

GLOBE

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Secrets *of the* Cyclades

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Please do not remove from your cabin.

FRUIT SOUP

and other delights

By Antony Bolante

You'll be surprised at what's plated for pudding around the world.

When you're eating at home, dessert can be anything from a guilty pleasure to a decadent indulgence. But when you're dining abroad, dessert should be an adventure. After all, we travel to awaken the senses and shake up our sensibilities. So although you needn't renounce the familiar flavours of, say, chocolate cake or apple pie, why not try a local confection for a taste of the unexpected? Here are just a few of the surprising sweets the world has in store for you.



kisél

Russia & Estonia

Whereas fruit-based desserts are nearly universal, dessert soups aren't nearly as widespread. In Eastern Europe, however, it's common to end the meal with a fruit soup. In Russia, the dish is called *kisél*, and typically eaten alone as a soup or even drunk as a dessert beverage. However, *kisél* can also be used as a sauce poured over curd cheese, semolina pudding, ice cream or pancakes. As with so many dishes nowadays, *kisél* is available as an instant mix. But the traditional preparation involves simmering sugar with fruit — typically, cranberry, cherries or red currant. The liquid is strained and thickened with potato starch, though cornstarch or arrowroot may be used instead. In some versions, the stewed fruit is retained, or fresh fruit added for variety in texture and flavour. Other recipes call for the addition of red wine. *Kisél* is often served chilled, but one can imagine how comforting a hot bowl of *kisél* would be on a cold night in St Petersburg or Tallinn.



leipäjuusto and runeberg cake

Finland

It's a distinct pleasure to commemorate the birth of Finland's beloved national poet, Johan Ludvig Runeberg, by enjoying his namesake dessert, an almond-and-rum-flavoured torte topped with raspberry jam, known as a Runeberg cake. But for more of a culinary adventure, ask for something a little more daring but just as distinctly Finnish: a baked cheese dessert called *leipäjuusto* or *juustoleipä*, depending on the region you're in. Because it's baked — and because pronouncing Finnish can be difficult — you might call it by the English name, “cheese bread”. But its more evocative appellation is “Finnish squeaky cheese”, because biting into its unique texture can actually make a squeaking sound! Traditionally, squeaky cheese is made from cow “beestings” — the rich milk produced after calving — curdled into a disk about an inch thick. This yellow cheese is then baked until toasted a speckled brown. Finns often enjoy squeaky cheese with coffee, or even in a cup with hot coffee poured over it. Some soak it in a little cream and sprinkle it with cinnamon and sugar. But most often, it's topped with fresh local cloudberry jam.

pavlova

New Zealand & Australia

The mouth-watering dessert Pavlova may call to mind another Russian famous for his bell-trained dogs, but it is in fact named for the celebrated ballerina Anna Pavlova. Travelling with her own dance company, Pavlova became the first ballerina to tour ballet worldwide. During her visit to Australia and New Zealand in the 1920s, an appropriately airy and elegant dessert was created in her honour. To make a Pavlova, egg whites and sugar are whipped into meringue, which is formed into puffy mounds or disks and baked until crisp on the outside and fluffy on the inside. Once cooled, the tops can be collapsed so that the shell forms a bowl to be filled with sweet whipped cream and topped with fresh fruit. Though both Australians and New Zealanders have claimed the Pavlova as their own invention, New Zealand historian Helen Leach has settled the dispute in favour of the Kiwis. In fact, kiwi fruit does make a great Pavlova topping.

The shell forms a bowl to be filled with sweet whipped cream and topped with fresh fruit.



puran poli

India

In the Maharashtra region of western India — where Mumbai is the capital — the people eat a sweet flatbread dessert called *puran poli*. Generally, it's served on special occasions and for important Hindu celebrations, such as *Ganesh Chaturthi* (a 10-day festival honouring the elephant-headed god, Ganesh), *Diwali* (the autumn “festival of lights”), or *Holi* (an ebullient spring festival of colour and love). The name “puran poli” indicates the dish's two parts. *Puran* is a stuffing made from *dal*, or lentils, cooked with *ghee*, or clarified butter, and jaggery, a kind of sugar made from dates and sugarcane. It's also spiced with cardamom and nutmeg, with a dash of turmeric for colour. *Poli* is a wrapper made from flour, milk and ghee. The poli is stuffed with puran to make a dumpling, which is rolled flat and fried in ghee until it's golden brown. Though it may resemble the more familiar Indian flatbread, *roti*, the puran transmutes the poli into a genuine dessert that can sweeten any celebration. 🍩



quindim

Brazil

Desserts in Brazil reflect the country's heterogeneous ethnic makeup and distinctive regional cuisines. In the northeastern city of Salvador de Bahia, indigenous, African and Portuguese flavours predominate. These influences are perfectly embodied in the popular dessert *quindim*. In its simplest form, egg yolks are combined with sugar and coconut, and then baked in a cupcake pan or large ring mold until the crust becomes a crisp golden brown. When flipped onto a serving plate, the crust becomes the base, and the intensely yellow, glistening custard faces upward. (The large version is called *quindão* and served in slices.) Egg yolks are a common component of Portuguese confections, while coconut is a plentiful local ingredient. The name *quindim* comes from the African Bantu language, which, along with the sugar industry, arrived in Brazil with the slave trade in the 17th century. To some, this panna cotta-like dessert may not seem as peculiar as, say, an avocado cream — another popular treat — but its multiethnic origins make it authentically Brazilian.

xingren doufu

China

Warm weather calls for a light, refreshing dessert — or in the parlance of Chinese philosophy, something with a little cooling yin to balance your overheated yang. In China — especially in Cantonese regions like Hong Kong — a dish of *xingren doufu*, or almond tofu, is just what the doctor ordered. But the name “almond tofu” is a misnomer: traditionally, the dessert contains neither almonds nor tofu! Whereas tofu is made from soy beans, the soft-textured cubes in this dish are actually gelatin. Hence, it's also called “almond jelly”. And although the flavour is derived from sweet Chinese almonds, this is just another name for apricot kernels, which have a similar flavour profile (but don't feel betrayed; apricot kernels stand in for almonds in things like amaretto, as well). To make this popular dim sum dessert, combine dissolved agar and sugar with an “almond milk” base made from ground apricot kernels. Chill in a shallow pan and, once it gelatinises, cut into cubes. Pile on fresh-cut fruit, or serve it alone garnished with goji berries or sweet scented osmanthus.

Traditionally, the dessert contains neither almonds nor tofu!

