



Gastronomy and cultural heritage guidebook





Modern Gastronomy





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CHAPTER 4

Modern dishes and trendy restaurants

Bulgaria has long been known for hearty traditional comfort food. But springing up around its classic cooking is a new wave of culinary innovation: exciting new chefs, eclectic restaurants and cool independent food producers serving up organic local produce with contemporary flair.

"In the last five or six years, Bulgarian food has been taken to a different level," says Milen Zlatev, Executive chef at Biorest restaurant. "I like to take something from the past, but present it with modern techniques to make it different, to add something of myself." The focus of his cooking is on classic Bulgarian food with a modern twist. The menu might include cauliflower cream soup with piperade and smoked chorizo, seabass with spring vegetables and nettle espuma, or duck magret sous-vide with celery root confit and celery cream.

Kosmos (aka Kocmoc) is a contemporary Bulgarian restaurant and one of the best in Sofia, according to Zlatev. There's traditional fare on the menu, presented innovatively. Think spicy beef tongue with foie gras mousse, pickled sprouts, harissa and herb mustard, or a "gin and tonic" pudding with lemongrass, cucumber, tonic sorbet and gin jelly.

Also taking Sofia by storm with a menu that pays homage to the slow food movement is Made in Home. This modern eatery emphasises locally sourced food, but with international influences and a focus on vegetarian and vegan dishes. On the menu: roasted yams with chilli, grape and spring onion; quinoa pilaf with cranberries; Black Sea mussels; and green tea tart.



Photo - [link](#)



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Andre Tokev is regarded as one of the top chefs in Bulgaria (he's a MasterChef in the literal sense, as well as being a judge on the Bulgarian reality TV cooking competition). At his restaurant Moments, Andre Tokev has created an eclectic fine dining menu that features ingredients like locally sourced pickled fish, forest mushrooms, a white chocolate and Amarula mousse, and a chocolate cake with pumpkin ice cream and yuzu tofu.

Meanwhile, MoMa sticks with tradition, serving up typical Bulgarian salads, barbecued meats and stews. This is where to get the dishes you might typically expect from Bulgaria – slow-baked rabbit leg; stewed lamb knuckle. But MoMa does it in a creative way (you can order a local dish served in a bowl made of bread) and with a cool modern interior.

Let's not omit the modern trends in the Bulgarian street food as well. As when in Bulgaria, it's crucial that you sample the modern twists of traditional street food. You might try pumpkin baked with honey and nuts. "Kebapche", a classic mincemeat and herb kebab. Banitsa, a savoury breakfast pastry filled with yoghurt, eggs and white cheese. Or skara, Bulgarian for grilled meats, meatballs and sausages (ask for meshana skara for a mixed grill). Wash it all down with ayran, a cool, savoury yoghurt drink.





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Modern gastronomy in Bulgarian media

In recent years, there has been an exceptionally heightened interest in culinary arts both nationally and internationally. Almost every television channel has its own cooking show, specialized cooking channels have emerged, and professional and amateur chefs are constantly competing for big prizes in various TV formats. Numerous feature films with culinary plots are being produced. Cookbooks, thematic culinary books, magazines, recipe collections, and books about wine, chocolate, and more are being published. Culinary blogs are being created, and special empty notebooks are issued to collect and preserve favorite recipes from "grandma's kitchen" or "mom's kitchen."



Photo - [link](#)



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Invention of new foods & receipts in the decades after the WWII

Shopska salad is perhaps the most emblematic dish of Bulgarian national cuisine, representing us to the world. The widely known salad has an established recipe. Every Bulgarian knows that traditional vegetables like tomatoes, cucumbers, red onions, and either roasted or raw peppers cut into cubes are the main ingredients. It is generously sprinkled with grated white brined cheese and parsley. The dressing consists of salt, vinegar, and oil.

Shopska salad is unique both in taste and appearance. The contrasting flavors of vegetables, onions, and cheese make it a standout among appetizers. Its interesting look is achieved with the national tricolor of the ingredients. The popularity of this appetizer is so great that in a survey of Europeans on favorite traditional European dishes, most participants mentioned the Bulgarian Shopska salad.

The question of the origin of Shopska salad is intriguing. The first attempts to prepare this beloved Bulgarian recipe are not from ancient times shrouded in the mists of history but almost from modernity.

The authors of the Shopska salad recipe are professional chefs from the Balkan Tourist establishments, who prepared food for foreign guests. In the mid-20th century, they created this salad to represent Bulgarian culinary art. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, it gained popularity in Balkan Tourist restaurants, becoming known as a "typical Bulgarian salad." By the early 1970s, it became an attraction for foreign tourists, marketed as "the healthy food of our ancestors." The salad's colors—white, green, and red—reflect the Bulgarian tricolor, reinforcing its status as a national symbol.

Variations of the salad include roasted or raw peppers and either grated or crumbled cheese. Some versions also add garlic or hot pepper for extra spice.



Photo - [link](#)

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France: Technical evolution & aliments

The technical evolution of French gastronomy is a rich and complex story, shaped by a series of significant advances over the centuries. In the 19th century, eminent chefs such as Auguste Escoffier played a crucial role in codifying French culinary techniques, laying the foundations for modern cuisine. Key developments included the introduction of classic sauces (Bearnaise, velouté, Béchamel, etc) which provided an essential structure for a wide range of culinary preparations. Contemporary chefs have revisited classic sauces with unique variations and twists. For example, the traditional béarnaise sauce made with clarified butter, shallots, tarragon and vinegar is often reinterpreted with the addition of ingredients such as Sichuan pepper or miso to create new and surprising flavours.

At the same time, advances in cooking techniques, such as sous-vide cooking and low-temperature cooking, made it possible to achieve precise, consistent results while preserving the quality of the food. The technical evolution of French gastronomy has also been marked by the emergence of molecular cuisine, an innovative approach that uses the principles of science to transform the texture and presentation of food. Pioneers such as chef Thierry Marx have explored new culinary frontiers by experimenting with techniques such as spherification, gelling and mousseification. In pastry-making, innovations such as the use of sugar and the creation of puff pastry have enriched the repertoire of French desserts. From sweets based on honey and nuts, pastries have gained importance, with own specialist, incorporating new textures and new foods.

For instance, the introduction of exotic ingredients such as passion fruit, yuzu and salt flower as well as techniques have enriched the repertoire of French gastronomy.

The French gastronomic meal was included on UNESCO's list of intangible heritage in 2010. The aim of this listing is to protect the meal as a cultural fact in France and is a clear demonstration of the importance gastronomy still has nowadays.



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Consumption evolution

Globalization has had a major impact on gastronomy. It has led to the spread of certain products and foods. In France, the influence is mainly Asiatic with spices, soja sauce, tofu and some cooking techniques like wok cooking appearing. It has also had a strong impact on street food but less on home catering. Indeed, contemporary globalization is characterized above all by the distribution of products intended to be consumed as they are, with little or no local reinterpretation. This is still true, even after the Covid period, which saw an increase in the snacking and takeaway/delivery trend in France. From 1986 to 2010, the time spent eating has increased slightly, by 13 minutes. However, the time spent cooking fell by 18 minutes. The French have changed their eating habits: they eat less fresh produce, more ready-made meals, and more often have their meals delivered. At the same time, the number of fast-food outlets has risen sharply, making it easier for people to eat on the run: over the last decade, the number of outlets in this sector has increased the most. Despite the fact that it's becoming easier and easier to eat at any time of day, French people's daily lives are still punctuated by three traditional meals, eaten overwhelmingly at the same times of day.

In today's food landscape, two trends stand out: the quest for transparency and the emergence of new diets. Consumers are demanding detailed information on the origin and composition of products, while at the same time adopting diets such as veganism and flexitarianism to give new meaning to their diet. This trend needs to be qualified. After several years of declining in France, meat consumption has picked up again in 2021. In 2017, 86% of French meals (excluding breakfast) contained meat and only 2% of the population declare to be vegetarian or vegan.

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Greece: Following the Mediterranean diet

Let's jump into the world of modern Greek gastronomy! From the 19th century to the modern culinary scene, Greek cuisine has undergone a remarkable transformation, but it has preserved its authentic flavors and techniques. While iconic dishes like Moussaka and Greek Salad remain beloved classics, and traditional ingredients like olive oil, feta cheese, and fresh herbs continue to play a central role in modern Greek dishes, modern chefs have embraced innovation by incorporating locally sourced ingredients and experimenting with global flavors. Cooking techniques have been preserved. Take, for example, the art of grilling, as evidenced by the beloved Greek dish Souvlaki, or the use of filo pastry, a thin, crumbling dough used in dishes like Spanakopita and Baklava.

Modern Greek cuisine adapted their culinary heritage to meet modern dietary preferences and lifestyles. It emphasizes health-consciousness with the use of fresh and seasonal products, with a focus on the Mediterranean diet principles, recognized by UNESCO since 2013 as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The Greek Mediterranean Diet consists mainly of olive oil, cereals, fresh or dried fruit and vegetables, a moderate amount of fish, dairy and meat. This nutritional model has been linked to longevity and reduced rates of heart and digestive diseases. Today's Greek cuisine can meet the modern demands of a cuisine based on local, fresh, seasonal produce, and capable of offering a cuisine for people with special diets (low-calorie, vegetarian, gluten-free, etc.).



Photo: Pexels by Dana Tentis



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The Greek gastronomy? A way of life!

Greek gastronomy means knowledge and skills, but also social interaction and customs. It is not by chance that the word of "diet" is from the Greek δῖαιτᾶ (diaeta) meaning way of living!

Greek dining traditions play a significant role in shaping the gastronomic experience. Meals are often communal affairs, with families and friends gathering to share a variety of small dishes known as Mezedes. This tradition fosters a sense of hospitality and encourages social interaction around the table.

Furthermore, the duration of eating and cooking in Greece reflects a slower pace of life, where meals are enjoyed leisurely. This relaxed approach to dining contrasts with the fast-paced lifestyles of modern society, offering a relief from the hustle and bustle of daily life.

When you think of modern Greek gastronomy, think quality and simplicity! Dishes such as Octopus with Ouzo, Feta Cheese with Honey, and Tzatziki showcase the rich flavors and simplicity of contemporary Greek cuisine.

And let's not forget about Thessaloniki, Greece's first UNESCO City of Gastronomy! that exemplifies the country's culinary heritage and innovation. With its vibrant food markets, traditional tavernas, and innovative restaurants. (see more: [Network of Creative Cities of Gastronomy - Thessaloniki | Municipality of Thessaloniki](#))



Italy: Emphasis on Quality and Freshness

Modern Italian gastronomy is a dynamic blend of tradition and innovation, characterized by a deep respect for regional ingredients and culinary heritage while embracing contemporary techniques and global influences. Here's an overview of the key aspects of modern Italian cuisine:

Emphasis on Quality and Freshness

1. Seasonal Ingredients:

- Italian chefs prioritize using fresh, seasonal ingredients to ensure the best flavors and nutritional value. Markets and local producers are often the sources for fruits, vegetables, meats, and seafood.

2. Local and Sustainable Sourcing:

- There is a strong focus on local and sustainable sourcing. Chefs and consumers alike are increasingly aware of the environmental impact of their food choices, leading to a preference for organic and locally-produced foods.

Innovation in Culinary Techniques

1. Fusion and Experimentation:

Modern Italian cuisine often incorporates elements from other culinary traditions, leading to innovative dishes that blend Italian flavors with global techniques. For example, sushi made with Italian ingredients or pasta with exotic spices.

2. Molecular Gastronomy:

Some Italian chefs have embraced molecular gastronomy, using scientific techniques to transform traditional dishes. Chefs like Massimo Bottura have gained international acclaim for their creative and avant-garde approaches to Italian classics.



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Reinventing Traditional Dishes

1. Modern Interpretations:

- Traditional Italian dishes are being reinvented with a modern twist. For instance, classic pasta dishes may be deconstructed or presented in new forms while maintaining their essential flavors.

2. Health-Conscious Adaptations:

- There is a growing trend towards healthier versions of traditional recipes. This includes using whole grains, reducing fat and sugar, and incorporating more plant-based ingredients without compromising on taste.

The Slow Food Movement

1. Preservation of Culinary Heritage:

- Originating in Italy, the Slow Food movement advocates for the preservation of traditional and regional cuisines, supporting local farmers, and promoting biodiversity. This movement has a significant impact on modern Italian gastronomy by emphasizing the importance of artisanal and heirloom foods.

2. Educational Initiatives:

- The movement also involves educating the public about the cultural significance of food, sustainable farming practices, and the benefits of consuming locally-produced foods.



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Regional Diversity

1. Northern Italy:

- Known for its rich and hearty dishes, often featuring butter, cream, and cheese. Risotto, polenta, and beef are staples. Regions like Emilia-Romagna are famous for products like Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese and Prosciutto di Parma.

2. Central Italy:

- Features a balance of meats, grains, and vegetables. Tuscany is renowned for its steaks (bistecca alla fiorentina), legumes, and olive oil. Rome's cuisine includes iconic dishes like carbonara and cacio e pepe.

3. Southern Italy:

- Mediterranean flavors dominate, with abundant use of olive oil, tomatoes, garlic, and fresh herbs. Seafood is a key component, and the region is the birthplace of pizza and many types of pasta.

Influence of Top Chefs and Restaurants

1. Renowned Chefs:

- Chefs like Massimo Bottura (Osteria Francescana), Carlo Cracco, and Nadia Santini have brought Italian cuisine to new heights, earning Michelin stars and global recognition. Their work often combines traditional Italian ingredients with innovative cooking methods.

2. Gourmet Restaurants:

- Italy boasts numerous world-class restaurants that set trends in modern gastronomy. These establishments often feature tasting menus that showcase the creativity and skill of their chefs.



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Global Influence

1. Italian Cuisine Abroad:

- Italian cuisine continues to be highly popular worldwide, influencing global culinary trends. Italian restaurants and pizzerias can be found in almost every corner of the globe, often adapting to local tastes while maintaining core Italian principles.

2. International Collaboration:

- Modern Italian chefs often collaborate with international chefs, participate in global culinary festivals, and contribute to a global dialogue on food innovation and sustainability.

In summary, modern Italian gastronomy is a celebration of the country's rich culinary heritage, updated with contemporary techniques, health-conscious adaptations, and a commitment to sustainability. It remains deeply regional while being open to global influences, making it one of the most dynamic and beloved cuisines in the world.



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Spain: Basque Nouvelle cuisine

Spain's culinary landscape has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past few decades, evolving from its traditional roots to become a global center of gastronomic innovation. This transformation can be traced back to the 1960s, when a new wave of chefs began to challenge the prevailing French-influenced cuisine and forge a uniquely Spanish culinary identity.

The Basque Country played a pivotal role in this culinary renaissance, with chefs like Juan Mari Arzak, Pedro Subijana, and Martín Berasategui pioneering the Nouvelle Cuisine Vasca. This movement emphasized fresh, local ingredients, innovative techniques, and a deep respect for traditional Basque cuisine. These chefs pushed the boundaries of what was considered possible in the kitchen, laying the foundation for Spain's modern culinary revolution.





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Molecular gastronomy and the influence of Ferran Adrià

Ferrán Adrià, the visionary chef behind the world-renowned restaurant El Bulli, took Spanish cuisine to even greater heights with his groundbreaking approach to molecular gastronomy. Adrià and his team explored the scientific principles behind food, experimenting with innovative techniques like spherification, deconstruction, and gelation to create dishes that challenged conventional notions of taste and texture. El Bulli's influence extended far beyond Spain, inspiring chefs around the world and transforming the global culinary landscape.





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The rise of a new generation

Today, a new generation of young chefs is reshaping the landscape of Spanish gastronomy. While still inspired by the innovations of Adrià and his contemporaries, these chefs are forging their own path, prioritizing flavor and experience over technical wizardry. Their cuisine is rooted in tradition but infused with a sense of creativity and playfulness that reflects the diversity of contemporary Spanish culture. From bustling urban eateries to intimate countryside bistros, these chefs are leading the charge towards a more inclusive and accessible culinary future.

Spain's modern gastronomic culture is more developed and dynamic than ever before. It is deeply rooted in the country's rich culinary heritage, while also embracing innovation and creativity. This unique blend of tradition and modernity is what makes Spanish cuisine so special.

Spain is home to numerous world-renowned restaurants, many of them with Michelin stars. We can highlight:

- El Celler de Can Roca in Girona, run by the Roca brothers.
- DiverXO in Madrid, run by chef Dabiz Muñoz.
- Arzak in San Sebastian, run by Juan Mari Arzak and his daughter Elena.



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