

Local Produce Focus as Foodie Festival Returns

By [Jemma Buckley](#)

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The food festival will feature master classes from local and foreign chefs.

Slowly but surely the Moscow food scene is changing, with demand from a growing number of foodies forcing restaurant chefs to become more creative with their product selection and menu designs.

Eateries such as Ragout, Grand Cru, Delicatessen and Bar Strelka are at the forefront of this growing gastronomic trend in Moscow, and these restaurants and their chefs will form an integral part of the Omnivore Food Festival, or OFF, World Tour, which will take place in Moscow this week.

The festival, which has grown exponentially since its beginnings in Deauville, France, in 2005, sees young chefs from around the world unite with counterparts in host cities to demonstrate their culinary prowess through live cooking demonstrations and special menus in local restaurants.

This will be the second time that Moscow has hosted the festival, after proving successful last year. The touring festival will be hosted by 12 cities in 2012 including Copenhagen, Shanghai, New York, San Francisco and Istanbul.

Natalia Palacios, director of the Moscow festival, first attended OFF in France several years ago. "I decided that this festival was something that Moscow really needed; something young, fresh and not snobbish," she said.

In every host city, fresh, local produce takes center stage, and this is no different in Moscow, despite long winters traditionally leading to a dependence on imported ingredients.

"Focusing on fresh produce has never happened in Moscow, and so it makes the festival quite revolutionary. The challenge is to create something extraordinary, but using very ordinary seasonal products. But can you imagine finding local seasonal products in Moscow at the end of April? It's a real challenge," Palacios said.

Moscow's cliché-eschewing chefs have risen to the challenge, creating menus that include dishes such as cold radish and wild garlic soup, nutria — a type of water rodent — prepared in birch with vodka bonbons with a herby moss sauce and a cock curry cooked in monastic kvass.

Familiar faces from last year's festival such as Alexei Zimin and Ilya Shalev of popular restaurant Ragout and Ivan Shishkin of basement foodie haven Delicatessen will return to lead proceedings. They will be joined by Dmitry Zotov from Antrekot and Dmitry Shurakov from Chaika, who prides himself on his unsnobbish attitude toward food.

"The products that I will be using at the festival (such as chicken hearts and turkey necks) aren't used by many people — it's going to be interesting to show them just how great these ingredients can be. I will be really advocating the use of Russian products, grown on our own soil," Shurakov said.

Moscow chefs will be joined by international counterparts from Latvia, Belgium, France and Italy, and the idea is that their partnership will encourage creative thinking and further develop Moscow's food culture.

Alex Zhiluk from fish restaurant Le Dome in Riga merges the traditional and the contemporary with an emphasis on Latvian specialities. He wishes to share with Moscow foodies his love of Baltic culture and coastal cuisine. "I am most excited to showcase our traditional herring and black caviar from Latvian sturgeon. ... I hope to show courage when breaking the rules of traditional cuisine."

Tickets for the master classes, which will take place at Gostiny Dvor on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, are available to the public online. For those unable to attend, you can make reservations at participating restaurants — Delicatessen, Ragout, Antrekot, Bar Strelka, Chaika, Black Market, Grand Cru, Khachapuri and Cafe Manon — which will have special menus to honor the festival on certain days this week.

Omnivore Food Festival master classes run Tuesday through Thursday at Gostiny Dvor, 4 Ulitsa Ilyinka. Metro Ploshchad Revolyutsii. To buy tickets and for more information about

participating restaurants and their menus visit www.omnivore-moscow.com.

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