

# The flavours of Eastern Europe

Melbourne brings three of Eastern Europe's most dominant culinary influences so close together you can have a Russian breakfast, Polish lunch and Hungarian dinner, and you don't even have to drive.

The best way to visit Melbourne's best Eastern European restaurants is by tram and train – you can take in the changing landscapes, meet the locals, hop on and off at will and not have to worry about finding one of those often elusive parking spots.

The journey starts in the CBD. Take tram 112 from Collins Street to Babka at 358 Brunswick Street. A fair way out of the Russian enclave, this restaurant and bakery serves the best cuisine of the Russian Federation to a packed house, six days a week. While you may need to queue, it's well worth the wait for a table – just see the satisfied smiles and listen to the chatter – be patient and you will be rewarded. It's a breakfast favourite, but dishes here range from spicy Georgian baked beans, spicy mince-lamb dumplings (pelmeni) as well as sandwiches made with Babka's famous sourdough rye bread. A meal at Babka is usually a spontaneous decision, so remember the sign hanging over the door – Babka, but never on a Monday.

On your way to lunch, why not pick up some sweets for later? Take the 112 tram back to Collins Street, walk a couple of blocks to Flinders Street Station, and catch the Sandringham line to Balaclava Station. Here, cross the road, turn right, and follow your nose to Haymishe at 320 Carlisle Street. This is Eastern Europe at its most authentic – impassioned arguments out the back, confusing customer service, and cakes, tarts and biscuits that are as good as any you'd find on the streets of Budapest. "Haymische" is Yiddish for homely, and you certainly feel as if you've been invited into someone's kitchen when



you're dining here. The bakery is primarily Hungarian, much of the produce is dairy-free and all of it is kosher.

A delicious Polish lunch awaits at Borsch Vodka and Tears at 173 Chapel Street in Windsor. To get here, catch the train back to Windsor Station, hop on the first tram towards the city and you'll find the restaurant on your right. Borsch, as it's known by locals, is a bustling place at lunchtime and is the perfect setting to savour aromatic chicken meatballs in broth, pierogi (a kind of dumpling), and delicate chocolate crepes. After the main meal, you can get stuck into the vodka. With almost 100 exotic varieties available, you'll be spoilt for choice.

In the evening, after you've polished off the last of your Haymishe poppy seed danishes, stroll back to Windsor Station. Catch the train away from the city to Elsternwick Station, which is almost directly opposite your dinner destination, Budapest, at the top of Glenhuntly Road. This is where a host of expert chefs (all from Hungary) serve the best traditional and contemporary Hungarian food. And although this cuisine is typically paprika-based, the menu has a rich range of flavours, from thick mushroom soup, and sweet but savoury cabbage rolls and crispy stuffed schnitzels, to crumbed cottage cheese dumplings that erupt with sour cream. Wash it all down with some palinka, a potent fruit brandy, and you'll truly feel as if you're dining on the banks of the Danube.

– Andrew Harris



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## what's hot

**Stiletto Sisters** – live Eastern European music at Borsch Vodka and Tears every Wednesday night.

**Weekend lunches at Budapest** – until October, popular eatery Budapest was open for dinner only. Now lovers of Eastern European food can indulge their taste buds at lunch on weekends as well.

**Bollywood Dreams** – this international photographic exhibition makes its only Australian stop at the Immigration Museum of Victoria and will be on display until January 28.

**Light Sensitive** – This collection of contemporary Australian photography from the Loti Smorgon Fund will be on display in the Ian Potter Centre at the National Gallery of Victoria until February 18.

**Call ahead:**  
Babka, (03) 9416 0091.  
Haymishe, (03) 9527 7116.  
Borsch Vodka and Tears, (03) 9530 2964.  
Budapest, (03) 9530 0849.



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