

...There is far more
to Irish cuisine than
Irish stew!...



DINGLE COOKERY SCHOOL



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COOKERY
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IRELAND

by SUSAN KORAH



HERIBERT BECHEN



Ireland

WHERE ON EARTH

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
 LEFT Fishing boats in Dingle Harbour; Muireann and Mark co-owners of Dingle Cookery School; Strand St, Dingle; Hake sizzling in the pan; Apples are locally grown.

FORTIFIED BY BOWLS OF STICK-TO-THE-RIBS ORGANIC oatmeal splashed with Bailey's Irish Cream, and warmed by the charming hospitality of the O' Donahue family, owners of Old Weir Lodge, our guesthouse in Killarney, a group of friends and I set off for Dingle, one of Ireland's most celebrated culinary capitals, and one of the most picturesque towns on its southwestern coast.

Leaving the emerald bays and winding dells of Killarney behind, our coach is soon on the Wild Atlantic Way scenic route. Pastoral cameos of gently rolling hills and lush green meadows sprinkled with brightly coloured wild flowers flash past the coach windows. We watch fat black cows grazing contentedly, and are told that they are a special breed dating back to the sixth century BCE when they were bred by Celtic tribes.

These scenes soon give way to the ruggedly beautiful coastline of the Dingle Peninsula. The seascape, the pungent smell of fresh sea air and the sight of fishing boats in the pretty harbour foreshadow the culinary adventure that's awaiting us.

As our coach pulls up at Dingle Cookery School, a simple white and brown building surrounded by vegetable and flower gardens, we are warmly welcomed by co-owner and instructor Muireann Nic Giolla Ruaidh.»



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MAKES 1 LOAF

Traditional Irish Brown Bread

This old-fashioned bread is traditionally shaped by hand but you can also use a loaf pan.

Wholewheat Flour 300 g	Baking Soda 1 Tbs
Plain White Flour 200 g	Buttermilk 300–360 ml
Rolled Oats 80 g	Salt a pinch

- 1 PREHEAT** the oven to 190°C.
- 2 MIX** all the dry ingredients together.
- 3 ADD** the buttermilk until the mixture reaches a stiff porridge-like consistency.
- 4 PLACE** the dough on a floured tray and shape into flat loaf around 3 inches thick and make a cross on the dough.
- 5 BAKE** for 30 minutes.
- 6 CHECK** by putting a skewer into the centre, and if it comes out dry the bread is done. If it is still wet, bake for a few more minutes.

«As Irish as her name, she — like many others in County Kerry — speaks the Irish language fluently, and is not only a cooking instructor but, like her business partner and teaching colleague Mark Murphy, is a veritable encyclopaedia of knowledge on the lifestyles and culinary heritage of her ancestors.

With typical Irish hospitality, she welcomes our group with cups of tea and freshly baked scones before putting us to work.

We are here not only to admire the scenery, but also for a cooking lesson, and to discover that there is far more to Irish cuisine than Irish stew!

We work in pairs at our own cooking stations as Muireann and fellow instructor Cristina Ni Mhorain demonstrate and explain the techniques in a way that allows both beginner cooks and seasoned professionals to create a superbly prepared and presented meal.

Later, as we sit down to enjoy the fruits of our labour — pan-fried fish (hake) with seasonal green beans, beets and lemon with thyme dressing, traditional Irish brown bread and Muireann's grandmother's Kerry Apple Cake — I reflect that it is almost literally a taste of Ireland — the freshest ingredients including the fish that was whisked off a local fishing boat that very morning, the vegetables grown in the school's own garden, and apples from an orchard in the surrounding countryside.

As we linger over cake and coffee, Muireann regales me with family anecdotes and stories behind some of the dishes we had prepared earlier; also, fascinating tidbits of Irish food history.

"Apples were recorded in Irish history from approximately 5,000 years ago as crab apple pips were found in archeological digs," she says. She goes on to explain that the first apples as we know them were brought in by the Normans and further cultivated by the Tudors.

"Apples would have been plentiful and used for eating, baking, feeding pigs and for making cider," she points out, adding that the Kerry Apple Cake we are indulging in is her grandmother's own recipe. "We used to have an apple tree in our garden when I was a child and many of our desserts would be apple-based," she says.

Muireann's tone is nostalgic as she reminisces about her childhood and her grandmother Hanorah from whom she learned the arts of baking and cooking.

"My grandmother taught me to make brown and white soda bread, currant bread and Kerry Apple Cake; also, wonderful potato cakes and amazing beef shepherd's pies," she continues in her lilting Irish voice.

She adds that her weekly visits with her grandmother would end with Hanorah tying her granddaughter's hair with a colourful bow before sending her home to her mother.

Sadly, our time together is coming to an end, but Muireann squeezes in one more anecdote about the brown bread we had baked for our meal. "The brown bread was always made in the form of a cake and prior to putting it in the oven, I was told to make a cross on the top to let the fairies out. I believed for years that there were fairies in my grandmother's house and used to go

searching for them around her house and garden.”

As I finish up my last bits of apple cake and coffee, I ask myself if anything could be more Irish than this — sharing a meal while listening to stories.

Run as a partnership between Muireann and Mark Murphy, “the region’s food hero” as Muireann describes him, the Dingle Cookery School offers unique culinary experiences and imaginative, hands-on classes including “Traditional Irish Cooking and ‘Catch and Cook.’” The latter combines a fishing adventure with a cooking lesson, when participants go out on chartered fishing boats, then return with their catch to learn how to transform it into a sumptuous meal.

The Dingle Food Festival

Mark was unfortunately away on the day of our visit, but it is fair to say that Mark and Muireann were at the helm of developments that put Dingle on the gastronomic map of Ireland.

With their combined drive and energy, passion for food and local produce, and years of experience in the food and hospitality business, the energetic duo not only train thousands of visitors every year to cook the Irish way, but have also been instrumental in developing the Dingle Farmer’s Market and the Dingle Food Festival which includes a Dingle Food Trail.

Held each year in the first weekend of October — the best weekend of the year as locals describe it — the Dingle Food Festival is a vibrant carnival of tastes, colours and textures that celebrates the peninsula’s produce and shows off the cooking skills of its finest chefs.

Organized by a small group of enthusiastic volunteers, it is now in its twelfth year, and has become one of Ireland’s most anticipated food events.

“The main aim of the festival is to celebrate the amazing food we have available here on the Dingle Peninsula,” says Mark in an e-mail interview. “We are fortunate to have incredible raw ingredients to work with.”

He emphasizes that the festival shares the same ethos as the school, which is to focus on quality local ingredients and local producers to share the message of what Irish food really is.

Having tasted real Irish food at the Dingle Cookery School while enjoying the stunning scenery, I promise myself that my next trip to Ireland will coincide with the Dingle Food Festival. **T&T**



DINGLE is in County Kerry, on the southwestern coast of Ireland, 71 kms northwest of Killarney. It is a little over an hour by coach from Killarney along a scenic highway. www.kerrycoaches.com

Dingle Cookery School
www.dinglecookeryschool.ie

Dingle Food Festival
www.dinglefood.com



SUSAN KORAH

MAKES 1 x 9" CAKE

Kerry Apple Cake

Self-Raising Flour¹ 225 g

Sugar 110 g

Butter 110 g

Cooking Apples 4
large, peeled
and sliced

Eggs 2

Milk 2 Tbs

Brown Sugar
1 Tbs

Flaked Almonds
25 g

- 1 PREHEAT** the oven to 170°C
- 2 CREAM** the butter and sugar.
- 3 BEAT** in the eggs and milk.
- 4 SIEVE** the flour into the mixture.
- 5 MIX** together and add in the sliced apples. The mixture should be quite wet. If a little dry, add some more milk.
- 6 PLACE** in a 9" deep greased cake pan and top with the flaked almonds and brown sugar.
- 7 BAKE** for 30 minutes.
- 8 SERVE** warm with some whipped dairy cream or custard. A cup of tea or coffee is the perfect accompaniment!

¹ If you don't have self-raising flour, use all-purpose flour and add 3 tsp baking powder and ½ tsp salt before sifting it.

SUSAN KORAH is an Ottawa-based journalist and travel writer. She has a Master's degree in journalism from Carleton University, and writes on national and international politics as well as travel and culture.