

FOOD ON THE MOVE

COMBINING A CITY TOUR WITH A FINE-DINING EXPERIENCE IN THE CAPITAL, BUSTRONOME IS A CULINARY ADVENTURE. GISELLE WHITEAKER SEES THE HIGHLIGHTS OF LONDON IN A NEW LIGHT.

I usually avoid buses any time close to rush hour in London, but tonight, I'm gripping my boyfriend's arm in excitement as I peer down the busy road by Victoria Embankment, watching for the black beauty that's going to transport us around London for the next two hours or so. It's not so much the journey, it's the accompanying meal.

Bustronome is no ordinary bus. The sleek black machine with gold detailing is a fine-dining restaurant on wheels. When it pulls up at the riverside bus stop opposite Cleopatra's Needle, a red carpet appears as if from nowhere and the guests are checked off a list, before being ushered inside and up the stairs to the upper deck.

The dining deck is wrapped in glass, providing panoramic views of Embankment. Square wooden tables accommodate 38 diners in configurations of two to eight, sitting on matching wooden floorboards on either side of the central walkway. Elio and I slide onto cushioned seats across from a small bar area and the charming waiter, Victor, immediately fills our glasses with bubbles and slots them into the cleverly constructed Perspex holder on the tabletop, designed to eliminate spillage once we're on the move. Sipping our aperitifs and nibbling on croutons loaded with olive tapenade as we look down on the bustle of cars



Above: The sleek silhouette of Bustronome. Below: Bustronome swings by a plethora of iconic sights.





Cod fillet with civet of mussels.



Ballotine of chicken, stuffed with lamb mousse and tarragon.



Garlic, rosemary and sun-blushed tomato cheesecake.



Blackberry and strawberry compote with strawberry and cassis mousse.



below, we are warmed by the dwindling rays of sunlight that are in their golden hour. There are worse ways to spend a Wednesday evening.

As we pull gently into the flow of traffic, we pick up the black media pens in the Perspex holder and flip our menus over. On the reverse is a map of our route, with gold dots by each of the sights. Touch the audio pen on a dot and it activates a commentary in a choice of nine languages. We're soon listening to a brief introduction of the Royal Courts of Justice. From the chatter emanating from the other tables, we suspect we are the first to embark on the educational aspect of the journey.

The commentary is just the right length, giving a truncated history and a few pertinent facts about each landmark. Over the course of the journey, we learn Big Ben is hand wound, an exercise that takes around 20 minutes; the Shard has 36 elevators; Piccadilly is named after piccadill collars, trendy in the late 16th century; and Buckingham Palace has 775 rooms. We're also struck by the beauty of London by night, as we glide past St Paul's, cruise over Tower Bridge, and motor by Marble Arch, amongst other iconic sights.

The only thing that draws our gaze from the windows is the food placed before us, starting with a flavour-packed duo of smoked fish with English heritage beetroot, pickled cucumber and lemon cream. Naturally, we wash our first course down with a glass of wine.

Top: Duo of smoked fish.
Bottom: Clever Perspex holders keep spillage to a minimum.





The glass-walled upper deck provides spectacular views.

INFO

For more information or to book your Bustronome experience, see www.bustronome.com/london

The second course is an intriguing tri-coloured cheesecake, comprised of garlic, rosemary and sun-blushed tomatoes and a Cecina crisp base. The pungent cheesecake is sweetened by onion compote and a drizzle of yellow pepper dressing. It's surprisingly light, refreshing the palate.

The pan-fried cod fillet is perhaps my favourite dish, paired with a civet of mussels, purple broccoli and pearl vegetables. It tastes as if it has been plucked from the ocean, which is somewhat ironic as it is dished as we cross the River Thames.

The savoury dishes culminate in a ballotine of chicken, stuffed with fine lamb mousse and tarragon. This is accompanied by fondant potatoes and sweet carrots, and rests on alternating swirls of crushed peas and a rich red sauce. A cheese interval follows, with a triangle of white apricot Stilton cheese served with apple and celery compote and roasted figs.

Just past Harrods, our final course appears: blackberry and strawberry compote with strawberry and cassis mousse and a scoop of vanilla ice cream. Replete, we sit back and enjoy the twinkle of the street lights as we wend our way back to our starting point.

Bustronome offers more than a meal. Paired with the highlights of London, this really is a gastronomic journey. ■

BUSTRONOME'S POACHED EGG AND JERUSALEM ARTICHOKES

SERVES 5

INGREDIENTS

- 5 Eggs
- 250g Jerusalem artichoke
- 100ml Double cream
- 2.5g Butter
- 500ml Water
- 250ml Oil
- 5g Coarse salt
- Salt and pepper
- Parsley

THE PERFECT EGG OR 64-DEGREE EGG

A 64-degree egg (147 degrees Fahrenheit) is an egg cooked in an immersion circulator at a low temperature. Unlike a poached egg, where a soft boil solidifies the white along with some of the yolk, with a 64-degree egg, the white and yolk are cooked uniformly (and minimally) all the way through. Cook the eggs in baskets in an immersion bath. The egg is ready after 20-25 minutes in the bath, but it will stay the desired consistency for another 45 minutes.

JERUSALEM CRISPS

Wash and thinly slice approximately 50g of the Jerusalem artichokes and reserve in water. Heat the oil in a deep fryer – do not exceed 160 degrees or the chips will blacken. Pat the artichoke slices dry with paper towel and consider seasoning after deep frying.

JERUSALEM ARTICHOKE CREAM

Peel the remaining Jerusalem artichokes and put them in the water with 5 grammes of coarse salt. Bring to the boil and simmer until the artchokes are soft. Add a small amount of artichoke to the butter and 25g of the cooking water to make a broth. Blend the rest of the artichoke with double cream, adding some cooking water if needed, until it is a smooth mash.

PREPARATION

Serve the mashed Jerusalem artichoke warm in a bowl or on a deep plate. Add one egg and whisk the Jerusalem artichoke broth before adding. Season with salt and ground pepper.

Decorate with flat parsley and artichoke crisps.

