



Vive l'Escalade & Chocolate Truffles

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Contact me at
susannye@tds.net
603 / 526 7319

Living in Geneva for almost two decades was a wonderful experience. It is a beautiful lakeside city and I have many fond memories of my time there. Among them is the Escapade. A cross between Independence Day, Thanksgiving and Halloween, Geneva celebrates the Escalade in early December.

While most of the ancient walls surrounding the city have disappeared, in 1602 they protected the town from invasion. That's when the dastardly Duke of Savoy laid siege on the city. Throughout the night of December 11th and 12th the Savoyards attacked, attempting to scale the walls and take over city. The attempt to scale the walls gave the battle, and later the holiday, the name Escalade.

All seemed lost until Mother Royaume, defending the lives and liberty of her fourteen children, threw a cauldron of boiling soup over the wall and onto the invading soldiers. Burned and bruised by the steaming soup and heavy iron pot, the Savoyards realized they were no match for la Mère and the fearless Genevois patriots. They turned tail and headed back to Savoy.



Every year, Geneva takes a week to celebrate the Escalade. It is a great time to explore the Old Town. Wandering through the narrow streets and alleys, you will very likely bump into some of the descendants Geneva's early citizens. Dressed in 17th century garb, they lead the festivities and turn the Old Town into a living museum. On the final evening of the celebration, a torchlight procession with fifes and drums winds through Geneva's ancient cobbled streets to Cathedral Square for a bonfire. There are no fireworks but canons are fired and proclamations are read.

Since Switzerland is renowned for its wonderful chocolate, it's only natural that Mère Royaume's infamous soup kettle be immortalized in sweet, creamy goodness. There are lovely, little chocolate shops on every street corner. During December their windows are all filled with beautiful chocolate soup kettles or marmites. They come in all sizes and are crammed full of marzipan vegetables and other sweets.

Many Swiss families celebrate the Escalade with a dinner. The traditional menu includes soup, of course, plus turkey, cardoons, a relative of the artichoke, and a giant chocolate marmite. At the end of the dinner, the oldest and youngest at the party take a rolling pin and smash the chocolate marmite. Chocolate and marzipan fly and everyone scrambles to collect the sweets.

I don't know why, I'm not sure if anyone knows why but Escalade celebrations include a sort of Trick or Treat. Children dress in costume, ride the tram, go door-to-door and even wander through a café or two singing the Escalade song. This song has a seemingly endless supply of verses but my sources tell me there are really only sixty-eight. In appreciation friends, neighbors and hapless bystanders hand out coins and candies. Or maybe it's a desperate attempt to stop all that singing. I did discover on more than one occasion that the young Genevois will continue to sing and sing, and sing some more, until you give them a treat.



Enjoy the holiday season with a big cauldron of soup or maybe some Swiss inspired chocolates!
Bon appétit!

Susan

Chocolate Truffles



Use good quality chocolate, preferably Swiss, to make luscious truffles for the holidays. Enjoy!

Makes about 4 dozen truffles

16 ounces dark chocolate
 1 cup heavy cream
 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
 2 tablespoons cognac (optional)
 2 tablespoons brewed espresso or very strong coffee
 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
 16 ounces milk chocolate

Chop the semisweet chocolate and put it in a heavy sauce pan with the cream and cinnamon. Cook over very low heat, carefully whisking the cream and chocolate together, until the chocolate melts.

Transfer the chocolate cream to a bowl and whisk in the cognac, espresso and vanilla. Chill in the refrigerator, stirring a few times, for 2 hours or until the chocolate mixture is thick and firm enough to scoop.

Line a baking sheet with a silicon mat or parchment paper. With a mini ice cream scoop or 2 teaspoons, make dollops of chocolate and place them on the baking sheet. Refrigerate for 30-45 minutes or until firm enough to roll into rough balls. Place the chocolate balls in the freeze for about one hour or until very cold.

Chop the milk (or white) chocolate and melt half of it over very low heat in a heavy sauce pan. Remove from the heat and add the remaining chocolate. Let the chocolate sit for a few minutes to melt. Stir to combine.

Dip the cold chocolate balls in the melted chocolate until completely covered. Place them on the silicon lined baking sheet. Let the truffles set for a couple of hours or overnight in the refrigerator.

About a half hour before serving, remove the truffles from the refrigerator and let them sit uncovered. Serve at room temperature.



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