

# Dingle: Better Than Ever

**Ireland Hopping /**  
By Margaret M. Johnson

If you’ve never been to Dingle, or haven’t been there in a while, put in on your list of places where you “must go” or remind yourself you “must return.” I took my own advice on the “must return” tip and spent three glorious (that means partly sunny and no rain) days there a few weeks ago.

For the uninformed, the Dingle Peninsula is one of the hottest spots on Ireland’s “Wild Atlantic Way.” It’s an area that stretches 20 miles into the Atlantic and is famous for steep sea-cliffs, sandy beaches, a dolphin named Fungi, great fishing, breathtaking scenery, nail-biting drives along the Sleat Head or through the Conor Pass, marvelous beehive huts that date to sometime around the 12th century, and as the location for the filming of “Ryan’s Daughter” (1970) — these are just for starters.

Need more? In Dingle Town alone, a thriving Irish-speaking community of 1,200 year-round residents, there are great pubs and restaurants, wonderful shops, a weekly farmer’s market, music, film and sailing events and, arguably, some of the friendliest people in the Kingdom of Kerry. I wrapped as much of this as possible into my 3-night stay, using Castlewood House as my base. I mentioned this award-winning small hotel when I reported on the “Best Breakfast” awards a few months ago and promised to tell all once I experienced it firsthand. I was not disappointed.

I arrived shortly after noon and Brian Heaton, chef/proprietor with his wife, Helen, apologized that the room wasn’t



Helen and Brian Heaton of Castlewood House.

quite ready. “How about a mimosa while you wait,” he asked, “or a cup of tea? Help yourself to Helen’s chocolate cake in the sitting room.” Things only got better after that: our room, one of 14 in the beautifully situated hotel on Dingle Bay, was spacious and stylishly decorated; the sitting room was warm and welcoming with antiques, books, games, and the aforementioned signature chocolate cake that guests can enjoy all day; and the dining room, where the award-winning breakfast is served, as stunning as the offerings on the menu. A beautiful cold buffet includes cereals, yogurt, berries and homemade fruit compotes — pears poached in Champagne and turmeric, baked plums in honey and orange syrup, stewed rhubarb — and homemade baked goods like scones, soda breads, and Brian’s bread and butter pudding, yes, for breakfast! Cooked break-

fasts include the obligatory “full Irish” and more gourmet choices like goat cheese and tomato frittata, eggs Benedict, and porridge with your choice of toppings like brown sugar, dried fruits, Bailey’s, Jameson, or Irish Mist, yes, for breakfast!

According to Helen, their unique award-winning breakfast menu developed over the years: “We close in January for six weeks and Brian and I sit together to try to figure out what would people like? What can we do to make it better?” She said they don’t like complacency in the menu and are always trying to “up our game.” Obviously, the strategy has paid off, and in addition to “Best Breakfast” awards from the Irish Times and Irish Independent, Castlewood ([www.castlewooddingle.com](http://www.castlewooddingle.com)) has won accolades for “Best Irish Welcome,” “Best Customer Service,” “Accommodation of the Year,” and “Top 25 Small Hotels



Castlewood House.

in Europe.” Here are two breakfast “favorites.”

## CHAMPAGNE-TURMERIC POACHED PEARS

SERVES 6 to 8  
1 (2-ounce) piece fresh turmeric, peeled and sliced  
2 cups dry white wine  
1 1/4 cups sugar  
2 cinnamon sticks, broken  
1 vanilla pod, split, or 1 teaspoon vanilla bean paste  
5 green cardamom pods  
1/2 cup orange juice  
Juice of 2 lemons  
8 medium pears, peeled, cored and quartered  
16 ounces Champagne  
2 ounces dried Gogi berries or currants  
2 ounces dried cranberries  
2 ounces dried blueberries  
1. In a large saucepan over medium-low heat, combine turmeric, wine, sugar, cinnamon sticks, and vanilla pod or paste. Cook, stirring frequently, until sugar dissolves.  
2. Add cardamom, orange juice, and lemon; simmer for 8 to 10 minutes.  
3. Add pears, Champagne, and berries. Place a round of parchment paper on top and then cover with a lid. Reduce heat to low and cook for 25 to 30 minutes, turning pears occasionally, until pears are very tender. Serve warm or at room temperature.

## BRIAN'S BREAD PUDDING

SERVES 6 TO 8  
This traditional dessert dish is a

surprising, but welcome, addition to the breakfast buffet. Perfect on its own, but delicious with crème fraîche or whipped cream.  
10 to 12 slices buttered white bread, crusts removed  
1 teaspoon nutmeg  
8 ounces golden raisins  
4 large eggs  
3/4 cup sugar  
1 teaspoon vanilla  
2 cups cream  
2/3 cup milk  
1. Butter an 8-inch baking dish. Arrange four slices of bread, buttered-side down, on bottom of prepared dish; sprinkle with half the nutmeg and half the raisins. Arrange remaining bread, buttered-side down, on top and sprinkle with remaining nutmeg and raisins.  
2. In a large bowl, whisk eggs; whisk in sugar, vanilla, cream, and milk. Pour over bread and let stand for 1 hour or cover and refrigerate overnight.  
3. Preheat oven to 350°F. Remove dish from refrigerator. Cover with aluminum foil and put in a large baking dish. Fill with hot water to come halfway up sides of dish. Bake on middle shelf for 50 minutes; remove foil and cook for 10 minutes longer, or until top is crisp and golden. Serve warm or at room temperature.

*Margaret Johnson's "Recipes" page expands this year to "Ireland Hopping: Adventures in Food, Drink, and Travel." For further details on her work or to order a signed cookbook, visit [www.irishcook.com](http://www.irishcook.com).*



Dingle Town.



Champagne-Turmeric Poached Pears.