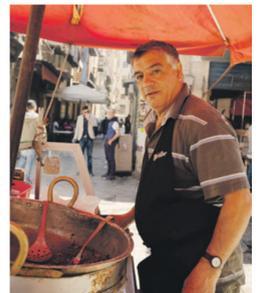
Throughout the neighbourhood there is no shortage of places to pick up Palermo's fast-food favourites. Francu U Vastiddaru was once a small corner stall but is now a fully fledged restaurant with dozens of parkside wooden tables. Here you'll find potato croquettes and Aubergine as well as *panelle*: chickpea-and-parsley (or mint) fritters invented by the Arabs, which are consumed as part of a hefty sandwich and have been prepared the same way for about 1,000 years. "Palermians like to eat," says rotund proprietor Fabrizio Valenti, with a finger pointing to his stomach and a smile on his lips. "Where you might have tea and cookies for a snack, we have *stigghiola*." That's a spring onion wrapped in seasoned intestines and grilled to a crisp, a victual that came courtesy of the Greeks more than 2,000 years ago (they also introduced wine and olive oil).

Nearby, Rocky Basile and his teenage grandsons work a street corner until 04.00, serving one of Palermo's most beloved, if intimidating, street-food specialties: *pani la meusa*. At the diminutive but popular pushcart he frizzles thin slices of boiled calf spleens and lungs in lard before stuffing the innards into a scooped-out soft sesame roll. Some say the roots of this speciality lie with Jewish butchers who, 1,000 years ago, would keep the leftover offal that they didn't sell. Back in the present day, Basile hawks these brawny, portable meals for €1.50 a pop. There is a wide variety of street food in Palermo but its shared traits are many: mind-bogglingly low prices, an apparent disregard for hygiene and an unfussy approach to animal parts and fat content. The widely advocated "Mediterranean diet" is not.

Close to the grand theatre of Piazza Massimo, Pietro Caccamo sells *grattarella*. It's a shaved-ice version of the granita that Arabs introduced to Sicily around the 10th century, when they flavoured snow from atop Mt Etna with the lemon, pistachio and coffee that they brought to the island, along with the almond milk brought by the Phoenicians. Enjoyed alone or with brioche, the ice-cream-like treat is, in these parts at least, considered a totally reasonable choice for breakfast.

With Palermo having become an increasingly popular destination, tourists are packing into its marketplaces, while its new-wave artisan shops and posh restaurants reflect a newfound interest in Sicily's changing culture. What's more, new Ghanaian, Bangladeshi and other food stands from Palermo's 21st-century diaspora have joined the market's mix.

At dusk at the Ballarò, a dim light illuminates the air, thick with smoke from the surrounding grills. The scene is familiar and yet somehow new: old-timers and immigrants alike perch on plastic chairs, dawdling over drinks and throwaway plates of time-tested recipes.



Address book:

Bancarella del Polpottavio
Enzo Pappa
Corner of Via Giovanni Naso and Via Nino Martoglio

La Bottega del Quinte Quarto
Via Nino Martoglio

Da Orazio A Ballarò
Piazza Ballarò

Sfincionaro Davide Ferrara
Piazza Ballarò

Francu U Vastiddaru
102 Via Vittorio Emanuele

Rocky Basile
211 Via Vittorio Emanuele

Grattarella all'Antica
by Pietro Caccamo
Piazza Verdi

Gelateria Del Cassaro
214 Via Vittorio Emanuele



Clockwise from top left: Lines forming at lunch; croquettes made for a hearty sandwich; boiled octopus at Enzo Pappa; Rocky Basile, the king of spleen sandwiches; Pietro Caccamo (and his pompom bottle) making fresh juices and granitas; granita – a fine breakfast with or without whipped cream; stands at the Ballarò; how to eat 'pane con la milza'; the church of Carmine Maggiore

Richard Nixon's favourite dish tells you all you need to know about his character and judgement: cottage cheese covered in tomato ketchup

a high intake of sugar and Fox News countered by the equally powerful crashes, which ensue when you see your lowly approval ratings. This is not, then, the diet of a well-balanced person, nor one to be recommended to a man whose hand hovers over the Big Red Button. But how does it compare to other world leaders, past and present?

Richard Nixon's favourite dish tells you all you need to know about his character and judgement: cottage cheese covered in tomato ketchup. These days Bill Clinton

alcohol. But, now that I think of it, being teetotal might not necessarily be that desirable a trait in a leader.

Winston Churchill was a noted gourmet who enjoyed Stilton, oysters and roast dinners followed by lashings of ice cream. He was also what we might today term a high-functioning alcoholic: he drank a bottle of champagne every day – for breakfast. Yet he saved the free world. The late Russian leader Boris Yeltsin, meanwhile, helped guide the Soviet Union into an era of greater freedom despite his blood being almost 50 per cent prof.

Meanwhile, in terms of the non-drinkers, former French president Nicholas Sarkozy didn't even drink wine and, partly as a result, ended up being the least-liked French president of all time.

EAT OF THE WEEK / LEBANON

Meat the Fish Beirut

Owner Karim Arakji started out supplementing premium sustainable meat and fish to hotels and restaurants across Lebanon. From this came the idea for Meat the Fish, a gourmet butcher and fishmonger where patrons can also pull up a chair and enjoy freshly cooked food. Wooden crates double as display shelves for the day's produce and outdoor furniture for sun-worshippers. "I wanted it to feel like a market where you can touch and feel things," says Arakji. This is a place where quality counts for everything – the black cod donburi is delicious and even the market salad is phenomenal. **Venetia Rainey** meatthefish.com



Photographer: Arnie Mena/Neilson

EAT OF THE WEEK / SPAIN

Baluard Praktik Barcelona

The name Baluard has long been synonymous with excellent, organic, slow-fermented sourdough bread, something that, until recently, was a rare find in Barcelona. Following in the footsteps of three generations of bakers, Anna Belloso opened the first Baluard bakery on Carrer del Baluard in 2007. She later fired up the ovens at her newest outpost inside the Hotel Praktik near Passeig de Gràcia (for which Baluard provides all the baked goods). Grab a *bocadillo de jamón* (ham sandwich) or a dose of something sweet and enjoy it in the hotel's elegant garden. **Sam Zucker** hotelpraktikbakery.com



Photographer: Silvia Corde