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## A Vegetarian Weekend in Cork

*Southern Ireland might not seem the obvious choice for a vegetarian weekend, but a concentration of superb veggie providers in Cork had me jumping at the first excuse to go there.*

A point to bear in mind: if there is a non-veggie in the party, they won't feel a bit deprived. In fact, the majority of customers of all the best veggie establishments are invariably not vegetarian.

Denis Cotter is a breath of fresh air on the chef scene. No pretension, no over-exposure on TV or in print (although he appears on Irish TV occasionally and has written three excellent books), just expertly executed and often exciting dishes that pack out his Cafe Paradiso restaurant in Cork night after night.

The restaurant is a reflection of himself: unassuming, friendly and with a focus on the food. His dishes are imaginative but not wacky or show-offy and his use of the more unusual vegetables is testament to his commitment to them. Denis favours local produce of the highest quality which is supplied by organic market gardener Ultan Walsh (of Gort Na Nain) who also supplies his honey. It's not just any old honey, it's gorgeous old-fashioned blossomy honey that reminds me of my childhood. Denis dribbles this wild flower nectar over your granola, pomegranate and pears at breakfast and pours it carefully over the Crozier cheese with walnut crispbreads for your dessert.

Ireland has the perfect climate for cheese making and Denis uses Irish cheese in his dishes to great effect: To complement and balance flavours. His use of Knockalara cheese was so delicious, I had it twice for my main course: almond and pastry galette of spinach and Knockalara sheep's cheese with coriander-

13 September 2009

By: Olivia Greenway



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crushed potato and sugar snap peas.

Denis has written three acclaimed cookery books and it would be hard to choose which one to buy; naturally I have all three.

At lunchtime, The Quay is a great choice. This is a daytime cafe run as a co-operative serving home made food. Wooden tables with oilcloth covers and a warren of rooms give the place a homely feel. After you have dithered over your main choice, you have the further complication of choosing from about seven salads. Next door they have a well run whole food shop, in case you're u for more.

There is enough to see and do in Cork itself to keep you occupied for a weekend, whether it's castles, churches or the natural harbour that interests you. If you want to venture outside, there are pretty villages to explore dotted around the coast. The roads are gloriously free of traffic and dropping in to see Macroom, Bantry and Kenmare is a delight.

Gort Na Nain, a few miles south of Cork, is run by market gardener Ultan Walsh who supplies restaurants in the area, including Paradiso. Despite being busy with his vegetables and his bees, he finds time to run his bed and breakfast with his partner Lucy Stewart. Food here is as good as you would get anywhere. The Irish like their breakfast and are a bit more imaginative than we are with our Full English. Why not try homemade chestnut sausages, served with fried

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CLAIRE MACDONALD

*The Cork for all Seasons*

## EVENTS CALENDAR

potatoes, poached egg and spicy tomato chutney or have drop-scone pancakes with Gort-Na-Nain honey and seasonal soft fruit? Lucy tells me that she cooks the breakfast and they share making the evening meals. Vegetables and fruit are produced to organic standards, supplied from their own farm and they also have their own eggs. Food miles become food yards.

I've read about Irish hospitality, and being the southern cynic I am, thought it was just a lot of blarney, but I have to confess I was wrong. The food isn't bad either.

Café Paradiso [www.cafeparadiso.ie](http://www.cafeparadiso.ie)  
 16 Lancaster Quay, Cork city. Tel: 00353 21 4277939  
 Gort Na Nain [www.gortnanain.com](http://www.gortnanain.com)  
 Ballyherkin, Nohoval, Kinsale, Co. Cork. Tel: 00353 21 4770647  
 Quay Co-op [www.quaycoop.com](http://www.quaycoop.com)  
 24 Sullivans Quay, Cork city. Tel: 00353 21 4317026

Irish tourist board [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie)

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## Editor's Choice

*Editor's  
choice*



### [Helen Hokin's Autumn Picks](#)

18/10/2012

This October Iceland Express celebrates Local Food Month with a brand new food guide.

### [Helen Hokin's spring picks](#)

07/03/2012

Spring - we're almost there - brings more episodes of my Food Tripper TV series exploring food history and culture all over the world. This time I'm in the Black Forest, Estonia and Grenada and you can watch all three 60-minute shows on Travel Channel on Sky 251.

### [Helen Hokin's winter picks](#)

21/11/2011

This winter, we're giving away a host of fantastic festive prizes in time for Christmas, my TV series continues on Travel Channel on Sky 251 and we have as usual all the latest in food travel news and reviews.

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