

Breweries, Kölsch and typical dishes

Cologne has more than 3,000 eateries representing a wide variety of cuisines that offer something for every taste. Almost each of the 184 nations that call Cologne their home is represented with their cuisine. The numerous international restaurants represent Cologne's multicultural character but it is the Breweries that exude the tradition and uniqueness of Cologne's hospitality.

In earlier centuries, most Cologne residents brewed their own beer. In the 19th century, tourism began to develop, accompanied by a corresponding gastronomy. However, the restaurants were kept more modest in comparison to today's gastronomy. In the house breweries, which switched to commercial serving, people simply sat down at raw tables in the hallway or in the narrow courtyard. Most of these old Cologne restaurants were destroyed during the war.

It is a special feature in Cologne to give restaurants "Kölsch" names. In hardly any other city is there as big a collection of pubs and bars with names that are in dialect. Examples are Em Krützche (At the little cross) on the Rhine, Bei dr Tant (At Auntie's) on Cäcilienstraße or Em golde Kappes (At the golden cabbage) in the Nippes district.

The long-established **breweries** include the *Sion Brewery* on Unter Taschenmacher Street, or the *Cölner Hofbräu P. Josef Früh am Dom*, the *Päffgen Brewery* on Friesenstraße, and the *Malzmühle* on Heumarkt, once visited by ex-US President Bill Clinton or the *Schreckenskammer* in the immediate vicinity of the Romanesque Church of St. Ursula.

The beer

Kölsch is at the center of Cologne Brewery culture – it is not only a type of beer but also the name of the local dialect and the Cologne lifestyle. The thing about Kölsch is that it can only be brewed in Cologne. It is a top-fermented beer (meaning the yeast soars up during the fermentation process) that is highly fermented in taste and dissipates sugar and malt much faster than other beers. The high concentration of hop and little carbonic acid make it a light and digestible beer. It tastes best fresh from the barrel and is served in typical tall cylindrical glasses called *Kölsch-Stangen*. The waiters are known as **Köbes** (deduced from Jacob in the pilgrims' times).

They wear the attire of the old brew workers, a high-necked blue cardigan with a double row of black buttons, black trousers, a blue apron and a leather purse in front of their bellies. The Köbes is a unicum among German waiters – sometimes cheeky, at other times warm, relaxed or dry-witted and untalkative. Köbeses carry the beer in a Kranz (wreath – a round tray with a handle), into which the Kölsch-Stangen are inserted. The "Zappes" (tap waiter), who taps beer behind the counter at the "Pittermännchen" (a 10-litre Kölsch barrel), has a special place in this group. The barrels are emptied quickly, so the beer is always fresh and cool.

Rhenish food

The brewery restaurants, or *Brauhäuser*, serve traditional fare that is hearty and down to earth and sometimes takes a little getting used to. Some dishes are a parody on refined eating habits. On top of the menu (called Foderkaat in Kölsch) is **Halver Hahn** (“Half chicken” which is actually half of a rye bread roll topped with a thick slice of old Dutch cheese and mustard). It stems from a time when eating chicken was not yet popular and made fun of those brewery visitors that could afford poultry. Known as “Röggelchen met Kies und e Glas Wieß” (rye bread roll with cheese and wheat beer) in earlier times the dish was first mentioned in the 15th century. The pastiche of the half chicken dates back to 1877 when rolls with cheese were served instead of the promised chicken.

Another ironically named dish is **Kölscher Kaviar** (Cologne Caviar) — a piece of black pudding with mustard and a rye bread roll. The name probably originated among Brauhaus regulars as a parody of the upper classes.

Sauerbraten is a popular dish in many regions. Many visitors from outside of Cologne like to have the "Rheinische Sauerbraten" served in Cologne because it is considered to be particularly delicious here. For Sauerbraten, beef is marinated in vinegar for three to four days. The sauce is thickened with cranberries and raisins and sweetened with honey cake. Potato dumplings and apple sauce are served with the Sauerbraten. Traditionally, horse meat was used in Sauerbraen, but today it is usually prepared with beef.

Another local specialty, available in restaurants as well as at street booths at Christmas time, are **Rievkoche** (potato fritters). The fried pancakes are made from raw, grated potatoes, some wheat flour, a pinch of salt and, sometimes, finely grated onions. They are particularly popular when eaten hot and served with cranberries or apple sauce in restaurants. The old city center of Cologne used to be home to many Rievkoche boots. On Schemmergasse there were so many of them the narrow alley was called "Rievkoche-Allee".

At a push people used to serve **Himmel un Äd** (Heaven and Earth) for lunch. Mashed potatoes and apples are cooked and served with black pudding or liver sausage fried in a pan. It is a dish that can still be found on menus in Cologne. Not only does it taste good, but it also has a religious note that resonates well with Rhinelanders. For people to thrive they need heaven and earth.