



MEET & EATS



ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHS BY ARANKA ESTEVE, YANG SHUO, MICHELLE HENDERSON, PAULA VERWULLEN, AND ANNIE SPRATT

If music festivals no longer suit your interests, it's time to embrace the food festival, where culinary yearnings are satiated with an evolving array of cuisines and innovative offerings. **ALI DUNWORTH** lines up this year's must-catch options.

Think you're finished with festivals? Don't give up too quickly – festival season no longer needs to be a lost weekend somewhere obscure, getting muddy in a field. Swap out chasing tunes to chasing edibles and you'll find there's a rousing food festival circuit growing and thriving around Ireland, inspired by the much-loved Ballymaloe Litfest. This event elevated its genre with thought provoking talks and demos, unrivalled artisan food offerings, and – importantly – plenty of fun times. As Ballymaloe takes a well earned hiatus from Litfest in 2018, we've rounded up a smorgasbord of alternative food events that should keep hungry revellers happy, enlightened and well fed.



AUGUST
16-19

THE BIG GRILL

As you may expect from the name, the main focus here is barbecue, and lots of it. Around 20 restaurants pop up over four days in leafy Herbert Park, building pits to cook from, with the rules stating chefs can only cook with live fire, using natural charcoal and wood only – no gas or electricity allowed. This makes for a smoky, fun-filled few days with plenty of slow cooked, tasty food on offer with an increasing veg focus each year. There’s a distinct street food, urban vibe to the line-up, with Angie Mar from The Beatrice Inn in New York and David Carter from Smokestack London joining. Homegrown talent includes Gráinne O’Keefe from Clanbrassil House and Paul Flynn from The Tannery. The “Bastecamp” area hosts talks, masterclasses and in-depth butchery, barbecue and smoking workshops all weekend. There’s plenty of craft drinks on offer and lively entertainment too. The five-star InterContinental is a stone’s throw away if you’re looking to make a weekend of it and want somewhere wonderful to kick back between feeds, biggrillfestival.com.



AUGUST
3-6

ENNISCORTHY ROCKIN' FOOD FESTIVAL

Wexford is a summer staple for many searching for sandy beaches and stocking up on their famous strawberries and spuds, but now there’s another reason to swing by the sunny south east. The eclectic Enniscorthy Rockin’ Food Festival is a weekend of eating, dancing and history – the result of three local events joining forces to come up with something decidedly unique. Food is always front and centre, with an abundance of brilliant local suppliers, open air food markets all weekend, pop-up dinners and The Food Marquee hosting talks, workshops, and demos with well known and local chefs. The history of Enniscorthy and the 1798 Rebellion are also essential elements of the festival – expect battle re-enactments, Ancient East storytelling, and mediaeval masterclasses. A local love for rock ‘n’ roll adds a truly upbeat vibe to the weekend, with live music, dancing, and smartly dressed rockabilly enthusiasts all over town. Rest your weary feet from all the revelry by booking into the nearby five-star Monart destination spa for a treatment or even better, a stay. [f @rockinfoodfestival](https://www.facebook.com/rockinfoodfestival)



JUNE
22-24

FOOD ON BOARD AT BODY & SOUL

Yes, technically this is a music festival, but much in the same way Body & Soul was once a standalone part of Electric Picnic, Food on Board is a burgeoning part of the festival, worthy of a standalone mention. Nestled amongst the walled garden of Ballinlough Castle, so a little away from the main site, it hosts a collective of ardent feeders, serving some of the finest festival food on offer in the country, with White Mausy by Katie Sanderson, My Goodness from Cork, and Julia’s Lobster Truck lined up already. All food is served on wooden boards, which are then washed and reused with all food waste composted on site. It also hosts a unique and delicately curated blind date experience on a lake called First Tastes, and there’s a decadent champagne bar, a buzzing conversation tent of talks featuring a diverse collection of speakers, and live music from jazz with a Balkan twist to modern Irish folk and Afrobeat. There’s plenty on offer too away from the standard festival revelry here – seek out The Sanctuary, where you’ll find the Immerse Spa Experience features luxurious seaweed baths, wood-fired hot tubs, and Balinese steam treatments accompanied by turmeric tonic to restore and revitalise, bodyandsoul.ie.



MAY
11-13

BURREN SLOW FOOD FESTIVAL

Well known for its stunning landscape, the Burren has also been carving itself out as one of the most intriguing food destinations in the country, and the Burren Slow Food Festival is the ideal opportunity to explore this. Now in its 14th year, this boutique gathering showcases the best of local food and suppliers. The festival kicks off on the Friday with a unique seafood supper involving a ferry ride from picturesque Doolin to the smallest Aran Island, Inis Oírr. The rest of the weekend is focused around tasting the Atlantic from the Pavilion in Lisdoonvarna, with celebrations around seafood, cookery demonstrations by renowned chefs including seafood aficionado Niall Sabongi, and an interactive talk with Kevin Thornton. Don't miss the excellent annual Burren Slow Food Banquet, showcasing the best of local ingredients. For a spot of adventure among the feasting, head to nearby Lahinch for a surf lesson to work up your appetite again. Or if you're more inclined to need a rest between feeds, check into the striking 18th century manor house hotel, Gregans Castle, where relaxation is top priority with TV-free rooms and sweeping views of the surrounding landscape, slowfoodclare.com.

OCTOBER
5-7

DINGLE FOOD FESTIVAL

As if you'd ever need an excuse to visit Dingle, but if you do, seek out its food festival in October. The charming seaside town already has a strong food reputation, and the headline act is definitely Dingle itself, with unabashed involvement from the whole town. The exceptional "Taste Trail" includes more than 70 venues around, from pubs, galleries and shops to restaurant favourites Out of the Blue and The Chart House. Expect plenty of ingredients farmed, foraged and fished from the surrounding peninsula including local seafood, fresh bakes, Atlantic seaweed, Kerry lamb and plenty of Dingle Gin. There are cookery demonstrations peppered across the weekend and street entertainment galore. Seek out an interesting selection of whiskey and wine tastings, craft beer and cider trails, and of course, make time to visit the famous, plentiful pubs – Dick Mack's and Curran's can't be beat. Bracing walks will be needed, so head to nearby Ballydavid for a cliff stroll and a visit to the local, TP's, and be sure to drive, cycle or somehow get to Sleah Head for incredible unspoilt scenery and breathtaking coastal views. Looking for a unique place to rest your head? Castlewood House (castlewooddingle.com), owned by husband and wife Brian Heaton and Helen Woods Heaton, is a charming boutique property offering a very warm welcome to guests, dinglefood.com.

Also worth checking out

BOYNE VALLEY FOOD SERIES

A showcase of food events from March to December all around the Boyne Valley, boynevalleyfoodseries.ie.

CONNEMARA MUSSEL FESTIVAL

May 4-6

Now in its 13th year, this three-day celebration of the native mollusc will see demos from Cliodhna Prendergast and Keith Carden from Hooked, a performance of *The Loves of Lady Gregory* by Curlew Theatre Company and live music, connemaramusselfestival.com.

GALWAY'S WEST END SUMMER FESTIVAL

May 31 – June 4

Local restaurants Kai, Dela, Tartare, Aniar and many more join forces for a brilliant street food celebration, galwaywestend.com.

TASTE OF DUBLIN

June 14-17

Four days of eating, drinking and entertainment right in the city, tasteofdublin.ie.

TASTE OF CAVAN

August 10-11

Artisan food, craft producers and chef demos from Cavan and surrounding areas. [@TasteofCavan](https://twitter.com/TasteofCavan)

A TASTE OF WEST CORK

September 7-16

Celebrating the best of West Cork food, producers, landscape and people, atasteofwestcork.com.

GALWAY OYSTER & SEAFOOD FESTIVAL

September 28-30

Ireland's longest running food festival celebrating Galway's rich annual oyster harvest, galwayoysterfestival.com.

FOOD ON THE EDGE

October 22-23

An international symposium for chefs and food enthusiasts with talk and debate on the future of food, foodontheedge.ie.

SAVOUR KILKENNY

October 26-29

Now in its 12th year, this festival in mediaeval Kilkenny has more than 100 events and 100 stallholders with demonstrations by some of Ireland's best known and loved chefs, savourkilkenny.com.