

## Serbian Cuisine

Serbian traditional cuisine contains a myriad of tastes and smells, much owing to the mixture of influences of various peoples who were just passing through or were living in this region. As is the case with the culture in general, this fusion of different influences resulted in originality, so that today a rich Serbian table offers unforgettable tastes that can only be enjoyed in Serbia.

Serbian cuisine is characterized by highly diverse, solid and spicy food, which can be roughly described as a mixture of Greek, Bulgarian, Turkish and Hungarian cuisine. The use of meat, dough, vegetables and dairy products is predominant in it.

Food preparation is a special part of the Serbian tradition and culture. In Serbian villages the kitchen was called "kuća" (house), while the center part of it was the hearth, which presented an important, cult place, next to which everyday-life took place and where the whole family gathered.

Serbian specialties you have to taste are: burek, gibanica, grilled meat, roast, Karađorđeva steak, cabbage rolls, goulash, đuveč (a type of a stew), moussaka, mućkalica (a mixture of different types of meat and vegetables in a form of a stew), čvarci (similar to pork rinds), kaymak, pršuta (dry-cured ham, similar to Prosciutto), and sour milk.

Drinking coffee is a centuries-old tradition in Serbia, so you mustn't miss home-made coffee accompanied by baklava, vanilice or Turkish delight, while the kind hosts will first offer you slatko and water in their homes.

A plum, considered a national fruit in Serbia, out of which a well-known rakia – Slivovitz is brewed, has, in a way, become one of the symbols of Serbia. You mustn't leave Serbia without having at least one glass of it.

For many of the Serbian national cuisine specialties there isn't a right word in the foreign language dictionaries, nor is there a taste they can be compared to. Therefore it is best that you come and taste them yourself. But, before that, you can find stories about Serbian dishes you want to taste on this page, as well as, the recipes for them, because, who knows, you might wish to prepare them yourselves somewhere, miles away from Serbia!

# SARMA



A very special culinary treat indispensable in any celebration, sarma has a practically sacred reputation in Serbian gastronomy.

Biggest fans of this dish say they can eat sarma for ten days in a row for every meal. They say that, after it is cooked, sarma tastes better as the days go by but also every time it is reheated. And with fans like this, it's no wonder sarma has become almost mandatory dish whenever there is a traditional celebration during winter in Serbia, and something you shouldn't miss.

Sarma, or at least some version of it, was brought in this region by the Ottomans. Its name originates from the Turkish word "sarmak", which means "to wrap in". Still, in Turkey there is a kind of candy that is also called "sarma", while in Serbia the term is used only for a savory dish. And what a dish it is!

Sarma is usually made of sauerkraut, minced meat and rice. A mixture of meat, rice and spices is wrapped in sauerkraut leaves and then placed in a pot, in which it simmers for a long time. Experienced cooks in Serbia can keep it cooking on slow fire for hours, making its taste even better. Especially if you add some smoked meat

or bacon to the mixture. True gourmands always drink wine and have some horseradish or garlic with it.

Because it is such strong food, sarma has become a traditional dish in Serbia during wintertime, especially during the period of “slavas” (Patron-saint day celebrations). For such occasions, it is usually served after the appetizer before the first dish. Of course, it can be served on its own, which is why we recommend you order it in one of Serbian “kafanas” (traditional Serbian taverns) and enjoy its taste.

If you are a gourmand, if you like food that is rich in flavors, juicy and strong, you will love Serbian sarma. And don’t forget to order some proja (a kind of corn bread) with it, and make the satisfaction complete.

If you are a vegetarian, you can also enjoy sarma if you order it without meat, but with rice or potato instead.

There is also another kind of sarma in this region. People from Serbia adore this dish so much they can’t give it up even during summertime. This is why, if you are in Serbia, you can enjoy it even during summer months. Only, in this version of sarma, meat and rice are wrapped in grapevine leaves instead of sauerkraut, and some onion is added as well. It also can be made in a vegetarian manner. A slava, wedding or even a good Sunday lunch almost cannot be imagined without some sarma at the table.

There’s no use just talking about preparation of sarma and its variations. It won’t do even to mention the fact that it found its place in songs nor that, according to some researches, most Serbs name it as their favorite dish. All these things can’t even roughly bring you closer the taste and uniqueness of a true homemade sarma. The only right thing you should do, when visiting Serbia, is go to a kafana, taste it and make your own judgment.

# BUREK



Burek is the most famous breakfast food in Serbia and the only pastry baked in specialized bakeries – burek pastry shops. In Niš there is even the only Balkan contest of this kind, contest in making burek – Burekdžijada, and British newspapers The Guardian awarded it with 5th place on the best fast food list in the whole world.

“Burek and yoghurt, please!” is the most common order that can be heard in Serbia’s pastry shops, and in burek shops they will only ask “With what?”, because that’s the only pastry they make. Between the layers of dough which are tossed and spread through air by burek maker’s apt hands can be found cheese, minced meat and greens, or it can be baked without any stuffing at all. There are also sweet versions of this meal, as well as the pizza-burek, but they cannot be considered as being the true, real burek.

Burek is eaten warm, at any time of day, but burek makers claim that it is sought the most early in the morning, after a good night’s sleep or a sleepless night on the way home from the crazy clubbing, on school lunch breaks, on your way to work – burek is here to replenish and raise the energy levels, since it is rich in calories.

In the beginning of 2012, British newspapers The Guardian, awarded burek the fifth place on the best fast food list in the world.

The biggest and smallest burek in the world

On “Burekdžijada” festival in Niš in 2011 was made the 440lb burek, with 6.5 feet wide diameter and is considered to be the biggest burek ever made. Niš’s bakers spent on this, how they called it “the Guinness burek”, 330lb of dough, 110lb of cheese, and 45lb of fat.

On that same Burekdžijada was also made the smallest burek ever, weighing only 0.1 ounce, which was baked in a beer bottle cap.

According to the first records mentioning burek in 1498, first burek in Serbia had been made in Niš, and the first burek maker was a Turkish baker called Mehmed Oğlu. He baked burek according to regulations applied in the whole state of Turkey, regarding the thickness of the crust and type of ingredients which had to satisfy the high criteria levels of quality.

So, burek originates from Turkey, therefore the name comes from the Turkish word “böreği” which was used for all types of pastry. However, in the Balkans this meaning is narrowed and only refers to Serbian or Bosnia-Herzegovinian type of burek.

While Serbian round burek is cut in quarters and can be made with cheese, greens and minced meat, Bosnian burekis strictly made with minced meat while thin crusts are rolled up. Same meal made with cheese is called “sirnica”, and with greens “zeljanica”. Also in Bosnia and Herzegovina they use vegetable grease, while in Serbia it’s mainly of animal origin (pork).

Both types of burek are made in Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia and Montenegro, brought to all of them by Albanian and Bosnian bakers. This greasy layered dough meal is prepared in many different ways in all other former Ottoman empire’s countries.

Burek

Bosnia-Herzegovinian type of burek

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In Serbia, the most popular of them all is the Niš's burek to which all residents of Niš are paying respects by organizing a manifestation since 2004, the only of its kind in Serbia and surrounding countries. On "Burekdžijada" festival held next to the river Nišava, bakers from all around the Serbia, Greece, Macedonia and Bulgaria are competing in the skills of burek making.

In the Balkans burek is considered as fast food, so you can try it on nearly every corner in bakeries, pastry shops or burek shops, but you must never forget – the yoghurt with it. Since burek is often compared to pita, famous writer MomoKapor explained the difference bit humoristically: "All pies are tarts but burek is tARTistic!"