



BRITAIN AND IRELAND

Agricultural countries with distinct cultures and histories, the foods of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland are rooted in farming traditions. They share many signature dishes, but each has its own variations.

TRADITIONAL INGREDIENTS

BUTTER

SUET

PORK

BEEF

LAMB

GAME

EGGS

POTATOES

ONIONS

PARSNIPS

CABBAGE

BERRIES

These large islands have landscapes that vary from marshland to lush pastureland, and from cliff-lined coasts to windswept moors and rocky mountains. Rainfall is plentiful and the soil rich, providing good conditions for farming, which dominates much of the countryside.

England, Scotland, and Wales

The island of Great Britain—bounded by the English Channel to the south, the North Sea to the east, the Irish Sea to the west, and the North Atlantic to the north—is an island of many rivers, lakes, and lochs, as well as highlands, moors, and pastureland. Eighty-five percent of the land here is used for farming, although today, most of the population lives in cities and much of Britain's food is imported.

A taste of history

Though originally inhabited by local tribes, such as the Celts, England, Scotland, and Wales were colonized by the Romans in the 1st century AD, and prospered until the 5th century, when they were overrun by Germanic tribes. There were Scandinavian invasions in the 9th and 10th centuries, and, in 1066, the island was conquered by the Normans. An important world power from the 16th century to the middle of the 20th, Britain colonized countries as far-flung as North America, India, Hong Kong, and parts of Africa. All of these factors have helped to shape modern-day British cuisine.

Britain's love of sugar took hold during the colonial period, when vast amounts were suddenly available from the West Indies.

Formerly an expensive commodity, reserved for the well-off, sugar quickly became affordable for the middle and working classes. From the beginning of the 19th century to its end, sugar consumption grew by five times. Using sugar as a preservative, canning also became possible. Even more importantly, sugar was associated with three other imports, coffee, chocolate, and tea, all of which became fashionable among the middle and upper classes. Of the three, tea was by far the most popular (see box, page 12).

For a long time, Scottish cuisine was greatly influenced by France. These two countries maintained a special relationship for hundreds of years, and they were allies during many conflicts with the English. During the 16th century, this "Auld Alliance" brought about a change in culinary fashions among the upper classes. It became fashionable in court circles to have a French chef, and French wines and brandy were adopted. The taste for the lavish became so

The British fry-up (opposite)

Fried bacon, eggs, sausage, black pudding, mushrooms, and bread, as well as grilled tomatoes, are all typical in a traditional cooked breakfast.

Beer appreciation

There is a great beer-drinking tradition in the British Isles. Pubs (bars) serve light ales and lagers and dark ales and stouts by the pint and half-pint.





Llangloffan cheese

Made in a farm near a small village in Wales, this hard, full-fat cheese is typical of the farmhouse cheeses that are once again becoming popular.

popular that a food shortage occurred, and, in 1581, a law limiting certain dishes to the rich was passed. During this period, many French-derived Scottish food terms came into being, like "jigot" from "gigot," meaning a leg of mutton, and "asht" from "assiette," meaning a meat dish. The Scottish refer to a flavorless dish as having no "gout," from "gout," the French for "taste."

During the 20th century, there were two major influences on British gastronomy as a whole. The first was the Second World War, during which time there was severe food rationing. This probably led to the plainness that is often associated with British food. The second, and contrasting, factor has been the growing influence over the last 50 years of the many immigrants from Britain's former colonies, particularly from the Indian subcontinent and the

West Indies. Indian food is widespread in Britain, although its authenticity is often questionable. Recently voted as Britain's most popular dish, the curry-house dish, chicken tikka massala, was actually invented in Britain rather than India. Balti cooking, so-called after the woklike pan in which the food is cooked, is better known in England, particularly Birmingham, than in Pakistan its home country.

European immigration has also made its mark, particularly in London, where there are many Italian and Greek Cypriot restaurants.

Over the past couple of decades, British restaurant cooking has enjoyed a renaissance, as people traveled more and tastes broadened. The food journalist R.W. Apple laments the loss of British tradition, describing modern British cooking as "about 40 per cent French bourgeois, 30 per cent Italian, and—after factoring in bits of Thai, Japanese and American south-western—only about 20 per cent British."

Staple foods

Meat has for many centuries been at the center of British gastronomy. With the country's lush pastureland, it has always been abundant. Beef is widely eaten, with Scottish Aberdeen Angus being particularly prized. A roast joint of beef, served with Yorkshire pudding (made from batter and the meat drippings), is a signature dish throughout the United Kingdom. Lamb is another favorite, particularly in Wales and other sheep-herding regions. Again, roasting is the preferred cooking method, and a sweet mint jelly is the usual accompaniment. Pork is another widely eaten meat.

No matter what the animal—bull, sheep, or pig—it was the custom until recently to use every part of it—head, tail, feet, offal, ears, and even the blood. Some of Britain's traditional dishes, including black pudding, Scottish haggis, and Lancashire hotpot (a lamb and kidney stew), grew out of this practice.

Meat is also used to fill pies, which are made often with a pastry shortened with suet (a type of hard fat). In the past, these were easy for workers to carry down into the mines or out into the

■ TEA: THE DRINK OF ALL CLASSES

BRITAIN IS KNOWN AS A NATION OF TEA DRINKERS, AND THIS TRADITION TOOK HOLD IN THE 16TH TO 18TH CENTURIES, WHEN COLONIAL EXPANSION MADE TEA AND SUGAR—ONCE LUXURY GOODS—MORE AVAILABLE TO ALL CLASSES. SWEETENED TEA SOON BECAME A CHEAP SOURCE OF ENERGY FOR THE WORKERS OF THE GROWING INDUSTRIES, AND IT WAS SOON REGULARLY DRUNK WITH THE EVENING MEAL OF THE LESS WELL-OFF; IN SOME HOUSEHOLDS THE WORD "TEA" HAS BECOME SYNONYMOUS WITH DINNER, THE MEAL EATEN IN THE EVENINGS AFTER WORK.

fields. Sometimes the pastry would be filled with meat at one end and something sweet at the other, making an entire meal. The best-known of the British meat pies is the Cornish pasty, a miner's turnover usually filled with beef and potatoes. Pork pies, fish pies, vegetable pies, and steak and kidney pies are also traditional.

Great Britain, particularly the North of England and Scotland, is rich with game. Roast venison, guinea fowl, hare, and various game birds are part of the gastronomic landscape. Hunting is a traditional sport among the upper classes, but people of all classes have always appreciated what the countryside has to offer.

It is worth noting that until relatively recently, country people and the poor subsisted largely on grain porridges and dairy products. Animals were only used for meat when they had outlived their usefulness for producing wool, milk, and eggs.

With Britain's many rivers and long coastlines, fish has always been an important element in the national diet. Battered fish with chips is Britain's original fast food, but there are many finer dishes based on fish, like salmon, turbot, sole, and the abundant shellfish found in the cold seas.

Scotland is particularly rich in seafood. The deep seas around it provide a wide variety, and freshwater fish, such as carp, tench, and trout, thrive in Scottish rivers. The salmon that go up these rivers to spawn are world famous. In Celtic times the sea was sacred, and the eating of fish was forbidden. However, by the 11th century, fish became important, because the Roman Catholic Church forbade meat on Fridays. Fishing has since been a major source of income.

Other specialties

Britain produces some renowned farmhouse cheeses, such as Cheshire, Wensleydale, Cheddar, Double Gloucester, and Stilton. Cheese is enjoyed on its own as a course, and it is an ingredient in many dishes, such as Welsh rarebit (eggs and melted cheese on toast).

England, Scotland, and Wales also have strong baking traditions. A variety of goods are made—yeasted breads and tea cakes, griddle



SMOKED FISH: REGIONAL SPECIALTIES

Because Scotland's fish supplies are seasonal, preserving methods were developed hundreds of years ago, probably introduced by Viking raiders from Scandinavia. These evolved into regional specialties. Kippering (salting, drying, and cold-smoking) is a west coast tradition, as this is where the best herring is found. Finnan haddock are cured in Findon, a village south of Aberdeen. To the north, whittings are wind-dried and moistened during curing to produce speldings. Arbroath smokies are smoked haddock, tied in pairs and smoked over halved whisky barrels sunk into pits.

There are two main types of smoking: hot smoking leaves fish ready for the table, as with smoked salmon; cold smoking will preserve the fish, but they then must be cooked. When home curing became illegal in the 19th century, factories in Aberdeen came into being, and were the basis of much of the town's prosperity.

bread and scones (baking soda biscuits). Oatcakes and griddle-baked breads called bannocks are specialties of Scotland. England is also known for its rich desserts, which are referred to as "puddings," probably because so many traditional desserts are just that: baked or steamed puddings made with generous amounts of butter, eggs, and cream. Summer pudding, made with berries and bread; spotted dick; trifle, a custard and cake confection; and jam roly poly, a jam-filled sponge, are all favorites.

Traditional fruits

Seasonal produce forms the basis of many English foods and drinks. Strawberries are picked for jellies or eaten with cream. Apples are cooked into pies or made into cider.



FOOD

In Ireland, a deeply Roman Catholic country, many eating customs evolved because of the Church.

Fish is traditionally eaten on Fridays, caught from local waters and streams. Cakes, to which spices or dried fruits are added, are made for occasions like weddings, baptisms, Christmas, and Easter. Pancakes derive from the Shrove Tuesday tradition, when all the milk, butter, and eggs, which were not permitted during Lent, were mixed into a batter and fried. According to village lore, a woman's marriageability was determined by how well she tossed pancakes.



Ireland

At the western edge of Europe, this is a land of rich, green farmland and bounteous coastal waters. The climate is relatively mild and quite wet. A microclimate produced by the Gulf Stream allows yucca and palms to grow in some areas.

A farming country with strong Celtic traditions, many Irish originally came from Scotland—the two countries are only 50 miles (80 km) apart at the island's north-eastern edge. Late in the 12th century, the Normans invaded from England, and many years of English control ensued. The English controlled only the eastern

part of the island until Elizabethan times, but then the whole of Ireland was subjugated. It was not until 1922 that Ireland was declared a free state, independent from Britain. Northern Ireland remains part of the United Kingdom.

Before the arrival of the potato in the 18th century, the Irish staples were dairy products and cereals—oats, barley, rye, and wheat—foods that remain important in the diet today. Cereals were used to make coarse flat breads and porridges, and butter was required to moisten these abrasive foods. Ale, consumed throughout the day, was brewed from barley. Milk was soured, made into curds and into soft and hard cheeses—Ireland has a fine farmhouse cheese tradition. The affluent ate meat—mutton and fresh and salted pork, beef, and venison—which was roasted on spits or boiled in cauldrons. For most people, though, meat was restricted to salted bacon. Fresh meat was a treat for holy days or festivals.

After the English conquests of the 16th and 17th centuries, more foods were introduced and Irish cooking evolved again. The cooks in the

SIGNATURE DISHES

Cullen skink A Scottish chowder made with Finnan haddock, onions, potatoes, and milk.

Roast beef Traditionally served with horseradish sauce and Yorkshire puddings.

Fish and chips Deep-fried, battered fish served with french fries and mushy peas, traditionally served wrapped in newspaper.

Haggis This Scottish sausagelike dish is made from a sheep's stomach lining, stuffed with offal, oatmeal and suet (hard fat).

Colcannon Mashed potatoes with cabbage, kale, or parsnips, popular in Ireland.

Bacon and cabbage Sometimes considered Ireland's national dish.

Bread and butter pudding A baked dessert made with buttered bread.

Bara brith Spicy Welsh fruit bread.

households of the Anglo-Irish gentry drew upon French cookery and adapted recipes brought back from the European "grand tours." The most important food brought into Ireland during this period was the potato. By the 19th century, it was the staple food of a third of the population. It was probably introduced to Ireland from plundered ships of the Spanish Armada, which were wrecked on the west coast. Overdependence on the potato led to the Potato Famine of the 1840s, when successive harvests failed. At this time, Ireland lost much of its population; those who did not die of starvation emigrated.

The Potato Famine affected for subsequent generations the way people thought about food. Nettles, wild greens, herbs, game, and oatcakes, which had been eaten out of necessity during the Famine, were later eschewed because of their associations with the "great hunger." The Irish diet became bland and conservative; plain food symbolized economic comfort. Until the 1960s, the average dinner consisted of meat, potatoes, and a vegetable, eaten with buttered bread and strong black tea. Tea, along with processed foods like sugar, jelly and white bread, had become available to the general Irish populace during the latter half of the 19th century. As in Great Britain, tea grew to be an important part of the diet, considered as both a food and a beverage.

In recent decades, Ireland has prospered, and more of its people have traveled overseas and been exposed to ethnic foods. The nation's palate has broadened, and many cooks are now committed to developing indigenous Irish foods and products—farmhouse cheeses, fish and shellfish, seaweeds, baked goods, farm-raised produce, and meats. There is also a great revival of home baking using domestic wheat. Soda-raised bread, made with delicious wholewheat flour and soured milk, is an Irish specialty. Many Irish baked goods come from the North and have ties with Scottish breads and pastries.

One of the riches of Ireland is its fish, and particularly its salmon. The salmon is revered in Irish folklore, as there is said to be a connection between this fish and the soul. A salmon is even pictured on one of the country's coins.



The country Irish have a tradition of hospitality which dates from Celtic times. People were long taught to leave their doors open, inviting passersby to partake with them of whatever food was on the table.

Food through the day

There are strong breakfast customs in the British Isles, and large, fried breakfasts have long been much-loved, though light breakfasts are now more the norm. In Ireland and Scotland porridge is commonly eaten. Though traditionally a country dish, Scottish students off to college would take porridge bags with them. During holidays the bags would be brought home for refilling. This student holiday is still celebrated as Mealy Monday at Scottish universities.

Lunch can be a light meal, as simple as a sandwich or a soup, and this tends to be the case in cities. Today, dinner is usually the main meal of the day, often consisting of a stew or meat or fish, with a vegetable and a starch, like potatoes.

Time for tea

Whether it's half time or between the hours of 3 and 5 pm, tea and cakes are a welcome treat. A cream tea consists of tea drunk with dainty cakes and scones. Tea may also be a more substantial meal with sandwiches or sausages and beans.