

# Of Supee, Spaetzli and Schnappers

*Take a tour with Gitanjali Prasad, into the land of mountains, milkmaids, and mouthwatering cuisine.*

**A**s the days turn shorter, crisper and colder, as spirits rise and one begins to dream impossible dreams of snow-clad mountains and smell the heady fragrance of pine and fir, let's journey to the world's playground, Switzerland, for a taste of the 'most perfected cuisine' in all Europe.

The Oberoi Hotel's celebration of Swiss food in all the metro cities held recently, recreated the idyllic pastoral image of Switzerland which is so cherished not only by foreigners but by the Swiss themselves. There have been some dissenters. "In our modern industrial country," said the playwright, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, "the simpering milkmaid and the alphorn are about as valid national images as the gangster and the gun-toting cowboy are in America."

No matter that the image is romanticised. It is exceedingly pleasant to be welcomed by an apple-cheeked girl in traditional Swiss dress and black lace hat, to be serenaded by the folk musicians of the famous Water Tower band of Luzerne, and to be treated to a video film of the most spectacularly beautiful Swiss scenery before tucking into delicious Swiss fare.

We are offered a choice of soups. There's Gruenerbs Suppe (a cream of

green pea soup) and Brotsuppe (a consommé with chunks of bread, cheese and a hint of caraway). It is to the Oberoi's credit, that though an overwhelming majority of guests plumped for the green pea soup, there was plenty to go around. (In case you were considering putting consommé on your menu, don't).

The mild and wonderfully comforting Gruenerbs Suppe was followed by Roter Schnapper Zuger Art (delicious poached fillets of red snapper in herb butter with white wine), which was delicate and subtle; and a pan-fried salmon steak with Swiss butter sauce and lemon, which tasted fresh and delicious, as the best river fish should.

After the fish course, we had Pouletbruechtli (gilled breast of chicken with an orange sauce), which was, as the simple description should suggest, indescribably wonderful. Why don't we make greater use of orange sauce as an accompaniment to chicken, one wonders? The side dishes served alongside were Aelplemagronen (macaroni of the Alps; macaroni with cheese, potatoes and onions, in a cream sauce) and Grueni Pilatus-Spaetzli Mit Pilz (a dish of spinach dumplings topped with sautéed mushrooms).

And then we had, with much fanfare,

Roeschti Vom Aentlibuech (potato pancake), which Roland Fuchs, corporate director, Food and Beverage Service, says "could almost be called the national dish of Switzerland." Switzerland, he explains, was not a very rich country, and so many dishes are potato-based. In fact, a typical Swiss lunch in the old days was often meatless, just a potato pancake and a salad. As I put the first forkful of Roeschti into my mouth, I am struck with the very familiar taste of this dish.

Before I joined *Society*, just over a year ago, cooking was a major hobby and occupation. I must admit that I enjoyed entertaining enormously, and often experimented with recipes so that I could come up with a dish I thought a particular friend would like. Since I normally serve Continental food which, I always think guiltily, is not as interesting for vegetarians as for non-vegetarians, I had, I thought, come up with a unique dish which, surely, every vegetarian had to love. For this I used to blend grated cheese and butter into boiled mashed potatoes, beat into peaks and then bake or heat under a medium grill till the outside was just a little crunchy and the inside meltingly soft and delicious. Roeschti is uncommonly similar. It is made with grated potato rather than mashed potato, and that variation in