

Where I want to indulge again in 2019: Best restaurants, dishes and desserts in the word by La Muse Blue

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Here I sum up the best restaurants, dishes and desserts of 2018 that I cannot wait to return to in 2019.

It is important, perhaps essential, to reflect on the year that passed. NO negative judgements, but an honest discovery of what was great, what pleased you. The result can take days, weeks even if your memory falters and your photo library goes to four digit species. The effort is worth though as I discovered myself. Looking back at the generosity of recent months completes the loop of the year, so you can free yourself for new experiences and only go back to the best restaurants, dishes and desserts you enjoyed.

The **best gastronomic experiences** of 2018 that opened my mind, pampered my palate and stroke my soul with lasting pleasure liberally spread across three continents - Asia, Europe and North America.

ASIA

For us [Kanda](#) in Tokyo serves the best contemporary kaiseki in the world. We go every year. Japanese chefs are savvy about their ingredient sourcing, not just for sushi, but in particular in the seasonal, multi-course [kaiseki cuisine](#). Chef Kanda delivers each time we dine at his exclusive counter. His passion for the European Burgundies reflects on the excellent wine list that with the rare Japanese smile his maitre'd and sommelier pours happily. No tipping in Japan, just show gratitude to the hard working chef.

NORTHERN AMERICA

[Single Thread](#) in California reinterpreted this Japanese seasonal tasting concept into its locally sourced gastronomic dining. The chef Kyle Connaughton gets most ingredients from the farm run by his wife Katina, and outsources the rest sustainably where possible (caviar, seafood, meat). My two meals there were exquisite, and the breakfasts served in-room at the tiny luxurious inn ranked in the top of 2018 for me too. Details further down. The design is comforting, luxurious while not showy, Silicon Valley in!

EUROPE

The old-continent favourite [L'Arpège](#) in Paris is still one of the best restaurants in the world. Alain Passard is a naturalist, a culinary magician who respects the product and tradition. The French cuisine is elevated to its grandest in unpretentious, barred down, country setting but with white table clothes on. Arpège is hard to beat for the perfected fine French meal. One entire afternoon we devoted ourselves to his multi-course feast, I went for the vegetarian tasting and oh, the veggie sushi - nobody has done it better, yet! Fish is my preferred *neta* (topping), but if the seas get depleted I know where to go.

The last two source from their own biodynamic gardens, sustainable fishermen and small scale, responsible farmers. It shows.

I must give it to the [Red Guide](#), even though I often disagree with its logic, since my **best gastronomic dining in 2018** involved all three Michelin starred restaurants - one was on its way to the third star just a year from its opening (a month after my visit, Single Thread officially got it). I have dined at each at least twice as per my judgement [criteria for reviews](#) (over a decade of professional gastronomic expertise nudged me to give promising restaurants at least two chances - most only prove themselves after the initial novelty halo clears my foggy lenses). Further, I enjoyed the hospitality and presentation at El Celler de Can Roca in Spain and of some other highly regarded restaurants such as Sushi Saito, Le Petit Nice, et al. but the competition was rife!

Curiously, the **most memorable single plates** were not mostly served at the my choices of above best restaurants. These dishes stood out:

- A reindeer moss ball "breaded" in Swedish black truffles at Agrikultur, Stockholm
- Roasted duck at Gastrologik, Stockholm
- Uni tostada at the [Brooklyn Fare](#), New York
- Aged *goma-dofu* (sesame soft pudding with kudzu root starch) at [Nishikawa](#) kaiseki restaurant in Kyoto
- Ravioli and marinated beet sushi at [Arpège](#)

The duck was shared at the communal table at the Michelin starred Gastrologik in Stockholm. In the same city, at Agriculture the Reindeer moss served like a lolly, covered in local black truffles, was a revelation. I want to eat more moss!

The **most irresistible desserts** have to share the sweet throne. In New York, my hedonistic cravings take me each visit to **Bibble & Sip** for their daily fresh giant cream puffs - the [matcha](#) and black sesame are my favourites. There is a queue, but one location, plus near Times Square, yet this is not a hype. The truly great quality, luscious dense cream filled puffs rival to the best eclairs in Paris and Tokyo. In Provence, the chocolatier and pastry chef **Hawecker** as an M.O.F. represents the best of France. His global travels inspired chocolates, the pastry, and above all the butter almond brittle biscuits make even non-sugarholic howl.

Italians rejoice, gelato stole my heart, again! This "km0" ice cream and sorbets sugared our plush car, since in addition to twice three scoops, I also bought two boxes to go of the heavenly "tree of gelato". I ate about a dozen scoops before getting home. I was once again the girl that I knew when I was little. Whipped from organic milk and slow-food certified, local artisan growers's produce in a tiny village between Como and Milan **L'Albero dei Gelati** is a hyper-lative achievement for ice cream. Creative, but driven more by what's in season and much locally sourced, just the sugar comes from abroad. They even offer gluten-free wafers.

A [chocolate](#) talk invites itself in. The best bites were a single origin organic dark **Standout Chocolate** from India. The small batch, bean-to-bar 70% cocoa from the IDUKKI region was made by Fredrik Martisson in Sweden. A shocker was a real fresh milk chocolate (I do not - usually - like milk chocolate) by **Tiroler Edle**. The organic milk comes from rare **Tiroler** Grauviehs cows that graze on the Alpine pastures of Austria. Smooth, generously milky with just the right balance of 75% Domori (Italy) cocoa.

The most interesting dessert though was something unusual. Atsushi Tanaka, the Japanese chef heading his one Michelin star restaurant **A.T. in Paris**, infused the relaxing *hinoki* wood (used traditionally in a relaxing bath) into the creamy and crumbly concoction. From Japanese hands comes also the quirkiest dessert that I could not get myself tasting this spring - the soft cream with a cherry and **spiny lobster flavour** in the Ise city, Japan. Let the lobster alone, I thought. Would you lick it sweet?

In Asia, best egg tart I had was at **Tao Cheung bakery** in Hong Kong. Simple, yet the puff pastry delicately crumbled between my teeth, and the generous still warm egg custard enveloped my tongue with silky pleasure.

The best **afternoon tea** was by far at the **Goring Hotel** in London. Crumbly and warm scones, buttery clotted cream, superb homemade strawberry jam, good selection of tea served properly (not over-infused), and the lawn, the art and the cosy library room to sip it in! Needless to add, the cakes were not cheap, baked with care. The Claridges, the Ritz et al. are tourist traps as retrying them during the past tea-fuelled-year affirmed to me and my companions (ladies and one gentleman). Perhaps, only Sketch is also worth your afternoon, but Goring is best for local tradition perfected to its proudest.

Casual bistros, bakeries, cafés, eateries and no-fuss restaurants that the Italians would call trattorias must be mentioned here too. For, it is not only fine dining of the Michelin calibre that we indulge in. I love authentic restaurants sourcing best local produce and cooking or otherwise preparing the ingredients at its finest. Most years the tops would be in Italy for me, but again it all depends where you travel.

My **best casual meals** in the South were naturally close or in the Mediterranean. On a protected island where a tiny port was built with restraint **L'Anse de Port Cros** is a very laid-back local fish eatery. All is served with the creamiest risotto, vegetables and table-side red wine salt. Complementary digestive shots come after the meal. On the dry land in Vence, Provence another al-fresco lunch at **Restaurant La Litote** again sated us with fine provencal fare. Seated under a linden tree on the cobble-paved historic village the sleeping cat next to our table did not lift an eyelid until the fish arrived. The pasta are great too.

Another excellent midday meal awaited me way North, in Norway. My last, sunny day in Oslo turned out one of the best langoustines I have ever chewed. Instead of an imported wine I washed them down with local beer. The view from **Festningen** is not bad either, the fjords and the port of Oslo spread like the Northern lights in front. A starter of a fish carpaccio, a side of thick, generous, crisp fries with mayo, Norwegian bread, the seafood feast at **Festningen** completed our Scandinavian summer journey with fanfare. More memorable than the three Michelin Maemo in town.

Not only best restaurants, but also breakfast sets our palate into the heavens of hedonistic

pleasure. Read about my best breakfasts over the past year to find where you should stay, drive to or indulge in the am while traveling. Also, the best gourmet shops in Europe will se your healthy resolve into high gear so before you go there you are ready to indulge mindfully.

My selections of the best restaurants are not discriminating other than the above continents, yet I still need to find the mind-blowing meal in Africa, return to Australia, New Zealand and South America has not seen me for almost three years, therefore my *coupe de coeur* may not deliver. Everything changes more rapidly today, so I better stick to the most recent experiences and each year share what was the best for my globetrotting palate and ultimately the craving mind.