



WORDS ELISABETH KING

RESTORING SWISS GLORY

ZURICH isn't normally associated with dropouts, starving artists and revolutionaries. But 100 years ago Tristan Tzara, Hugo Ball and Francis Picabia founded the Dada art movement in the city now synonymous with bank accounts identified by numbers rather than names. They also opened the Cabaret Voltaire club. Unfortunately, the building was left to decay after a brief heyday as the funky hangout of its time. Finally, developers came calling in the early Noughties, looking to turn the historic premises into luxury apartments. To prove that Zurich's citizens aren't always ruled by their heads, a protest group took up residence to prevent the development. They succeeded and the city fathers re-opened the Cabaret Voltaire as a post-modern cultural space. Better yet, entrance is free.

You will have to pay for the drinks in the new Cafebar duDa, though. During the day it's a relaxing space amid Zurich's Altstadt but at night it's time to work your way through a curated selection of absinthes - the once-notorious drink that inured artists to their poverty. A gin-based Dada Sour, using a house-made thyme syrup infusion, has also become a star attraction. Or why not sip a Manifestini - the Cabaret Voltaire's twist on a classic Bellini featuring organic prosecco.

The on-site grill serves up Brutzel brote - two thick slabs of bread from John Baker, a bio-dynamic baker which claims its workers put on some Marvin Gaye, light scented candles and allow the biocertified yeast to reproduce in privacy. It works. The bread is fantastic, especially topped with the Cabaret Voltaire's extensive lineup of fillings.

Zurich is probably the only city in the world where you can take a tuk-tuk and rest assured that your safety is paramount. I'm not talking about the auto equivalent of a tin can on three wheels. The Swiss version is the world's first fondue tuk-tuk. A very high fun factor is guaranteed is the claim and it's on the money. A free bottle of white wine and a Gruyere cheese fondue are included in the 90-minute city tour which is limited to four people because of the size of the vehicle.

The views are textbook panoramic and there's an outstanding lineup of craft beers and wines by the glass.

If a freshly brewed local craft beer is more to your taste, the Zurich Food Tour takes you to Zurich-West, a former industrial district-gone-upmarket which triggered the city's much-vaunted gastronomic revolution. The tour operators tactfully warn off teetotalers, vegetarians and people with allergies, as you thread through some of Zurich's top bars and trendy restaurants grazing on seafood, fish, meat, Swiss wines and, of course, the local suds.

For over 50 years the Chesa restaurant in the Peninsula Hotel in Hong Kong has been pulling in lovers of Swiss food, particularly geschnetzeltes - succulent strips of veal with white wine, cream and mushroom sauce. It's listed on the menu as the less

tongue-twisting veau a la zurichoise. On its home turf, one of the best places to enjoy this classic dish is the Zeughauskeller, a 15th century armoury-turned-beer hall that packs them in for its hearty food and free-flowing draught brews.

The recently opened Marktgasse Hotel, a luxury boutique property, also nestles behind a 15th century facade. Swiss specialities such as emince de veau (patties in a cream sauce) - far more delicately presented - are the speciality of the hotel's sleek Baltho Kuche and Bar. But to really prove that Zurich is not all about finance and hi-tech, the four branches of the St Jakob bakery employ staff with disabilities to make and serve their award-winning bread, pastries and truffles.

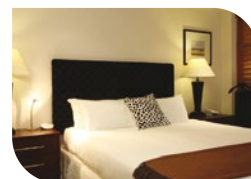
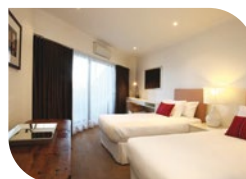
One of my friends has a bucket list that centres on the world's highest bars. In Zurich, the contender is Clouds Bar on top of the 36-storey Prime Tower, the city's tallest building. The views are textbook panoramic and there's an outstanding lineup of craft beers and wines by the glass. Coffee is just as revered in Zurich as it is in Vienna and the place to sink back and imagine you are James Joyce on holiday is the Conditorei Schober, a plush Belle Epoque cafe that offers a laundry list of coffee variations and melt-in-the-mouth pastries. Mentioning the name of the famous Irish author is no throwaway line. Joyce, his wife Nora Barnacle, and the Nobel Prize-winning author Elias Canetti are buried in Zurich's Fluntern Cemetery.

Switzerland boasts 117 Michelin-starred restaurants. Six are in Zurich - Mesa, Pavillon, Rigiblick, Sein, Maison Manesse and EquiTable. The last two are the most recent inductees. Maison Manesse is the

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brainchild of chefs Fabien Spiguel and Miguel Ledesma and experimentation guides the menu. We're talking egg cooked at 62.7 degrees and topped with pine nuts and broccolini on a purée of vegetable cooked in pear wine. Fabian Fuchs reels them in at the two-star EquiTable where organic fine dining is elevated to fantasy level.

The old town is a homage to Zurich's commercial heritage, dating back to the 14th century when the first freely elected mayor, Rudolf Brun, established the guild laws. A political move that shifted the economic dominance of the church to the powerful merchant community. The city is peppered with historic zunfthausen (guild halls) that constitute a picturesque walking tour. The carpenters, builders, wainwrights, food and spice merchants showcased their profits on Limmatquai. The streets close to the Rathaus (town hall) was the fiefdom of the silver and goldsmiths and tailors. The weavers, saddle makers, painters and winemakers preferred the other side of the river on Munsterhof.

Buy a bottle of wine from one of the world's most unique wine shops - the Albert Reichmuth Wine Store on Feldstrasse - built from 1500 wine crates used to transport mainly French wines. Over 570 wines await your perusal, so you can toast the wealth of Zurich's wine merchants and winemakers who lavished their profits on two of the city's most splendid guild houses. 

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