



SWEET SOMETHINGS: The well-equipped dessert section of the Swiss Week at Grand Hyatt Doha.

Photos by Najee Feroke



FROM THE ALPS: Two musicians play the alphorn, the Swiss national instrument.



Martin Aeschbacher, Swiss Ambassador to Qatar.

Mad about fondue

Food, culture, music – the Grand Hyatt Doha festival is a celebration of everything Swiss. **By Anand Holla**

For those who dig their mousse and fondue, Swiss treats are pretty much the piece de resistance of all things chocolate and cheese. And even for those who don't know their Emmental from their Gruyere, the Swiss Gastronomic Week at the Grand Hyatt Doha could be the most delicious crash course in experiencing Swiss fine dining pleasure.

The Swiss Week, which is on till May 16 at The Grill restaurant, opened in style on Wednesday. Buzzing with the guests' chatter and laughter, the tone of the evening – a rather pleasant one sourced from folk music straight out of Swiss mountains – was set by a few musicians flown in for the event. Playing traditional Swiss music on their accordions and keys, they kept up the merry mood of the evening.

To accompany the choicest of wines was an impressive collection in the cheese and bread section. Although there are around 450 varieties of Swiss cheeses, the most distinct of the lot like tete de moine and emmental had made it to the assortment here.

Apart from the mandatory fondue (a hot dish made of melted cheese), there was raclette (a dish made by heating the cheese and scraping off the melted part), rosti

(crisp, fried, shredded potatoes), and a host of authentic Swiss delicacies that Chef Heinz Ruifbach had whipped up.

To flag off the main course, two musicians played the deep-toned Swiss national instrument alphorn – a 12-foot-long wooden folk instrument played by Swiss shepherds to communicate across mountain valleys. As for the lip-smacking desserts propped up by the finest Swiss chocolates, the Toblerone Mousse certainly took the cake.

Martin Aeschbacher, Swiss Ambassador to Qatar, said that the Swiss Week is a terrific occasion to meet people and enjoy Swiss food. "This is the second edition, and is a Grand Hyatt initiative. The fact that its General Manager Christoph Franzen is also a Swiss helps bring in authenticity to the event."

Not just Franzen, even his two adorable kids were seen dancing next to the musicians, joyously breaking into a traditional Swiss jig. "I take great pride in my culture. Also, having been a chef for many years, anything to do with food is very close to my heart," Franzen said, of how he naturally took to putting the event in order.

Soon after the official opening of the Swiss Embassy in Qatar last April, the Swiss Week was held for the first time. "Food is part of our national identity and it gives a good idea of our culture. In Switzerland, there are a lot of varieties of local food," said Aeschbacher.

"If you think about Swiss food, you think about chocolates,

fondue, and raclette. It's easy to raise cattle in Switzerland as the country is mainly made of mountains. That's why we get a lot of milk, from which we make a lot of cheese," he said, "And then, of course, we have this wonderful traditional music."

Aeschbacher sees the Swiss Week in Doha as an important means of culture exchange. "Doha is an exciting place. It's a hub where you meet a lot of people, and the city is great to be in touch with regional affairs. I happen to meet many of my friends from Iraq, Syria or Egypt, here in Doha," he said.

This is perhaps why the Swiss Week will also play host to an education fair at the same venue here. "In the coming week, we will have 15 Swiss private schools, some of which are highly prestigious, be part of an education fair at the same venue here. That's because when I talk to my Qatari friends, I can see that they are really interested in education."

And for those eager to travel to the Swiss Alps this summer, Aeschbacher has a humble request: "It was difficult to handle the rush of visa applications here last summer. Everybody wanted to go to Switzerland right after Ramadan. It gets tough to process so many visas in such short time. So please apply as early as possible, and we will do our best. And of course, it's a great sign for us that an increasing number of people from Qatar want to visit Switzerland."



SWISS STRAINS: Kids dancing to the tune of Swiss folk music.