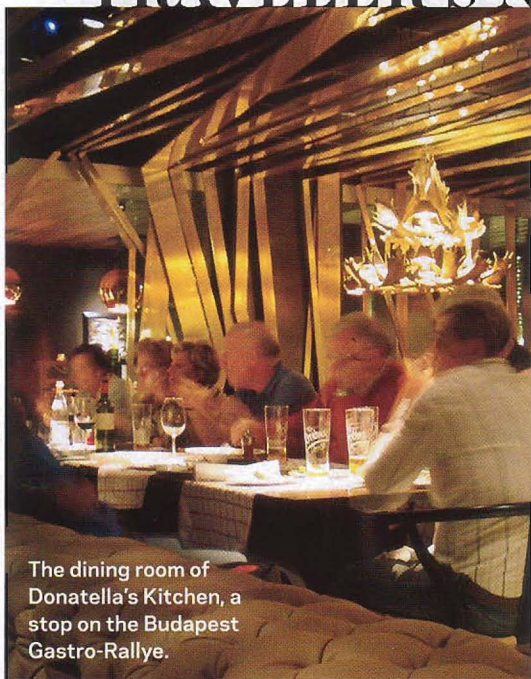


TRAVELER'S NOTEBOOK



The dining room of Donatella's Kitchen, a stop on the Budapest Gastro-Rallye.

HUNGARY FOR FOOD

"Not many gourmets would consider Budapest a culinary destination," says Henrik Tidefjärd, founder of the **Gastro-Rallye**, an inventive restaurant-hopping tour that he recently launched in the Hungarian capital. "But the city's gastronomic scene is exploding right now." Tidefjärd's food jaunt, in which

each of four courses is consumed at a different location, debuted five years ago in Berlin and has since branched out to Zagreb and Copenhagen. But Budapest, where Hungary's burgeoning wine scene has sparked an haute-peasant culinary movement, is Tidefjärd's favorite. The roving feast begins at the

trendy bar Szimpla, with duck-liver pâté and a glass of wine. A choice of Italian appetizers at Donatella's Kitchen, a space designed to look like a futuristic alpine hut, is next. Then comes a modern take on old-world staples (think goulash) at Klassz, a cheerful place whose walls are decorated with images from Hungarian folklore. Desserts are served at the sleek, all-black Baraka. The best part? Thanks to all the walking in between courses, you never feel guilty—even after four hours of indulgent eating. **\$830 for four people. 011-49-16-0387-2264; gastro-rallye.com.**

GISELA WILLIAMS



Calm Amid the Palms

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC Reconnecting is the raison d'être at the plantation-style **Peninsula House**, on the DR's northeastern coast. To furnish the romantic mansion, French owner Marie-Claude Thiebault shipped three forty-foot containers from her homes in Provence and Istanbul, then sprinkled the contents—European antiques, Chinese porcelain lamps and Tibetan artifacts—throughout the retreat's six guest suites, various parlors and expansive verandas (above). The beachfront property also has pairs of chaise longues beside the pool and tables for two in the candlelit inner courtyard. These little touches, plus the house's distance from any major development (two hours from Santo Domingo, fifteen minutes from the shops of Las Terrenas), practically guarantee a rekindling of passion. *Suites from \$520. Calle Coson, Las Terrenas; 809-307-1827; thepeninsulahouse.com.* MEG NOLAN

A cottage at El Silencio Lodge and Spa, surrounded by the Costa Rican rain forest.



CASTLE IN THE CLOUDS

COSTA RICA Central America's newest luxury outpost is dishing out leisure and adventure in supersized portions. Spend a morning with a private guide at **El Silencio Lodge and Spa's** 500-acre reserve, ninety minutes from San José in the Costa Rican highlands, and you'll see spectacular waterfalls and, with any luck, glimpse the elusive quetzal. Adrenaline junkies can ride horseback, raft on Class II and III rapids or zing along a zip line nearby. Be sure to save the afternoon to experience the wilderness in a far more decadent way, with a rain-forest aromatherapy massage in one of the riverside spa's cone-shaped treatment rooms. When you're ready for some more downtime, drink in the view in private: the sixteen hillside cottages are furnished with rocking chairs and hot tubs, and generously proportioned terraces overlook a green blanket of trees. *Cottages from \$210 per person, all-inclusive. 011-506-2761-0301; elsilenciolodge.com.*

SUSAN CRANDELL