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French Macarons

By Genevieve Northup



The macaron may be petite, but its shockingly vibrant hues, complex textures and bold flavors are grand. The confection has long been handled with white gloves and gently placed in stylish boxes embossed with the emblems of Parisian patisseries. Today, macarons are less elusive, so watch for their pops of color in shop windows, whether close to home or on the go.



The Art of Macarons

The origin of the macaron has been widely contested, but its popularity and commercialization is often attributed to the high-end Ladurée bakery.

Confusion exists over the name of this culinary creation; “macaron” is the French spelling, while “macaroon” is the Anglicized name. Whatever you call them, make sure you understand the difference between the French treat and coconut mounds, called macaroons.

The macaron’s base is two round “cookies” made from egg whites, sugar and almond flour. Between is a filling of buttercream enhanced with oil, extract, chocolate or fruit spread; vanilla, chocolate, pistachio, lemon, orange, strawberry, raspberry and rose are popular choices. Food-safe dyes are added for aesthetic appeal.

Baking macarons is challenging, particularly because they are expected to have the same size and shape. The exterior of each cookie is level and evenly cooked. The cookies should be airy but not too dry; they should give as you take a bite and have a slightly gooey texture inside. The side of each cookie that meets the filling has a slight edge, referred to as a *piéd*, the French word for foot. Enough cream center is needed for every cookie bite, without any overflowing. The filling is rich, but not overpowered by sugar.

The Quest for Macarons

..... Paris

Macarons are available all over Paris, but why not splurge with those worth that are worth the fuss?

Ladurée: Each salon is a revival of art nouveau design, providing an elegant backdrop as you try distinctive flavors by the pioneer of macarons. Liquorice, vanilla rum, coffee, salted caramel and strawberry marshmallow are inventive twists. Ladurée also has limited editions, such as gingerbread, chestnut and hazelnut.

Pierre Hermé: Equally famous, Pierre Hermé’s stores are sleek and chic, creating an art gallery atmosphere for exquisite pastries and chocolates. Hermé’s macaron flavors include crème brûlée, Métissé



(orange, carrot, cinnamon), yogurt and lime, and Satine (cream cheese, orange, passion fruit). Adventurous eaters should try offerings that combine conventional and unconventional components – fig or chocolate may be paired with foie gras.

Jean-Pierre Hévin: This renowned chocolatier translates his work with cocoa to macarons. Mango coriander and other interesting fruit medleys round out the diverse selection.

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March 20 is Macaron Day (Jour du Macaron) in Paris. At participating stores, you'll receive macarons in exchange for charitable donations.
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Gerard Mulot: Mulot’s macarons constantly evolve to keep pace with changing tastes and seasons. Blackberry, pineapple ginger, coconut and grapefruit have made the rotation.

Sadaharu AOKI: Japanese chef Sadaharu Aoki melds his heritage with French techniques and a modern flourish. Typical tastes are supplemented by Asian-inspired fusions of yuzu, green tea and sesame. Additionally, Aoki elevates macarons by dipping them in dark chocolate to create Chocorons.

Grégory Renard: This baker has two loves: chocolate and macarons. Renard’s macarons are among the least expensive in the French capital. Black currant and violet, dark chocolate, salted caramel and chocolate hazelnut are just a few of his colorful gems.

Dalloyau: The Dalloyau family has been a frontrunner of the French culinary world for more than 400 years. Classic macarons include citrus tea, coffee, bour-

bon vanilla and Opéra, which is a simplified rendition of the bakery’s signature cake. Past seasonal surprises have included cherry, melon, banana and citrus tea.

Lenôtre: The cases of Lenôtre tempt with jasmine, sweet wine and chocolate, chestnut cream, and mandarin orange, plus more common options. You can even learn how they are made during a baking lesson.

Eric Kayser: This bakery chain has more than a dozen stores in Paris serving fabulous cakes, croissants and pastries. Pick an assortment of delicious, traditional macarons to go.

..... *Beyond Paris*

No matter what country you’re in, a good French bakery is likely to have macarons. Here are a few to stop by:

L’Art Sucré, Germany: Florian and Sandra Köller have bakeries in Wiesbaden and Bad Homburg, near U.S. military installations. Far from ordinary, L’Art Sucré prepares pistachio with sour cherry, mango coconut, and strawberry passion fruit macarons. You can even order online for parcel service.

La Maison du Pain, Germany: This small chain has six stores between Frankfurt, Mainz, Wiesbaden and Sulzbach. La Maison du Pain serves French breakfast items and an assortment of desserts, including macarons.

Macaronnerie, Germany: The name says it all at the Macaronnerie in Heidelberg. You will want to bring home at least one of each tasty combination.

Confiserie Sprüngli, Switzerland: The Swiss version of the macaron, the Luxemburgerli, was perfected by Sprüngli in the late 1950s. More than two dozen varieties are produced, including several infused with alcohol. Delivery is available to the U.S. and Germany.

Namur, France and Luxembourg: Namur makes 14 types of Luxemburgerli at locations in Luxembourg and Metz, France.

Though it is tempting to devour each in one bite, take a moment to enjoy your special macarons. When your box is empty, visit www.davidlebovitz.com/2005/10/french-chocolat for detailed instructions to make them at home. ■