



Passport Newsletter

THE ORIGINAL UNBIASED TRAVEL NEWSLETTER

Celebrating Our 46th Year!

January 2010

Hungry for Hungary



Mushroom and leek strudel.

Our most recent trip to Hungary had two specific purposes: to eat as much strudel as reason would allow, and to learn about the Hungarian wines that have created such a buzz.

Strudel is to Hungary what sachertorte is to Vienna or mille feuille is to Paris. Your grandma may have made her own strudel, but chances

are she didn't fill it with exotic and aromatic mixtures of sour cherries, cottage cheese, apricot, plum, poppy seed and even cabbage. For those gastronomic treats you have to go to the **First Strudel House of Pest**, in an historic building dating to 1812. It's the only shop in the city uniquely devoted to strudel, but in addition, it's a fine restaurant where strudel shows up in unexpected places, such as with chicken under a creamy paprika sauce. Dinner for two, before wine, about \$60. Reserve in advance. 22 October 6 Street. Tel: 36-1-428-0134.

Part of our strudel indoctrination included learning that its origins were most likely with the Byzantines, reaching Hungary through its occupation by the Ottomans in the 16th century. More entertaining, though, was watching a strudel-making demonstration in which the baker started with a small dollop of flour and stretched it until it was the size of a bed sheet. The secret of the stretch is the high gluten content of the flour. There are other secrets that are part of making the perfect strudel, but the Strudel House won't reveal those.

Our lodging was in the boutique **Gerlóczy Hotel**, which has 15 fairly large, comfortable rooms with good bathrooms. A graceful, spiral staircase with wrought iron railing and a lovely bit of leaded glass at the top leads from the lobby to the rooms, as there is no elevator. The overall impression is one of Europe in more genteel times. The staff is helpful with everything from luggage to bookings to directions. Just in front of the hotel is a popular sidewalk café. Doubles from about \$130. V. Gerlóczy #1. Tel: 36-1-501-4000. Fax: 36-1-501-4001.
www.gerloczy.hu.

Our tour was under the direction of Gabor Banfalvi, a charming Hungarian who is married to an American woman. His passion in life is wine, and in 2008, he began leading bespoke tours to sample the wines of his country. Although there are local wine festivals at various times throughout the year, Gabor is ready at any time to escort you to the wineries in the hills beyond Budapest or in other wine-growing areas of the country. Hungarian wines, other than Tokaj, were little-known a few years ago, but now they are winning awards for the breadth and diversity of their offerings.

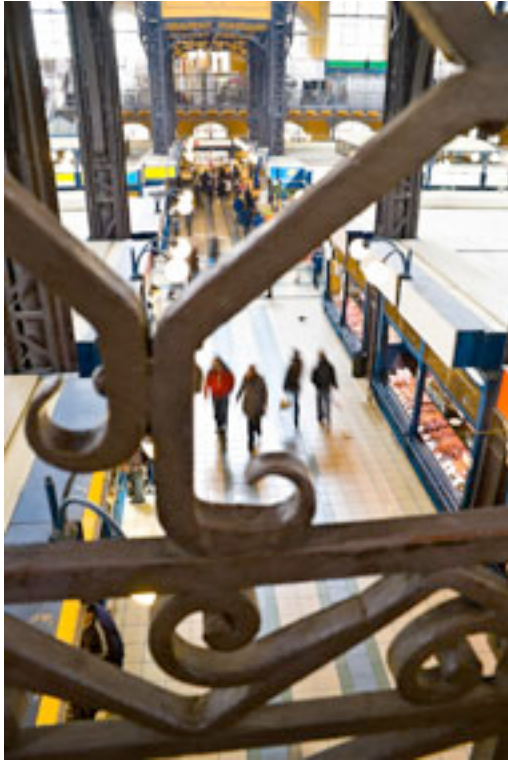


The Archabbey of Pannonhalma, where Benedictine monks nurture grapes into wine.

We opted for a tour and tasting at the hilltop Benedictine [Archabbey of Pannonhalma](#), which was founded in 996 C.E. For a thousand years, the monks have been traveling around Europe, collecting the best

grape varieties and planting them on the 130 acres they cultivate. They are best known for their dry Gewurtzraminer and Rieslings. In a private cellar, we sampled a 2007 Rhine Riesling, a Sauvignon Blanc 2007 and a Welsh Riesling, all very satisfying. Tastings cost about \$10 per person. www.bences.hu/en.

South of Budapest, we came upon a local festival in the village of Villany, centered on the **[Szende Pince](http://www.szendepince.hu)** restaurant and wine cellar. Ordinarily Gabor wouldn't take visitors to the Szende cellar, as it isn't the most sophisticated winery in the village, but the festivities were not to be missed. We sampled four Hungarian wines, a Riesling, a Karina, a Merlot and a Cabernet Franc, all drinkable but not outstanding. Later we dined on roast duck, pork knuckle, chicken, sauerkraut, pickles and potatoes and were serenaded by a gypsy musical group. Dinner for two, with wine, about \$40. Baross Gabor u. 87. Tel: 36-7-249-2396. www.szendepince.hu.



Market tours are also available. Above, the Budapest Market Hall.

Guidance about Guides

Our guide, Gabor Banfalvi, drives his own car and does all the organizing of the tour to your preferences. His fee is about \$400 a day for a small group. His wife, Caroline, offers three- to four-hour market tours in Budapest at about \$120 for two people.

www.tastehungary.com.



In Israel, strudel is so much a part of local cuisine that the similarly shaped typographical symbol "@" is colloquially called a shtrudel.

Strudel Truths

Although strudel is primarily considered a European creation, similar baked goods are found in cuisines around the world. Several cultural versions are made with filo dough or puff pastry; but the European version must be made of dough rolled out and stretched so thinly it can almost be seen through. If one has trouble mastering the ultra-thin strudel dough, it can be rolled out again at any thickness, wrapped around a filling and called a turnover.

January Fare: Paprika Chicken



Hungarian paprika chicken. Photo, [Matt DeTurck](#).

This month's recipe comes from Budapest author and tour guide [Carolyn Bánfalvi](#) from her book, *Food Wine Budapest*.

Paprikás Csirke (Paprika Chicken) Ingredients

- 2 large onions, peeled and minced
- 1½ teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons of lard (or oil)
- 2 pounds chicken pieces
- 1 or 2 tomatoes, chopped

- 2-3 tablespoons sweet paprika
- 1 banana pepper, sliced into rings
- 2 tablespoons sour cream, plus more for garnish if desired
- 1 tablespoon flour
- 2 tablespoons heavy cream

Preparation

1. Heat lard (or oil) in a cast iron pot. Add onions, sprinkle with half of the salt. Cook, covered, over very low heat until the onions are glossy. Turn off heat and stir in paprika.
2. Add tomatoes and ½ cup water; mix. Heat on low and place the chicken in pot. Sprinkle remaining salt over chicken; cover; cook about 30 minutes checking frequently to see if it needs more water.
3. Remove lid, add sliced peppers, cook for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, in small bowl, mix sour cream, flour, and heavy cream.
4. Remove chicken and place pieces on serving platter.
5. Add sour cream mixture to paprika sauce; stir until blended. Cook 1-2 minutes; don't boil. Pour paprika sauce over chicken; garnish with sour cream and paprika. Best served over traditional spaetzle (see sidebar), but can also be served over rice or pasta.



Spaetzle, shown here with sautéed mushrooms.

Spaetzle, a Traditional Accompaniment

Here are the directions for *galuska*, or spaetzle, the traditional Hungarian side dish.

Ingredients

1 ½ cups flour

1 teaspoon salt

water

1 egg

Lard or butter, melted (optional)

Preparation

1. With wooden spoon, mix flour and salt. Make a well in the center. In a separate bowl lightly beat egg and water; add to the flour mixture. Mix until just blended. Cover; let mixture rest 10 minutes until bubbles appear on surface.
2. Boil large pot of salted water. With spoon, tear off pieces of batter and drop into water. Dumplings are ready when they surface. Remove with slotted spoon. Toss with melted lard or butter.