

FOOD

Valerie O'Sullivan

Grate expectations
Cheesemaker Maja Binder's dairy creations include seaweed-flavoured offerings and Italian-style cheeses



A SLICE OF SMALL TOWN PRIDE

HOT SIPS

Martin Moran on what to look for in Lidl's French wines sale
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KATY McGUINNESS



How did Dingle become the country's top culinary destination? By creating a vibrant community of like-minded foodies

A year ago, the Restaurants Association of Ireland named Dingle the country's top "foodie town". The west Kerry fishing port beat heavyweight competition from Galway, Kilkenny and Cork to win the inaugural prize. As the nominations close for the 2015 contest, highlighting once again just what it takes to become a renowned destination for culinary tourists, just how did tiny Dingle, home to fewer than 2,000 souls, do it?

Dingle is blessed with a picturesque coastal location and its boats can land catches within metres of restaurant kitchens. The rugged hinterland also suits the mountain sheep, the proximity to the sea imparting a salty tang to their meat (Dingle butcher Jerry Kennedy sells lamb considered by many to be the best in Ireland). In addition, the local dexter cattle, which are small and hardy and are ideally adapted to the area's rough terrain, produce meat that is richly marbled and much prized by chefs.

Having great fish and meat is not enough, however. For a town to establish itself as the country's premier food destination, it needs not only fishermen and farmers, but also growers and foragers, cheesemakers and artisan food producers, shopkeepers, chefs, restaurateurs and cafe owners. It needs craft brewers and distillers, and bar-owners committed to making their premises welcoming and convivial — not forgetting hotels and B&Bs where the hospitality comes easy.

When all these like-minded folk come together and collaborate with singular purpose, they can create a vibrant and ➔



→ sustainable food community for the benefit of the whole town — and that is how it appears to be in Dingle.

For the first-time visitor, the town can be a little overwhelming. Where should you begin? Coffee is always a good place to start. Bean in Dingle, on Green Street, opened in June and is a modern space with a large communal table and a window bar, serving its own blend of coffee roasted to order by Badger & Dodo in Cork. It offers cinnamon rolls from the Bacus Bakery, in nearby Cloghane, and muffins and sausage rolls made by Michelle O Sullivan's Bluirini Blasta, in the Dingle food park.

Bean in Dingle's owner, Justin Burgess, moved to the town with his family 14 years ago, aged 11, and spent eight summers working as a barista at Murphy's Ice Cream while studying for a degree in environmental science at University College Cork.

"I got great coffee training there," he says. "And I got to know Brock Lewin from Badger & Dodo, who is a lovely guy — very dedicated, with a real passion for coffee. When I found the premises on Green Street, I went to him and chose the

blend [coffee nerds will want to know that it's 50% Brazil ipanema, 25% Guatemala san juan, and 25% Ethiopia yirgacheffe], which is quite different from anything that was available in Dingle before, smoother and sweeter on the palate. People seem to enjoy it, we've had overwhelming local support."

At next month's Dingle Food Festival,

Burgess will serve delights that include espresso martinis, with his parents, sister and brother drafted in to help. "I'm excited for our first festival," he says.

After coffee, you could do worse than try a scoop or several of Murphy's ice cream — Kerry Cream Vanilla, Toasted Irish Oats and Dingle Sea Salt, perhaps — made from the milk of the indigenous

Local heroes

Clockwise from top right: Murphy's has introduced sorbets made from rainwater; award-winning restaurants include the Global Village; Out of the Blue chef Eric Maillard rewrites the menu each day, depending on the catch; pubs such as Dick Mack's offer music with local brews. Seafood, below, is a speciality



Kerry cow, a breed that had languished for years until the Murphy brothers remembered the deliciously creamy quality of its milk and decided to use it in their products.

This year, the Murphys have introduced a range of Rainwater Sorbets, capitalising on one of the town's most abundant natural resources, and now have two shops in the town, as well as outposts in Dublin and Killarney. The raspberry and chocolate versions are exquisite.

Then you could drop in to Maja Binder's Little Cheese Shop on Green Street, where you will find the German cheesemaker's Dingle Peninsula cheeses, including the seaweed-flavoured Dilliskus, as well as Olivier Beaujouan's On the Wild Side charcuterie, and Saorla O'Corrain's Dovinia range of handmade chocolates, including cheese chocolates — flavours include Milleens, Cashel Blue and Gortnamona — which must be tasted to be appreciated fully.

"I'm so pleased that people like what I'm doing," says Binder, who comes from the Black Forest, trained as a cheese maker in Switzerland and arrived in Ireland in 1997, founding Dingle Peninsula Cheese the following year. She says she is coming to the end of her busiest summer yet.

As well as the shop, Binder has a stall at the Dingle Farmers' Market, which is a huge draw for locals and tourists and takes place every Friday on Holyground, near the harbour. Binder sells her dried Dingle truffle cheese for grating over pasta and salads, as well as fresh mozzarella and cream cheese that she makes every few days in the summer months. At the festival, she will be serving a Swiss-style fondue laced with red wine and poitin.

In the Dingle food park, Michelle O'Sullivan's neighbours include Dingle Sushi and Seamus Fitzgerald's new butcher, Micilin Muc, making sausages, black and white puddings and dry-cured bacon. Fitzgerald started up only a month ago, but his products are already the talk of the town. He says he set up his business as an alternative to being on the dole, using skills he picked up over 15 years working in the trade in the UK.

"All I have is a mincer, and I'm making sausages the traditional way, so the texture is coarser than most commercial sausages. I think it gives better flavour. It's a small operation so I'm not afraid of trying new things. It's just me, so it is hard work, but it's going great," he says.

Also in the food park is the Dingle Cookery School, run by chef Mark Murphy — who has stints at Longueville House, L'Ecrivain and Global Village on his CV — and his business partner, Muireann nic Giolla Ruaidh.

"We've had a brilliant first year," says Murphy. "Over the winter it's mainly locals, either for month-long, one-night-a-week courses on learning to cook, or improving skills, or pastry, or for one-day courses on bread, or gluten-free or edible Christmas gifts. Our Pig in a Day [pork nose-to-tail butchery and cookery] course was really popular, too."

"Then in summer it's more tourists. The 'Catch & Cook' course [which combines Atlantic sea fishing with cooking and eating the fresh catch] is really fun — people get so competitive and there's always one poor fella who catches nothing and another who catches 10. The North Americans in particular love the Traditional Irish course. We give them tea and scones and teach them about the history of Irish food."

On the Friday of the food festival, people from the Camphill community



Over to you

At the Dingle Cookery School, Mark Murphy teaches a traditional Irish cuisine course that is popular with visitors, writes *Katy McGuinness*. Below, we share three of his recipes with you. The hake dish uses locally caught fish and the Kerry apple cake is based on a traditional recipe. “The recipe for Dingle pies is our version of a dish that was served on fair day in Dingle,” says Murphy. “We use Dingle Peninsula lamb and mix it with onions, celery, carrots and herbs. Traditionally, most pies would have consisted only of mutton.”

HAKE AND SEASONAL GREENS

Serves 4
What you will need
For the dressing
Juice of 1 lemon
Leaves from 5-6 sprigs thyme
For the fish
100ml/3½ fl oz rapeseed oil
Cider vinegar
Salt and pepper
2 beetroots, washed
50g/1¾ oz butter
For the hake
Salt and pepper
Bunch of seasonal greens
120g/4oz hake per portion (180g-200g/6oz-7oz for main course)
Dried seaweed flakes

How to prepare
Mix together dressing ingredients and season well. Place beets in a pot, skins on, and cover with water. Bring to boil, then simmer until tender. Remove from water and allow to cool slightly, then, remove skins, using a cloth. Purée beets in a blender with some of the cooking liquid and some of the butter. Season well with salt and pepper.
To prepare greens, separate them and remove large stalks but keep them.
Put a drop of rapeseed oil into a pan on a medium to high heat. Season fish, then lay fillets in pan, skin-side down. Fry until skin is golden and crisp, and fillets are cooked two-thirds of way through. Turn fish over, reduce heat and cook for about two more minutes. When almost cooked, add small bit of butter. Turn off heat and allow to rest.
Meanwhile, wash greens gently, retaining a little water on them. Heat a pan. Add stalks to pan with a little water and cook for about a minute, before adding greens and cooking for two more minutes, or until wilted. Season. Place some greens in centre of plate, spread some beetroot around and place fish on top. Drizzle dressing over fish, then sprinkle with seaweed flakes.



KERRY APPLE CAKE

Serves 6-8
What you will need
110g/3¾ oz butter cubed
110g/3¾ oz sugar
2 eggs
225g/8oz self-raising flour
4 large cooking apples, peeled and sliced finely
2 tbsp milk
25g/1oz flaked almonds
1 tbsp brown sugar
chantilly cream or custard, to serve

How to prepare
Preheat oven to 170C/gas mark 4. Cream butter and sugar, beat in eggs and milk, then sieve in flour. Mix, then add the apples. The mixture should be quite wet. If it is a little dry, add a drop of milk. Place in a 9in deep, greased tin and top with flaked almonds and brown sugar. Bake for 30 minutes. Serve warm with some chantilly cream or custard.



DINGLE PIES

Serves 6
What you will need
For the filling
450g/16oz boneless lamb (shoulder or leg. Keep bones for stock)
1 onion, diced finely
2 cloves garlic, minced
2 carrots, finely diced
½ stick celery, finely diced
400ml/14 fl oz stock
2 tsp flour
For the pastry
(optional)
Bunch parsley, chopped
Leaves from bunch thyme
Salt and pepper
350g/12oz white flour
175g/6oz butter (or 100g/4oz butter cubed plus 75g/2oz lard)
100ml/3½ fl oz water
Pinch salt
1 egg, beaten with pinch of salt

How to prepare.
To make the pastry, sieve flour and salt into a bowl making a well in the centre. Dice butter, or butter and lard, and bring to the boil in a pan with the water. Pour liquid into flour and mix quickly, beating to a smooth dough. Wrap in clingfilm and allow to rest for at least a half an hour.
For the filling, sweat onion in oil over a low to medium heat for three to five minutes, seasoning with salt and pepper. Add garlic and cook for another two to three minutes, then add celery, carrots and thyme. Cook until shiny.
Mix meat with flour and a little salt and pepper. Place a pan over medium to high heat, then add a little oil and some of meat pieces. Cook until browned. Remove and repeat with more meat. Add meat to vegetables and cover with stock. Season and add a bay leaf. Cook over a low heat for two to three hours, until lamb is tender and falling apart. Add parsley, taste and season again.
Preheat oven to at 200C/gas mark 6. Oil a muffin tin, roll out pastry and cut into small discs to fit tin, then cut lids for pies. Press a disc into each round of tin and fill with lamb mixture. Brush egg wash over edges of the pastry and place a lid on each pie. Crimp edges with a fork, brush with egg wash and pierce small holes in centre. Bake for 25 minutes.



will give demonstrations of cheese-making at the cookery school.
When it comes to dinner, Martin Bealin’s award-winning Global Village restaurant is a must-see. The way Bealin tells it, it’s a simple matter of fresh fish from local inshore fisherman, meat from farmers who operate sustainable policy and practices, and seasonal vegetables grown in the restaurant’s own chemical-free and biodynamic garden. But all that takes a lot of hard work, and Bealin still manages to produce food that is sophisticated yet unpretentious, the menu a joyous celebration of all that the Dingle Peninsula has to offer.
Alternatively, head to seafood eaterie Out of the Blue, where the menu is rewritten each day according to whatever the boats have landed at the quay across the road or the catch dropped in by anglers. It’s the restaurant you have looked for in every seaside town you have ever been to, and seldom found. The modest appearance and casual ambience — it’s a shack, not to put too fine a point on it — belie the excellence of its offering.
Or you could try the Chart House, Doyle’s, the Half Door, Ashe’s, Lord Baker’s, An Canteen, the Boatyard, Fenton’s, Idas, Reel Dingle Fish, the Grey’s Lane Bistro (formerly the Goat St Café) or the Goat (located in what used to be the Goat St Café). Truly, you are spoilt for choice.
There are great pubs, too. There is the celebrated Dick Mack’s, but there is also Foxy John’s or Curran’s (both of which double as hardware shops, and both of which have upped their game in recent

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times and now offer better facilities and an improved range of drinks). The Dingle Distillery’s vodka and gin is widely available (the whiskey is due at the end of the year), as is Tom Crean’s locally brewed lager.
Dingle could teach many larger towns a lesson. Its tradition of hospitality has moved seamlessly from being pub-focused, towards a more varied offering that anchors the appeal of the town to a

broader base. It still has excellent pubs, and they will always be one of the draws, but food has become of greater importance, recognising the change in, and diversity of, visitor priorities.
Much lip service is paid to local and seasonal produce, but the Dingle food community is the real deal. Provenance is not just a fancy word on the town’s menus, but an ethos that it lives and breathes, with local produce highlighted almost everywhere that food is served. The natural synergies that exist in Dingle have created a genuine modern food community with pride in its heritage and optimism about its future, well deserving of its selection as Ireland’s first foodie town.
The Dingle Food Festival takes place from October 2-4. dinglefood.com