



DESTINATION DRINKS

With Stuart Gregor

Pure blarney magic

How to have a face-licking good time in Dublin

So I've made it home from Dublin. That sounds like a relatively mundane, almost pedestrian statement. But trust me – if you've just had five nights in the world's drinking capital you'll recognise what an absolute triumph that sentence is.

It was touch and go for a while. I arrived on a Saturday when there would be a Rugby World Cup match (versus Scotland, no less) and chose to visit the Guinness brewery at elevenses to get the day off to a solid start. It wasn't just The Cranberries who were zombies the next day.

So let's get the most obvious question out of the way. Yes, most definitely yes, you have to visit the Guinness Storehouse. It's incredible. Apparently it attracts something like 1.7 million visitors a year – which means around half of all tourists in Dublin head to the home of the black elixir. And it seemed all of them were there the same day as me – the place was jammed.

You must book ahead. On the Saturday we visited there were no spots available for walk-ins. And for the love of Jesus, Mary and Saint Patrick himself, be sure to pay the extra eight euros for the stoutie. What's a stoutie? Well, it's a pint of Guinness with a selfie of you on the head. Nope, I don't know how they do it either – it's pure blarney magic. But if you've never licked your own face off the creamy head of a pint of Guinness, let me tell you, you've never lived. My counsel would be to book an early tour and stay for lunch at Arthur's Bar. By 12.30 there are Irish

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dancers, live singers playing The Pogues and straight-up the best Guinness and beef pie I've ever tasted (there's a surprise, said nobody at all).

After three hours at Guinness, you're in need of a lie-down. But you won't do that because you're in Dublin. You'll go to a pub, maybe several pubs. You'll drink Guinness and fine Irish whiskey (with an E, unlike Scotch whisky) and you'll end up eating something called a spice bag at Xian Street Food on Anne Street. What's a spice bag? According to a random I met in a pub, a spice bag is one of Ireland's “greatest culinary creations” – a bag full of chips, chicken, spices, onions and grilled capsicum. You won't believe it. You probably won't even remember it.

Xian is opposite Kehoes, a proper Dublin pub and a must-visit. You'll spot it from Grafton Street as there will be a queue for spice bags right across the street.

Really, you can't go too wrong with any pub in Dublin (or Ireland for that matter). Each has

phenomenal Guinness and all the tales you have heard are true – Guinness in Ireland really is so different to what you drink elsewhere in the world. Even the most hardened non-Guinness drinker will fall under its spell. Most tourist guides will send you to the Brazen Head on Lower Bridge Street, by the River Liffey, as it's Dublin's oldest pub and who doesn't want to say they've had a pint at a pub established in 1198? That said, the Brazen Head is packed full of Americans, and there are a lot of Americans in Dublin. A quick half-pint and a quirky Instagram post should do the trick.

And then there's Sinnotts. We spent a few days golfing before Dublin (which, if you're fat, old and white like me, is an absolute must-do) and all our young caddies told us the only place to watch sport in Dublin was Sinnotts on King Street. Do your research and if there's a rugby, Gaelic football or even big English Premier League match on when you visit, then go watch at least some of it at Sinnotts. I've watched a lot of sport at a lot of pubs across the world and watching an Irish rugby test at this pub is the best vibe I've ever experienced. The chicken burger is legit, too.

Once you've drunk three times your body weight in Guinness, it's time to up your game and visit a couple of whiskey-makers. We went to Teeling Distillery in the Liberties district and it's a ripper experience. And then we loved our visit to the most famous of all Irish whiskeys, Jameson.

While Jameson is now distilled in Cork, the original HQ at Bow Street has become a world-class experience. It probably only gets 20 per cent of the visitor numbers at Guinness, but it's still popular so book ahead. And go the 15-euro upgrade and have the special cask draw, which for us was an 18-year-old Jameson that was as good a dram of Irish as I've ever tasted.

So, there's a lot to love about drinking in Dublin, but here's where I was enormously surprised – beyond the spice bags and gammon steaks there's an excellent growing food culture. A special shoutout to two joints almost next door to each other on Camden Street that showcase the best of modern Dublin – Pickle, a superb North Indian, and Delahunt, a classic old boozer repurposed as a brilliant modern Irish restaurant. And finally a mention to a tiny spot called Fish Shop in Smithfield. It seats only a dozen or so guests, but has the most delicious cockles and mussels I think I've ever tasted.

Dublin is definitely alive, alive-o.



The Guinness Storehouse in Dublin, home of the black elixir (inset) that must be tried in Ireland.



FOOD NEWS

Sunny side up

New Sunshine Coast local Bli Bli Hotel (right), featuring a modern bistro and bar with a rooftop terrace, is raising the steaks on classic pub fare. Joining premium beef, such as Black Angus from the Riverina, on the centrepiece wood-fired grill are the likes of butterflyed local prawns, chicken shish and saltwater barramundi. The wide-ranging menu also covers punchy salads and pastas and wood-fired pizzas.

Atria brings on lunch

Lunch is now on the menu at Atria, the Ritz-Carlton Melbourne's signature restaurant. Just kicking off this month, lunch means diners can get a daytime dose of those 80th-floor views while wrestling



with choices such as Albrohlos Island scallop crudo or roasted pork jowl? Dry-aged Murray cod or the Macedon Ranges duck? But when it comes to dessert, no contest. Make ours a brandy baba with crème diplomate.

South NSW calling

NSW's Southern Highlands Food & Wine Festival is back this year and will be held in the heart of Bowral at historic Corbett Gardens (December 8-10) under magical lighting installations as part of the month-long Festival of Lights. The food stalls will include local leading lights (ciao, Pizzettaro and Artisan Delish Salami!) alongside regional wines, beers, gins, whiskies, rums and liqueurs.

Photography: Dexter Kim (Harper)

DRINK UP



Hitting the roof in Sydney

Just in time for summer, Sydney's Kimpton Margot has opened Harper, a rooftop bar with a beach-club vibe and drinks that chime with the theme. The Summer Holiday mixers vodka, pandan, pinot grigio and lychee, while the Barbie Girl Slushie blends rosé with berries and rhubarb. Pooches welcome to join the party.