

EAT AND LISTEN

Belfast has reinvigorated its culinary scene. The music's not bad either.

BY TIFFANY THORNTON

It's morning at the Folktown Artisan Market in Belfast's historic 16th century Bank Square. The sun casts a glow across one of the city's oldest churches. People clamour around the popular Krazi Baker booth. Steaming handmade Irish soda farl are lined up across the outdoor oven. Stuffed potato bread with famous Armagh apples beckons the palate.

Ireland, never particularly known for a varied culinary scene, has been more commonly associated with the basics: Guinness, Baileys Irish Cream, the staple Irish stew of meat and potatoes, and a traditional Belfast Ulster fry up breakfast.

Over the last few years, however, Belfast has reinvented its relationship with food, resulting in a dynamic culinary scene rivaling that of any major city.

It has steadily distanced itself from its long and tragic history of "the Troubles," the political and religious strife that went on for decades.

What has emerged is a hospitable city that boasts lovely cobblestone streets to stroll and shop. Besides crossing the bridge over the River Lagan to the Titanic Quarter, you must eat your way through Belfast.

The Titanic museum, built in 2012, has a fluid architectural design with a silver-tinted exterior that reflects the ship's grandiose size. You can spend hours exploring the history from the Titanic's inception to its unfortunate demise.

Across the street from the museum in the Titanic Quarter, you will find the newly opened restaurant Cast and Crew, which sits alongside Titanic Studios where much of the popular Game of Thrones TV series is filmed. Keep your eyes peeled for a glimpse of the cast while you indulge in

delicious salmon fish cake and mushy peas.

The Merchant, in downtown's lovely Cathedral Quarter, is about as grand as it gets. Formerly a bank, the 18th century Victorian-inspired building conjures up the feeling of being on the set of *The Great Gatsby*. Intricate cherub faces peek out from the Great Room's restaurant where a Baccarat chandelier hangs from the high ceiling.

The cocktail bar with its roaring fireplace and red velvet chairs was once home to the world's most expensive cocktail, a Trader Vic's Mai Tai that went for approximately \$1,500! More affordable cocktails include The Fog Cutter and the Fin McCool. You will not be disappointed. You also won't have to go far to sleep as The Merchant also houses a five-star hotel.

The steak at Deane's Meat Locker is beyond exceptional. The Hannan beef is aged for 35 days in Europe's first Himalayan salt chamber, resulting in a succulent sirloin served with beef-dripping chips.

No visit to Belfast is complete without a wee listen to local Irish tunes while downing a few pints of Irish beer! Built around 1780, Kelly's Cellar is the oldest traditional pub in Belfast. Live music reverberates out into Bank Square every night of the week. 🍷



Top: Apple-stuffed potato bread

Bottom: Steak at Deane's Meat Locker

GETTING THERE

Belfast, Ireland

Fly to the Dublin airport seasonally or fly to London's Heathrow airport and then connect to the George Best Belfast City airport.