

FOOD

## Eat me and adore God

Sold on the heady smell and taste of truffles, Anna Trapido sniffs out suppliers

**Alexandre Dumas once wrote that** if a truffle could speak it would say: "Eat me and adore God." I'm not sure that God has all that much to do with it, because whether you shave white truffles over pasta or stud your scrambled eggs with black truffles, the penetrating smell and powerful, earthy flavour are utterly primal in their perfection. Let's just say it: truffles are simply superb sex on a plate.

Truffles are the fruiting body of a fungus that grows underground attached to the roots of oak trees.

There are at least 70 species of truffle, but there are only two that really count in culinary circles: black truffles (*Tuber melanosporum*), which are most famously associated with the Périgourd region of France, and white truffles (*Tuber magnatum*), found predominantly in Northern Italy.

The good news is that we are coming into truffle season. Trained truffle dogs and pigs are sniffing out these underground treasures as we speak. The white truffle market in Alba is busiest in the



### CONTACTS

**Go to:**

[www.trufflesofafrica.co.za/growing.html](http://www.trufflesofafrica.co.za/growing.html); or contact Donna Hornby [donna@trufflesofafrica.co.za](mailto:donna@trufflesofafrica.co.za) or 072-538-1707

**La Marina:**

Tel: (011) 997-0500

**Strafella's:**

Tel: (011) 784-5738

**Auberge Michel:**

Tel: (011) 883-7013

**Linger Longer:**

Tel: (011) 884-0465

**La Madeleine:**

Tel: (012) 361-3667

**Food on the Move:**

Tel: (011) 403-1232

Then there is the Kalahari truffle, which isn't actually a truffle at all in the classic Eurocentric sense of the word, but is an underground fungus that tastes damn fine

months of October and November, while the black truffle season (which starts in late autumn) reaches its peak in January. The bad news is that these fabulous fungi aren't cheap. Pesticides and deforestation have significantly reduced the truffle harvests of recent years and rarity is ex-

pensive. Once import expenses are added into the mix, you won't find fresh white truffles in SA for less than R50 000/kg and their black buddies, while less pricey, are still about R5 000/kg.

If imported truffle costs leave you reeling, however, there are a range of local-is-lekker alternatives. The KwaZulu Natal-based company Truffles of Africa produce miniature pot plant-sized trees inoculated with spores of black truffle that are suitable for verandahs. Don't start salivating yet — your stoep truffles will take five to seven years (and plenty of tender horticultural care) to produce their first crop.

Those who can't wait five years for a Johannesburg-based night of truffle heaven should try Auberge Michel in Sandton for gratinated scallops with truffle, Strafella's in Morning-side for porcini risotto with truffle shavings, or Linger Longer for a truffle-laden pasta from heaven. Pretoria-based piggies should root out the truffle crème brûlée amuse bouche at La Madeleine.

Those who wish to go the do-it-yourself route should head for La Marina at the Longmeadow Business Estate, Edenvale, where super-obliging staff are happy to

help those with expensive tastes and limited means. Almost all suppliers would make you buy a whole kilo but at La Marina they will sell you as little as one truffle. Since an average black truffle weighs approximately 70 g, R782 will buy you a taste of heaven. They also sell truffle shavers for those who need toys to accompany their culinary pleasures.

Then there is the Kalahari truffle, which isn't actually a truffle at all in the



classic Eurocentric sense of the word, but is an underground fungus that tastes damn fine.

Kalahari truffles (*Terfezia pfeilii*) are found in the Northern Cape and Namibia and have a pleasantly nutty, wild mushroom-like flavour. Kalahari truffles are occasionally available in Gauteng, and Arnold Tanzer of Food on the Move holds the crown as the local king of the crop. Before you rush off in search of a homegrown truffle experience, do remember that the Kalahari truffle season is in April and May and that it is deeply dependent on good rains in March. Sadly, this year's rains were poor so we should all start praying for 2010.

The 19th century Italian composer Rossini once remarked: "I have wept three times in my life — once when my first opera failed; once again, the first time I heard Paganini play the violin; and once when a truffled turkey fell overboard at a boating picnic."

I feel a Kalahari truffle Orange River padkos party coming on. ■

