

BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN

Hidden Frankfurt

With a reputation as Europe's stodgy financial center, **Frankfurt** now offers lots of surprises, including restaurants that could fit easily in London or Madrid.



Wearing a light gray suit over an untucked white T-shirt, Simon Horn tosses a long leg over his bike and walks into **Margarete** (margarete-restaurant.de). The restaurant, across from Frankfurt's historic city center, opens the following day, and Simon, one of its owners, is about to show a group of local reporters around the space. Before the tour, he sits with me at the back of the bright and airy restaurant. I want to know—from someone generating buzz in this town—the scoop on dining in Frankfurt.



Travel details



At the Airport

If you ever find yourself with extra time at an airport, there's no question where you want to be: Lufthansa's first-class terminal in Frankfurt. It's a knockout.



The terminal, for the airline's elite frequent fliers and first-class travelers, feels more like a small luxury hotel, with its own check-in and security checkpoint. Travelers can hang out in a sleeping room, a tub (complete with a Lufthansa squeaky duck), a leather armchair, the dining area (with made-to-order meals) or the cigar lounge (with 80 types of whiskey). Best of all, when your plane boards, you'll be chauffeured to the aircraft in a Porsche Panamera or Mercedes-Benz S400 hybrid.



Last year, Lufthansa opened its largest Senator Lounge in Frankfurt, with showers, massage rooms and the City Lights Bar. Several of the lounges also have areas for kids. The airline's spa-like Welcome Lounge is ideal for business- and first-class arriving passengers who need a snack, a shower (with L'Occitane products) and a freshly ironed shirt. This year, the airport will open a new terminal with additional shopping and five new Lufthansa lounges.



More Info + Getting Around

Frankfurt.de
Frankfurt-rhein-main.de
City Walking Tours: Alexa Negrao, alexa.negrao@web.de

Getting There

Daily nonstop service to Frankfurt from Dulles International on Lufthansa.

"We have street food, and we have really expensive places," Horn explains. "But today, there is very little in between." At 28, confident and cool, with tousled black hair over a boyish face, Horn seems to have perfected the Euro rock star look. And he's become a star in Frankfurt.

Inspired by his father's cooking as a child, Horn opened his first bar at age 18 and his first restaurant by 21. We sit at a long table. People scurry around us, working on the restaurant's finishing touches. His English isn't perfect, but I understand clearly his take on Frankfurt's culinary reputation and his desire to change it. With Margarete, he's leading the way. The restaurant, open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, has a variety of healthy options (that alone is refreshing in Frankfurt), with take-out items such as to-go smoothies and homemade muesli. And don't miss the rotating art and literature display in the front gallery.

"I think it's a trend—having normal, cool places, instead of just steakhouses or cheap food," Horn says. When I broach the matter of the city's overall reputation, he says, "Frankfurt is way better than people think it is."

More Dining Stars

Horn isn't exercising youthful hubris. During the four days I spend in the city, I learn he's absolutely right. Hotels have gotten into the culinary act in Frankfurt, too. Witness

the new Jumeirah's signature restaurant serving German and Austrian cuisine, **Max on One** (jumeirah.com/frankfurt). Designed by Takashi Sugimoto and his innovative team at Super Potato, the restaurant feels like a large urban apartment, with an open kitchen and floor-to-ceiling bookshelves. Breakfasts include honeycomb from the beehives on the roof.

Lohninger (cocoon.net/club/lohninger) is the newest of star chef Mario Lohninger's trio of upscale restaurants (also check out award-winning Silk, where diners recline on white leather daybeds; and Micro). Lohninger serves up Austrian cuisine with classics such as Wienerschnitzel and more contemporary offerings such as trout strudel. And if you're looking for a spot where locals converge to buy produce, meat, homemade pasta and pretzels, duck into **Kleinmarkthalle** (kleinmarkthalle.de). The two-story indoor market is perfect for a quick, inexpensive lunch upstairs, where you can pick up a prepackaged assortment of herbs to make traditional green sauce. If you don't mind waiting in line, sample Mrs. Schreiber's famous fleischwurst.

All right. Not every food and beverage venue in Frankfurt has to be fashionable. Some transcend waves of newness by simply offering the consistency of goodness. Which is why I can't resist **Wacker's Kaffee** (wackerskaffee.de), which has been roasting coffee in the city since 1914. There are enough devotees to this place that I contend with lines

out the door. Good news, however: There are several locations throughout the city.

Beyond Finance

Before I arrived in Frankfurt, I knew of it—as many Americans do—only as Europe's financial center. It's home to the European Central Bank, as well as several large commercial banks. But I suspected that there was more to this city than euros, in the same way we know there's more to Washington than government. Simon—and three days of exploring—assures me that is indeed the case.

Thanks to the financial sector, Frankfurt has a skyline unique to this part of the world. Skyscrapers are so unusual in European cities that Frankfurt, home of the River Main, is affectionately referred to as Mainhattan. But below the towering monuments to money (including Deutsche Bank's twin towers, nicknamed Debit and Credit), the city is far from conservative. Frankfurters say their city stands apart from other cities in Germany. "It's open-minded and free-spirited," my tour guide tells me, as we walk by the Occupy Frankfurt camp.

There are shisha lounges and Asian grocery stores among the sausage stands and sauerkraut, and bankers' suits aside, it's a pretty casual city. Frankfurt is tech-savvy and green (every other vehicle seems to be a Smart Car), and it reminds me of Washington in several ways—both are compact cities, immensely walkable and rich with museums. Frankfurt's airport is a 10- to 15-minute train ride from Hauptbahnhof (Central Station), a hub for the S-Bahn (above- and below-ground train) and the U-Bahn (subway).

Frankfurt's late-night techno-club scene (check out Cocoon Club and Orange Peel) is popular among locals, but you don't have to stay up till the wee hours for some action. The city's calendar is filled with festivals and fairs, and there's no better time than summer for celebrating and al fresco dining. Events range from the **Green Sauce Festival** (May 5–12), honoring the region's traditional seven-herb sauce, to the **German Choir Festival** (June 7–10), when more than 400 choirs converge for a weekend of performances and sing-alongs.

There is also a festival for **apple wine** (Aug. 10–19), a sour, low-alcohol drink that has been part of the region's culture for centuries. Touted for its health benefits, it is served from a blue porcelain jug, and you can identify an apple wine tavern by the wreath hanging outside its front door. (The Apple Wine Express tram—complete with apple wine and pretzels—tours the apple wine district on weekends and holidays.)

The Museum Embankment is home to 26 museums, 13 of which are along the southern

bank of the Main, which flows into the Rhine. Naturally, there's a **Museum Embankment Festival** (Aug. 24–26), an open-air celebration with music, food and performances. All summer, there is activity along the river promenade, and if you're lucky, you'll catch the guy who opens a mobile cocktail bar (with folding chairs) out of his Volkswagen bus.

By the time I arrive at Margarete the day before its opening, I've eaten my way through the city—muesli with chocolate flakes, soft pretzels, apple strudel, green sauce with egg and potato, apple wine, smoked fish and

plenty of small cakes and pastries.

But I understand Horn's assessment that the city yearns for more trendy and casual cuisine. As reporters gather in the front of the restaurant and we wrap up our conversation, Horn and his partner invite me to later stop by **Blumen** (rotlint60.de), their cozy, 18-seat restaurant with a fixed menu and doorbell access.

Like the street where the restaurant is hidden, Frankfurt offers more than meets the eye, Horn explains. "You have to explore," he says. "It's like a treasure." ☺



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