

# Gluttony in Lyon

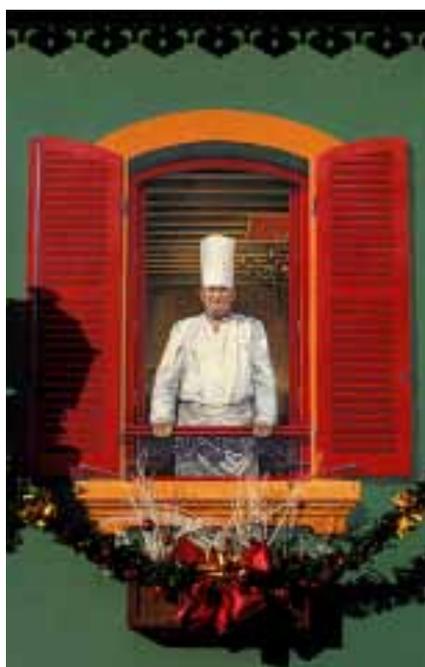
FEASTING LIKE A LOCAL IN FRANCE'S FOOD CAPITAL BY DEBASHREE MAJUMDAR



Lyon's eateries serve all manner of food. Popular ones like À la Pêche aux Moules specialize in mussels and other seafood dishes (top); A wall mural from Paul Bocuse's Michelin-award-winning restaurant Collonges au Mont d'Or (bottom).

There's no need to work up an appetite in Lyon. Every corner of France's third-largest metropolis holds an offering that will instantly make you hungry. And as befits a city known as the culinary capital of France, food here is not just about eating, but also about traditions, institutions, and excellence.

Nobody embodies this better than Chef Paul Bocuse, the undisputed granddaddy of modern French cooking, and the shiniest star in Lyon's culinary firmament. Exploding onto the global gastronomy map with his signature innovation *soupe aux truffes* (truffle soup) decades ago, Monsieur Paul rewrote the principles of French haute cuisine. His nouvelle or new cuisine focused on bringing out the real textures of the ingredients, and using fresh produce alone. Since 1965, he has been keeper of the much coveted three-



Michelin-star rating for his restaurant L'Auberge du Pont de Collonges, located on the outskirts of Lyon.

Bocuse is omnipresent in the city. A giant mural of his smiling face greets visitors at the entrance to Les Halles de Lyon—Paul Bocuse, Lyon's most famous indoor market for all things edible. Here, stall after stall stocks the best local produce including cheeses, fresh fruits, charcuterie, pickles, confectionery, wines, and chocolates. If food were theatre, then this market would literally be the world's greatest stage. The accomplished chef animates this nerve centre of Lyon's perpetual food festival, which everyone is invited to join.

Besides Bocuse, *bouchons* comprise yet another preoccupation of the Lyonnaise. These warm, unpretentious, old-fashioned eateries are known for offering generous portions. Forming a quintessential chunk of the Lyonnaise

experience, the bouchons emerged during the 19th-century economic downturn, when *les mères* (mothers) started kitchens after losing their jobs as cooks in the households of bourgeois families. They managed these humble kitchens with ingredients from local producers. Even today, the ingredients are strictly sourced from local markets and farmers, and traditional dishes, especially meats, are served. From pig's

head to oxtail, eating at a bouchon is a nose-to-tail adventure.

In fact, the rule of thumb when navigating Lyon's gastronomic offerings is to be willing to stuff one's face with all sorts of delicacies rather than avoid the ones with pigs' ears or calf tripe. However, a wide variety of chicken and fish dishes are available for the squeamish eater.

Besides the bouchons, there are nearly

40 local farmers markets in Lyon, which sell everything between Saint-Marcellin cheese and Beaujolais to wash down those portly blood sausages at breakfast. There are trendy bistros too that jostle for space along the alleyways. However, the old-fashioned bouchons, with their red-and-white chequered tablecloths, convivial atmosphere, long lunches, and lingering chats are the best expression of Lyon life.



A lazy weekend brunch at Les Halles de Lyon-Paul Bocuse (left) is a local tradition. Over four dozen stalls are set up by Lyon's best butchers, cheesemakers, and wine growers; The regional favourite tarte à la praline, a tart with a pink almond filling (right), is inspired by Lyon's rose gardens.

### FIVE BOUCHON CLASSICS & WHERE TO EAT THEM

#### SALADE LYONNAISE

A staple at most *bouchons*, this classic consists of bitter greens dunked in plenty of vinaigrette mustard. It's served with croutons, crispy bacon strips, and poached eggs, topped with snipped chives.

**WHERE TO EAT** **Chez Mounier**, 3 Rue des Marronniers, 69002 Lyon; €18-20/₹1,300-1,500.

#### SALADE DE CERVELAS

The centrepiece of this salad is a special pork and pistachio sausage. In the early days, the sausage was stuffed with pig brain and that is how it got its name *cervelas*, deriving from the Latin cerebrum or brain. This salad also includes eggs, capers, pickles, shallots, parsley, and generous helpings of vinaigrette.

**WHERE TO EAT** **Le Bouchon des Filles**, 20 Rue Sergent Blandan Ancienne Voie du Rhin, 69001 Lyon; €18-24/₹1,300-1,800.

#### QUENELLE DE BROCHET

Quenelle, from the German *knödel*, is the heart of Lyonnaise main courses. Made primarily from the flesh of the pike

fish, with an occasional addition of veal fat and meat, these dumplings are coated in moist breadcrumbs and served in a creamy crayfish sauce. Eating this will keep your stomach happy for hours. Pair with a bottle of Beaujolais.

**WHERE TO EAT** **Café du Soleil**, 2 Rue Saint-Georges, 69005 Lyon; €24-26/₹1,800-1,900.

#### GÂTEAU DE FOIES DE VOLAILLES

This is a steamed pudding made with chicken liver, white bread, eggs, milk, mushrooms, green olives, tomatoes, thyme, spring onions, and fresh cream. You may need a post-lunch nap to recuperate.

**WHERE TO EAT** **Les Lyonnais**; 19, Rue de la Bombarde, 69005 Lyon; €25/₹1,800.

#### TARTE À LA PRALINE

Pralines are a mainstay on Lyon's dessert menus. Lyonnaise pralines are made out of almonds and cloaked in cooked sugar and pink food colouring. These pink confections are used to decorate a whole bunch of desserts, from tarts to cakes.

**WHERE TO EAT** **Les Halles de Lyon – Paul Bocuse**; 102 Cours Lafayette, 69003 Lyon; €10/₹740. ●