



SUMMER SEASON

FEASTS TO SAVOUR AROUND LUXURY SCOTLAND

by Vivien Devlin

Those lush green Scottish landscapes we have admired since Spring are now ready to give up their rich bounty: their harvest.

We feel the days imperceptibly shorten and see the farmers taking to the fields to bring in their crops with the birds flocking in their wake.

These summer scenes set our taste buds alight. Chefs take advantage of what's fresh to conjure up unforgettable dining experiences. Farmers markets are loaded with local delicacies as edible memories to take home.

In August and September, as summer heads into autumn, what is in season in Scotland?

On the hills, the Glorious Twelfth heralds the reappearance of grouse on the table. From the fields beetroot, parsnips, runner beans, blackberries, blueberries and gooseberries come in, while ripe orchards offer plums and apples. Sea bass, brown trout and mussels are some of the delicacies our waters give up at this time of year.

(Research kindly provided by Fiona Laing, Libby Andrews and Ken Scott)

GAME



Grouse inhabit pine forests to moorland and mountainside, so Scotland is its perfect habitat.

The grouse season starts on 12 August - "The Glorious Twelfth" - and the gamekeepers work throughout the year to ensure that the best possible conditions exist for the grouse to rear their chicks and to build or repair the butts for the shooters. Males are bigger than females — twice as heavy in the Capercaillie, the biggest member of the family.

Across the country, chefs delight in complementing the first game of the season with carefully judged accompaniments from field-fresh produce.

Grouse has a uniquely earthy flavour, derived from the birds' diet of blueberries and heather. They fly fast and close to the ground, so that hunters often have to shoot after the escaping bird.

In a productive grouse year, well over 350,000 of the birds are potted by shooting parties in the UK, mostly in Scotland, during the August to November season.

Low in fat, packed with protein, young grouse is delicious roasted – its tender, rich breast meat melts in the mouth.

It is well matched with bacon to prevent the meat from drying out, and accompanied by sage, rosemary and thyme, while sweet blackberries bring out the nuttiness.

Venison is not so date-dependent, with Roe Deer in season all year but the red deer stags are at their best in early September, having been in season since 1 July. The name, incidentally, comes from the Latin, venor, to hunt or pursue.

Increasingly the healthy credentials of Venison are becoming valued: with less than 2% fat, it's a good source of healthy protein and iron. The versatility of venison makes it popular with chefs, who tame the rich flesh with beetroot, elderberries, blackberries, prunes, port, wild mushrooms, thyme, celeriac, chestnuts, pears and parsnips. For a more delicate flavour try Roe Deer which browses on a variety of tree shoots and herbage, rather than the Highland vegetation of Red Deer.





GAME... [cont]

The tranquil Knockinaam Lodge is an historic hunting lodge on the Mull of Galloway, which at this time of year arranges stalking and shooting for guests in some of Scotland's best beats for Roe Deer and wildfowl.

If stalking is not your bag, then the hotel's private sandy beach and 30 acres of glorious gardens offer a perfect snapshot of this often overlooked part of south-west Scotland.

In landscape such as this – combining rich rural farmland and wild coastline - Executive Chef Tony Pierce's imaginative food lets local flavours shine through in his Michelin award dining room. Perhaps these dishes will tempt you to take a visit this summer or autumn.

Roast Breast of Loch Rannoch Grouse with Spiced Lentils, Carrot Purée, Pomme Fondant, Crisp Pancetta and a Bramble and Port Reduction, followed by Hot Raspberry Soufflé served with its own Sorbet

Local fish suppliers are Alan Watson from Carsluith Smokehouse and Trevor Davidson from Drummore.



The extensive kitchen garden and greenhouse offers the freshest vegetables and herbs throughout the summer.

You can almost taste the ripe, freshly picked produce in these descriptions - Cappuccino of Garden Pea, Pear and Mint as well as Grilled Fillet of Wild Salmon with Knockinaam New Potatoes, Green Asparagus and Chive Hollandaise.

Roe deer is abundant in Dumfries and Galloway, a browsing deer eating a wide variety of tree shoots and herbage. This is reflected in the delicate flavour of the meat. In the early Autumn, Chef Pierce will marry "Roast Loin of Highland Roe Deer with a seasonal parsnip puree and sweet and sour beetroot."

The 4th of September is now known as "Eat Scottish Vension Day" since it began in 2009 and has been a success ever since. Special menus, dishes and events can be enjoyed throughout Scotland.

FIELD CROPS

Fresh from the fields now are the first of the new season parsnips. Parsnips, with their familiar buttery, slightly spicy, sweet flavour, have been cultivated for at least 2,000 years and are a good source of vitamin C, folate and potassium.

The stylish boutique townhouse in the heart of Inverness, Rocpool Reserve and Chez Roux restaurant was named the Most Excellent City Hotel at the Condé Nast Johansens Annual Awards 2011. For Head chef Steven Murray and his team (under the leadership of Executive Chef Albert Roux), seasonality is of utmost importance to produce dishes which include local ingredients, sourced wherever possible.



Moving into mid August after the Glorious 12th, Grouse will feature heavily on the menu: Traditional roast grouse, with bread crumbs, game chips and natural game jus served with honey-roasted or pureed parsnips.

Venison is sourced from Ardgay Game in Sutherland and partridge from nearby Cawdor. Handpicked food producers provide the finest fresh, sustainable produce in season - Highland beef, succulent scallops and langoustines from the West Coast, rare breed pork from the Black Isle, razor clams from Fortrose, artisan hot smoked salmon from Mallaig and crab from Orkney.

At Inverlochy Castle at Torlundy near Fort William, its Michelin-starred head chef, Philip Carnegie, has created this inventive dish: Parsnip-wrapped Loin of Rabbit, with confit of its own leg, lentils and truffle for a sumptuous main course. Traditional Highland fare in this delightful setting, with its 19th century castle, private loch and the majestic backdrop of Ben Nevis. Chef Carnegie finds a mouth-watering use for one of Britain's most underrated vegetables: the Beetroot. A fresh tasting, inventive starter this season is "Isle of Barra Crab, beetroot cannelloni, goat's cheese and apple".

Once worthy of being an offering to the ancient Greek god Apollo, beetroot only really found favour in Britain with the Victorians. With beetroot, the ingenious Victorians made wine, candied sweets, pickles, salads and even hair rinse.



FIELD CROPS... [cont]

Picked beetroot was a common addition to salads, and many people recall the bitter, vinegar taste from childhood memories. Cooking beetroot is so different - sweet roasted, served as a salsa, borscht, and perfect with goat's cheese. Traditionally a winter root vegetable, the tender baby beets are ready to harvest from late summer onwards.

As you tour the verdant Scottish countryside, vegetable plots are keeping gardeners busy. Runner beans thrive and are a favourite of amateur gardeners, with cane wigwams and trellises encased in lush bean plants a common sight. Brought to Britain in the 17th century by Charles I's gardener John Tradescant, they were initially grown for their scarlet blooms before the flavour of the beans became appreciated. Now with their high yield, they are the staple of the vegetable patch and market garden.

Many of the Luxury Scotland hotels have their own vegetable gardens and share their home-grown produce with their guests. After all, it's the ultimate way of cutting food miles. At Pool House on the shores of Loch Ewe, the dining room is at the heart of this distinctive, family-run country house hotel. Just feet away from the spot where the river joins the sea, you may spot seals, otters and many types of birds as you dine

Some are from the hotel's own garden or chickens and ducks. Many others are from suppliers within a 10-mile radius, as freshness and seasonality are paramount to Chef John Moir as he creates his four-course set menu each evening.

Local growers have formed a co-operative "Good for Ewe" to supply freshly picked vegetables, the twice weekly farmer's market, and "Croft 14" for salad leaves, herbs, edible flowers, watercress and micro leaves.

The hotel garden produces leeks, carrots, garlic, beans, broad beans, peas, sugar snaps, beetroot, cabbage, broccoli, lettuce, strawberries, apples, crab apples, pears and much more. Summer is the time for gooseberries, blueberries and blackcurrants served as compotes or made into sorbets and parfaits.

Sample Loch Ewe scallops, langoustine and crab as well as a wide variety of fish landed at Gairloch. The late summer menu includes such dishes as "Seared breast of young grouse, "bon bon" of confit leg, mulled red cabbage, sweet potato & cinnamon puree, crispy Parma ham, game & Drambuie sauce" followed by "Blackcurrant and blueberry parfait, brown sugar and rose petal meringue, Chantilly cream".

Moir's cuisine lives up to the dramatic setting, artistic decor and natural surroundings. Its past as a Second World War field training base and the Royal Navy's HQ add interesting layers to the modern day ambiance of romance and lavish decadence.

"The food is, quite simply, delicious... To eat in such a setting as the Pool House dining room, with its lovely views is a real pleasure and the warmth of welcome the Harrison's exude is an example of hospitality at its best."

Lady Claire Macdonald.





SEAFOOD

In Scotland you are never far from the sea which means we have come to expect great fish and shellfish on our plates. Like the land, the seas have their season and the later summer is perfect for sea bass, mussels and brown trout.

Airds Hotel on Scotland's west coast is a haven for gourmet travellers with dinner menu changes daily and emphasising West Coast seafood and home-grown vegetables. This 18th century Inn can be found at Port Appin, north of Oban. Airds received the accolade of Best small Scottish luxury country house hotel 2011 and is a charming getaway at any time of the year. Described by Alastair Sawday in his book, 'Special Places to Stay' "Faultless service, ambrosial food and warmly cosy interiors". Chef Robert MacPherson has 3 AA rosettes and is a Fellow Master Chef of Great Britain.

Diners at Airds can indulge in the Tasting menu, complemented with matched wines per course. Enjoy a flavour of Argyll this summer with hand-dived Scallops from the Isle of Mull, Oban Halibut with Chanterelles, Pea and Broad Bean Etuvee and Fennel Essence and locally sourced Pork Belly, Apple Gel and Crispy Ears. After a platter of fine cheese, end with the sweet, fresh cooling taste of Vanilla Bean Souffle with Iced Raspberry Ripple Parfait and Scottish Berries.

This is a destination hotel for Foodies. Why not experience a special event, the 7 course Gourmet Dinner at Airds Hotel on 29th October. The menu will be selected nearer the time to ensure the best, seasonal produce, but may well include Highland Venison and fresh local seafood, with an introduction to each wine.

Airds is also open for lunch and in summer time, lunch is served in the garden or the conservatory with a menu featuring local mussels, langoustines, smoked salmon and oysters. Nearby you can enjoy outdoor adventures amidst the stunning coastline - walking fishing, boating, biking, boat trips and golf.



SEAFOOD... [cont]

For many anglers, Scotland is the pre-eminent destination for fishing: the salmon and trout beats being among the best in the world. With both wonderful rivers and magnificent coastline, our waters are varied and often ruggedly scenic.

The brown trout is mainly a freshwater fish and there's excellent fishing on many Scottish rivers including the Tay, Tweed, Clyde, Tummel, Don and Glass. The meat usually has a pinkish or yellowish hue and a good flavour. Smoked it makes a wonderful foodie souvenir to look out for at one of the many farmers' markets which you'll find have regular dates in towns across Scotland.

You need to head back to the south-west for the season's other fish speciality. It's in the waters of Galloway where Scotland meets England that sea bass are at their best. Anglers catching this chunky fish might be rare, but it is a favourite on the plate with its firm white meat and excellent flavour due to its diet of crustaceans and molluscs.

Perhaps the most appropriate place to savour the flavours of the sea is on board the luxury yacht, Hebridean Princess, the floating country house hotel which accommodates up to just 49 guests, who are looked after by 38 members of crew and staff.

Choose from a diverse range of itineraries, as



the ship cruises around the West Coast and tiny Scottish islands from Barra to Westray, visiting gardens, castles, whisky distilleries, beaches and fishing villages. There are occasional cruises to Norway and around the UK.

The emphasis is on fresh sea air, wildlife and bracing walks by day with fine dining by night. Head Chef Paul Sim has been in charge of the small galley since 2004 offering "Country Manor modern with a twist." As much as possible, the seasonal produce is from Scotland and sourced from selected ports of call en route for a taste of the Hebrides. Sample fresh baked bread, wild mushrooms, garden salad leaves, asparagus, delicious scallops, langoustine, West Coast salmon, Inverawe smoked salmon, Isle of Mull cheese, lamb and haggis. With a kitchen brigade of just five chefs, the cuisine is simply exceptional, from the fresh fruit, eggs, kippers and kedgeriee for breakfast, a lavish buffet or formal lunch, cakes and scones for afternoon tea, tiny home-made canapés with cocktails each evening, to four and five course dinners.

While guests are hiking or biking around Colonsay, Chef Sim will be meeting Andrew Abrahams, known locally as Mr Oyster, (who supplies the famous Rogano restaurant in Glasgow), to take on board a crate or two of the salt-sea shellfish. Colonsay wildflower honey is also provided by Abrahams who has produced honey and reared queen bees for 30 years. For the Gala dinner there could be a fine choice between Lobster (from Scrabster), or succulent Highland Venison. From long experience of Hebridean guests, Sim knows he can prepare the dishes equally, with around 25 selecting lobster and 24 taking venison. In the late summer and autumn, a selection of Scottish game including partridge, pheasant and guinea fowl will feature on the menu.

While every cruise is a foodie journey, a speciality itinerary is the forthcoming Gastronomic Tour of Skye, departing Oban on 22nd June 2012. Shore excursions include Isle of Skye Oyster farm, Talisker Distillery and two world famous Skye restaurants, The Three Chimneys and Kinloch Lodge. Sitting on the sun deck with an aperitif, before lunch and dinner, passing idyllic wild coastline and shimmering distant islands, will surely give you a great appetite on a Hebridean Princess cruise.





SOFT FRUITS

It's the turn of the rich dark soft fruits to come into season now the scarlet raspberries and strawberries are fading. The Blackberry, or commonly called Bramble in Scotland, is also known as Caneberry, Bumble-Kite, Bramble-Kite and Brambleberry, derived its name from brambel, or brymbyl, meaning prickly. Rural folklore says it's unlucky to pick them after Michaelmas on 29 September, when the devil claims them by stamping on them and spitting on them.

Blackberries and blueberries are particularly cultivated in the Carse of Gowrie and picked from hedgerows and gardens. With them come the health benefits of all fruit, blueberries in particular being thought of as a "super" super food because of their impressive anti-oxidant credentials.

One of the kitchens which salutes the produce of its surroundings is the Royal Scotsman, the luxury Orient Express train. Travelling through so many glorious areas of Scotland, culinary inspiration is never far from

sight. Mark Tamburrini, the Head Chef, brings his experience of working for such fine restaurants as Hotel du Vin, Turnberry and L'Escargot, otHote into his "cosy" cooking space where he works his magic for his unique restaurant. In the convivial mahogany-panelled dining room, just 36 diners savour gastronomic breakfasts, lunches and dinners, while rolling through forested glens, by lochside and rivers across the Scottish Highlands.

"The Royal Scotsman has one of the very best restaurants in Britain, moving or stationary" Travel and Leisure magazine.

Chef Tamburrini uses a lot of summer berries, smoked duck and venison through the summer and autumn, with much produce sourced locally during the journey. Step on board and experience superlative cuisine in sumptuous comfort. This is a typical menu for the formal night: Scottish oak smoked salmon with poached langoustine, Roast Fillet of Caledonian Crown

Beef, roasted root vegetables, potato pancake, black truffle jus, and ending with White Chocolate and Raspberry Delice with berry compote

"My priority for The Royal Scotsman is to use as much of Scotland's fine selection of fresh produce - hand dived scallops from the west coast, wild mushrooms which are picked by hand and brought directly to the train. Our selection of beef and lamb is sourced from The Shetland Islands where they use the traditional method of grass rearing their cattle. Scotland has such a great selection of produce why would we go anywhere else?" Mark Tamburrini





The reputation of the gooseberry has had something of a makeover in recent years, helped by endorsements by TV chefs including Jamie Oliver and Hugh Fearnley-Whitingstall. This tart fruit has long been grown in Britain with references to it in Henry VIII's time, as a fever medicine in the plagues, as well as in folklore which says faeries would shelter from danger in the protection of its prickly branches.

Now in Scotland, Perthshire is the focus for commercial cultivation, but you'll find bushes in hedgerows and thick, rocky woodland even in the most northern areas, where it is commonly known as a "grozet".

Ripe Scottish gooseberries have been used for centuries to make ales and William Brother's Brewing Co of Alloa makes "Grozet" by adding the berries in the second fermentation in honour of the Scottish tradition of brewing drinks from cereals, wild herbs and ripe fruits.

The Grozet of the Borders widow, Tibbie Shiels, was immortalised by Sir Walter Scott and James Hogg, the Ettrick shepherd, in the late 18th century.

Gooseberries are usually cooked for tarts, sorbets, crumbles and ideal served with mackerel, the sweetness cutting through the oily fish.

GOOSEBERRIES



ORCHARD FRUIT

Ripening plums, apples and pears on the trees are a sure sign that the summer will soon be drawing to a close. They also herald the return of crumbles and pies, those fondly remembered puddings of childhood. Scotland's professional chefs are more adventurous than our home cooks, finding delicious twists for old favourites.

Tony Pierce at Knockinaam Lodge in Galloway, for instance, is adding Damson Crème Brûlée to his menu this autumn and at Inverlochy Castle, Chef Carnegie is offering Roasted Plums with a pecan nut crumble and toasted almond ice cream.

More than 300 varieties of plums are grown in Britain, but Scotland's climate can make it difficult for this fruit – first imported from central and southern Europe by the Romans – to thrive. Plums, which do best in high sunshine, tend to grow most successfully in the lowlands, but this does not stop them being a favourite accompaniment for some of Scotland's most traditional food like duck and other game.

“What is more mortifying that to feel that you have missed the plum for want of courage to shake the tree?”

Logan Pearsall Smith.

Lass o' Gowrie, Melrose White, Galloway Pippin, Scotch Dumpling and the Bloody Ploughman are names to conjure with. These are some of the traditional Scottish apples identified by the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society, which records that “apple culture flourished in Scotland from at least the 12th century, focussed mainly in religious settlements. Scottish links with France in the 1540s led to new expertise in apple culture.

Monks were trained at Kinloss Abbey in Moray, some moved south to Pittenweem Priory which was then linked to St Andrews. Cardinal Beaton brought fruit trees home from France for the orchard at his summer palace at Monimail in Fife.

This legacy means we have about 40 indigenous varieties growing in Scotland today with commercial orchards in the south-east and south-west.

In East Lothian, Ian Rennie and Peter Stuart saw the potential of local apples and since 2008, Thistly Cross has been producing farmhouse cider and introducing innovative flavour variations evolved from strawberries, elderflower or Highland single malt casks. Apples are the key ingredient in one of the all-time classics of the sweet trolley: Tart Tatin.

ORCHARD FRUIT... [cont]

At Inver Lodge Hotel is the Sutherland contribution to Albert Roux's portfolio of Chez Roux restaurants. This "Luxury Country House hotel of the year, 2011" commands impressive views of Loch Inver to the west and high peaks of Suilven to the south-east. This luxurious retreat envelopes you in the heart of Scotland's natural wilderness and just the location for fishing, bird watching and long walks.

Inver Lodge's sheltered position at the head of Loch Inver means the spectacular scenery and wildlife (eagles, deer, seals, salmon and trout) of Assynt are on your doorstep.

Executive chef Albert Roux devises the menus with Head Chef Lee Pattie, highlighting local seafood and Achiltibuie salmon to create " hearty country cooking using products from the sea which is literally on the doorstep."

After a day walking in the pure Highland air, guests are ready for a feast of local produce such as Mussels in classic Roux light creamy curry sauce - a popular dish.

In September, Apple Tart Tatin will appear on the menu when the rich fruity caramel and flaky pastry will melt into vanilla pod ice cream. Another signature element is the Sable dessert. Raspberries will be used in August, then replaced by poached pears by late September. Cherry Clafoutis is a firm favourite of Mr Roux, as is classic Lemon Tart with compote of fresh seasonal berries.

August and September are wonderful vibrant months to tour the countryside, cities and coastline of Scotland, as the trees slowly turn gold and russet red.

Why not visit some of these fine Luxury Scotland hotels or take a journey in elegant style on the Royal Scotsman or Hebridean Princess, to savour imaginative, gourmet cuisine where fresh summer ingredients only enhance the deluxe travel experience.

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