



Exploring Northern Ireland

Beyond Fish and Chips

By Kathy McGorray Dougherty

Just a few years ago, an article about the cuisine of Northern Ireland would have been short - very short. I remember my first visit to Northern Ireland in 1991; fish and chips actually were on the menu every night, along with (for some reason) chicken Kiev. Since then, the chefs in Northern Ireland have discovered their own local treasures — abundant seafood, flavorful cheeses, fresh vegetables and fruits, grass-fed beef and lambs, incredible breads and more. They have also, thankfully, discovered a world of spices and seasonings.



Some of my fondest travel memories involve food — the hastily planned picnic by the sea, finding an incredible restaurant in the middle of nowhere, wandering in markets and sampling previously unknown foods. Now, when winter rolls around, I think of the hearty food I've had in Northern Ireland. Fresh seafood, bread pudding dripping in Irish whiskey sauce, delicate cream of carrot soup, hearty brown bread, flakey, slightly sweet scones with creamy butter — I could go on and on. Of course, there was plenty of strong tea, Guinness and Irish whiskey to wash it down.

Organic and locally grown foods are gaining popularity in Northern Ireland. We stopped by a farmer's market in Dungannon, County Tyrone, and walked away with armloads of goodies; fresh baked goods, crisp apples from the orchard down the road, homemade chutney and more. And this was just a small market!

New organizations promoting the cuisine of Northern Ireland are springing up. The Taste of Ulster highlights restaurants throughout the north, while the Tyrone Good Food Circle recommends eating establishments in Co. Tyrone that meet its standards

for everything from utilizing locally grown products to providing excellent customer service.

Northern Ireland is also home to a world-famous cooking school — the Belle Isle School of Cookery located on Upper Lough Erne near Enniskillen in County Fermanagh. The school is located on a 470-acre estate that includes deluxe self-catering accommodations. The estate itself is actually a working farm that includes its own dairy herd. The cooking school offers courses ranging from one to seven days. You can read more about the school and sign up for classes at their website www.irish-cookery-school.com.

Kathy McGorray Dougherty is owner of Northern Ireland Travels, which specializes in creating personalized, self-guided trips to Northern Ireland. For more information, visit their website at www.nirelandtravels.com.