

amazon.co.uk


DATACOLOR SPYDER5EXP
 £89.99 (plus delivery) Prime


AVP HYPERION ...
 £28.50 (plus delivery)


X-RITE COLORMUNKI
 £139.20 (plus delivery) Prime

Life · Travel

Forget cabbage and potatoes, pass the caviar

St. Petersburg—Not so long ago mentioning a visit to Russia would bring a spate of jokes about a cabbage and potato diet. Not any more.

By **ROWENA CARR-ALLINSON** Special to the Star
Sat., May 26, 2007



St. Petersburg—Not so long ago mentioning a visit to Russia would bring a spate of jokes about a cabbage and potato diet. Not any more.

Things have changed dramatically and today St Petersburg's gastronomic scene is set to rival any other large European city. The trick is knowing where to go.

With a \$1.5-billion facelift in 2003, the city has experienced an explosion of gourmet restaurants with Starbucks-style Coffee House outlets popping up on every street corner.

To sample Russian classics in a sophisticated atmosphere, head for the city's historical hotels, which have oversized rooms, over-the-top décor and caviar bars as standard.

At the Grand Hotel Europe (grandhoteleurope.com), silver service and operatic entertainment come with the marble decor. We skip the bear stew and order the Zastolye for two. A smorgasbord of traditional local dishes, there is enough to feed half the Red Army: home-smoked sturgeon, vodka marinated salmon, baltic sea herring, Stolichnaya salad, smoked venison loin, pickles, marinated mushrooms and of course, caviar ...

That leaves me totally incapable of finishing my Salmon Koulebyaka (rolled in pastry). The entire meal is washed down with vodka, and although I'm dubious at first, the grapefruit vodka is zingy, fresh and delicious.

The city's newest Caviar Bar at the Hotel Angleterre (angleterrehotel.com) has pride of place, with perfect views onto St. Isaac's Cathedral. Far from being fuddy-duddy, the Caviar Bar is bang on trend with its sleek rich black and red leather interiors. Its designer style oozes luxury with the caviar theme omnipresent, right down to the bar covered in thousands of tiny glistening black beads. A caviar bar. Literally. The menu features light dishes including Kamshatka crab salad, but the star attraction is, of course, the eye-wateringly expensive fish egg.

Colin Flood, the Angleterre's charismatic British chef, recommends the Oscietra caviar, with fresh blini and Smetana, the Russian equivalent to sour cream. Its acidic tang makes it the perfect accompaniment to caviar.

"Caviar without Smetana is hot dog without the sausage. Or maybe the roll," Flood jokes.

Next door, at one of the city's favourite Italian eateries, Borsalino's (hotelastoria.com), businessmen and locals prop up the bar to the sound of a jazz singer flown in from New Orleans. An institution, Borsalino's has that 1950s gangster's layer feel about it.

To sample traditional Russian fare in the high street, try the Elki Palki chain, technically Ukrainian but very similar. Aside from the odd 'forest' décor, the food is good and plentiful. The Siberian Pelmeni (dim sum meets tortellini) is a real treat at the fraction of the price of the fancy restaurants.

For Pelmeni with a view, the Belle Vue brasserie at the Kempinski Moika 22 is an affordable choice in a fairytale setting. The varied menu has everything from game dishes to seafood. We try the creamy Stroganoff topped with shredded gherkins, oversized crab raviolis and borsch. This Russian staple was once a peasant beetroot broth but has since been jazzed up with decadent foie gras toasts.

Anton, our waiter is charming and gives great recommendations, a rarity in a city where service still hasn't quite caught on yet.

More upmarket is the Old Custom's House, dubbed "the home of haute cuisine" and a must on any gourmet's tour. The cosy red brick cellars with vaulted ceilings and elegant décor is as well-known for its excellent Tzarskaya oysters (Tsar's choice) as for its celebrity clientele. It boasts 44 presidents, including Putin, on its guest list, as well as Gwyneth Paltrow.

Tiffany's, owned by restaurateur Vadim Lapin, is all plush interiors, gleaming red chandeliers and European fusion food. Alongside risotto and pasta dishes you'll find more inspired duck's breast with apple strudel or sushi.

"Tiffany's is a really hot place now," says Viktoria Petrova, a regular. "It's the perfect mix of trendy interiors, a light atmosphere and delicious food."

But the hottest table in town is the ultra-chic Lumiere, French chef Patrick Moren's exclusive dining room on the Grand Palace shopping mall's upper floor is as much about the exquisite interior design, with its ceiling of Swarovski crystal pendants, as it is about the menu and the skyline views. The elaborate dishes are both complex and eclectic. Try celeriac nougat with lobster and smoked salmon with oyster mousse, black caviar and cucumber jelly or wild mushroom and foie gras ravioli with mushroom & truffle oil. The place is breathtaking. Definitely so hip it hurts. A bit like the prices.

Next door, the SevenSky Bar attracts a younger crowd. Kids lounge around looking good and ordering cocktails from the seven-metre black granite bar. The menu offers everything from pizzas to Japanese soba seafood noodle salad or Moroccan chicken.

These hot restaurants don't believe in advertising but dig a little and there's a world of cutting edge gourmet experiences.. Hardly cabbage and potatoes.

Rowena Carr-Allinson is a freelance writer based in London, England. Her visit was subsidized by BMI.



LEADERS OF TOMORROW
Read more ▶

UBC SAUDER SCHOOL OF BUSINESS | ROBERT H. LEE GRADUATE SCHOOL

Leaders of Tomorrow

- ▶ A fresh approach to business school
- ▶ UBC Sauder grad becomes top tech innovator
- ▶ Game-changing innovators flourish at UBC Sauder
- ▶ Business school puts a premium on global learning
- ▶ UBC Sauder grad puts best foot forward

▶ More

LEADERS OF TOMORROW ▶

COMPLETE COVERAGE MORE TO EXPERIENCE

TORONTO STAR TOUCH
TORONTO STAR



GET THE FREE TABLET APP. ENJOY FREE UNLIMITED ACCESS.

See more offers

Book now ▶



You might be interested in

-  **Ontario doctors push back against changes to discipline process**
-  **Casey Affleck speaks out about sexual harassment allegations**
-  **Beau Biden's widow in a relationship with her late husband's brother: report**