

# A gourmet's taste of the Emerald Isle

A girls' weekend away gives **Jade Wright** a flavour of culinary County Cork

**W**HEN celebrity chef **Keith Floyd** went to the great restaurant in the sky, the gourmet world went into mourning.

And nowhere more than in Kinsale, County Cork.

The colourful restaurateur had made the pretty fishing village his home, and had been one of the leading lights in making it the culinary capital of Ireland.

But his work lives on, with one of the finest food and drink festivals in Europe.

Kinsale has the largest number of quality restaurants anywhere in Ireland.

A quaint fishing village where the quality of the local meat, vegetables and dairy produce is second to none, it's the perfect place to eat, drink and be merry.

During the three-day festival weekend every October, visitors can sample fresh seafood, world cuisine and traditional Irish cooking or enjoy a pint of Guinness in one of the host of local pubs.

I'd heard that the portions are huge and the food so good that no-one can say no.

Never ones to shy away from a challenge, my friend Lisa and I went to sample Kinsale's finest.

A 20-minute taxi ride through pretty fields from Cork Airport, we checked in to the stunning Trident Hotel ([www.tridenthotel.com](http://www.tridenthotel.com)), which overlooks the beautiful harbour and its brightly painted cottages.

Trident is one of the four main bases of

the festival, and a culinary treat in its own right. Its Pier One restaurant has AA Rosettes and two RAC Dining Awards, plus the best soda bread I've ever tasted. Lisa loved the kippers and black pudding – their breakfast is to die for.

We quickly found out Kinsale chefs pride themselves on their reputation and most are members of the Good Food Circle ([www.kinsalerestaurants.com](http://www.kinsalerestaurants.com)).

We met most of them at the festival launch, held on the Friday evening in the White Lady pub, sharing a few pints of Murphy's (this is not Guinness country, as we quickly discovered) and mouth-watering canapes with the revellers.

After working up an appetite, we headed to the famous Fishy Fishy ([www.fishyfishy.ie](http://www.fishyfishy.ie)) on the harbour.

Unsurprisingly, their speciality is seafood – from lobster to crab, crayfish to cod, monkfish, squid, john dory and haddock.

Everything is caught locally and delivered fresh. As a result, they have a Michelin BID gourmand award and were voted Best Seafood Restaurant of the Year by the RIA four years running.

And, to their eternal credit, they'll even feed a non-seafood eater like me with a smile. Their mushroom risotto is one of the best I've tasted.

Lisa loved the seafood, sampling scallops and mussels and giving both a stamp of approval.

After dinner we had a walk around the harbour, which quickly descended into a stagger around the fantastic pubs.

The area is full of character and charm – Kinsale lays claim to being the oldest town in Ireland and in 1997, the local restaurateurs and historians set up the International Museum of Wine.

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# Eat, drink and make merry

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It's a great place for a girls' weekend away at any time of year. The prices are reasonable, the people are friendly and there's plenty to do whatever the season.

But if you like good food, the festival makes it extra special.

Saturday is the highlight, as the revellers join Alice, the Mad Hatter, March Hare and the Fieldmouse for an escorted tasting tour of the 11 members of Kinsale's Good Food Circle.

It's a feast of epic proportions, as we quickly found out.

Starting the day with a glass of Champagne at 11am we followed Alice to each culinary delight. It's a bit like a posh pub crawl, but as well as free drink, there's the finest food you've ever tasted, presented steaming hot on spectacular dishes from each kitchen.

And, as you might expect given the theme, everyone has to wear a mad hat in honour of the special guest – the Mad Hatter.

Once you've bought

your ticket, everything is free.

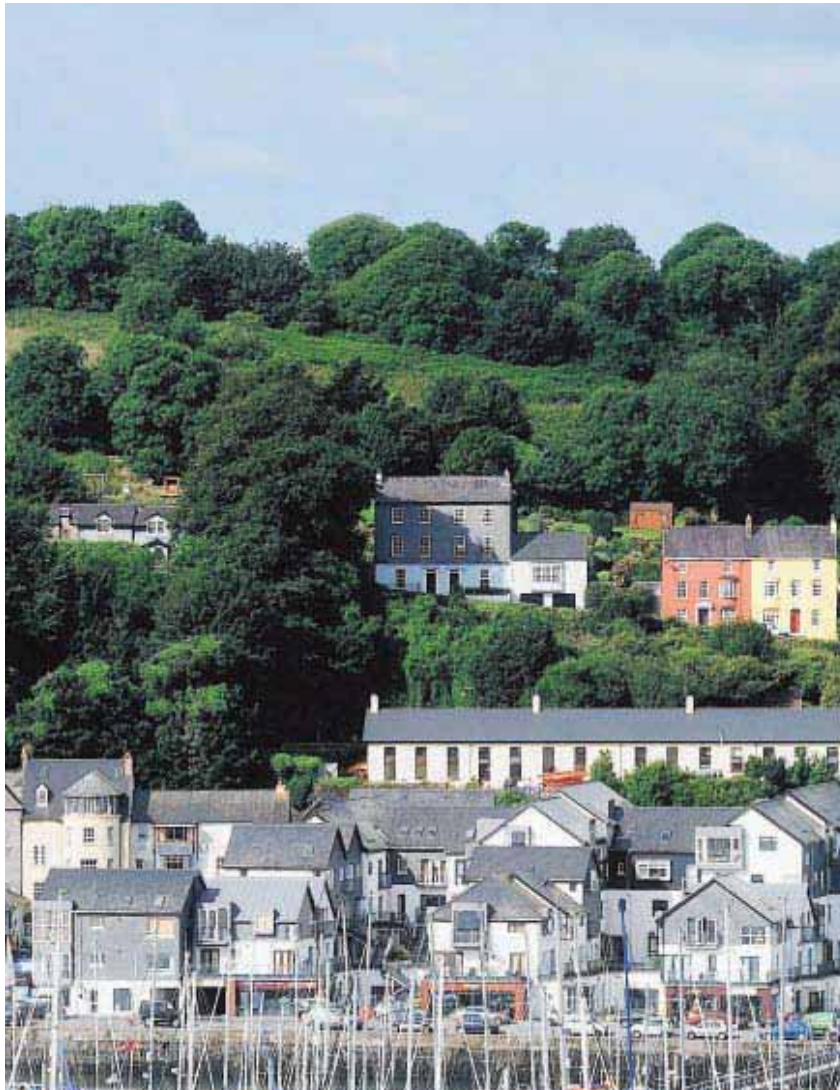
Lisa and I were clearly amateurs, eating far too much on the first two stops. I'm vegetarian and couldn't try the whole range, but Lisa gamely stepped in, trying tripe and frogs legs, plus a whole charcuterie of meat – topping it all off in style with lobster thermador.

It bears testimony to the culinary skills of the chefs of Kinsale that we managed to get around the whole course, albeit waddling slightly by the end.

Even our historical walking tour the next morning couldn't make up for the excesses of the night before, so we decided the best medicine was one more lovely lunch – at the superb Jim Edwards Restaurant in Market Quay, before getting the plane back to Liverpool.

Stepping on the scales when I got home, I was half a stone heavier. It's a wonder the airline didn't charge me for excess baggage.

But I wouldn't have swapped my gourmet weekend for the world.



## TRAVEL TIPS: KINSALE, COUNTY CORK

**JADE** stayed in the Trident Hotel, Kinsale ([www.tridenthotel.com](http://www.tridenthotel.com)) where a twin or double room with breakfast starts at £35 pppn.

Tickets for the food festival were approximately £55 for the Friday launch (including a £35 dinner voucher for any of the restaurants) and £80 for the 11 destination full-day Mad Hatters' Tea Party.

Dermot Ryan ([www.kinsaleheritage.com](http://www.kinsaleheritage.com)) offers excellent historical walking tours of Kinsale for around £4.

Ryanair offer flights from Liverpool John Lennon to Cork from £5 ([www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)).

Aerlingus ([www.aerlingus.com](http://www.aerlingus.com)) fly from Manchester to Cork from £20.

Find out more at [www.discoverireland.com](http://www.discoverireland.com)



**IN THE MOOD: Mad hatters**