

WeekendsOut

In the market for fine Scots fare

ONE of the delights of December is being able to tuck into a host of delicious seasonal food, drink and delicacies. Buying local food and drink can help make this year's festivities extra special, but it is also a good way of supporting Scotland's farmers and producers. NFU Scotland is running a campaign which encourages us to support those striving to produce the very best in beef, lamb and pork, those growing Scotland's cereals, potatoes, soft fruit and root vegetables, poultry keepers producing eggs and poultry meat, those milking the nation's cows and those dedicated to producing the humble brussels sprout. NFU Scotland president Jim McLaren said: "Scottish food and farming get tremendous support from the great Scottish public. "More and more, Scottish consumers are looking to fill their plates with fresh, local Scottish produce and this Christmas they will, once again, have a tremendous array of home produce to choose from. "Scotland's reputation as a land of food and drink is blossoming and we have ambitions to grow our food industry. This campaign will show that farmers are at the very heart of that ambition." One easy way to support the campaign is to have scrambled eggs, from Scottish hens, with Scottish smoked salmon for breakfast on Christmas Day. It's something John Sinclair, farmer and proprietor of Craigies Farm Shop near Edinburgh, will be doing. "My family and I will take a few days off over Christmas and New Year and, on Christmas morn, I'm looking forward to a bit of a lie in, followed by my favourite breakfast of all: scrambled egg with flaky smoked salmon. "I keep about 100 hens on the farm. "I have two breeds - Isa Browns and Rhode Rock, which are hardy hens and they can lay free-range eggs outside throughout Scotland's cold winter. "The Isa Browns are about two years old and the Rhode Rock are about five months old. "The Rhode Rock have just started to lay pullets' eggs. Pullets are young hens and they lay smaller eggs. As the hens get older, they start to lay fewer, but larger, eggs. "When the hens come to the end of their professional life, aged about two and a half to three years, customers often take them home to live in their gardens, knowing that every now and again these hens might surprise them with another fresh egg. "The hens eat corn, mainly, but they also love kitchen scraps, especially bread. "They spend the winter in the farm's strawberry fields. "The hens like this because the fields contain insects like vine weevil, which they find particularly delicious."

Shopping for tasty items to eating during the Christmas holidays is as important as finding the ideal gift for a loved one. A good place to start looking is your local farmers' market, writes Susan Welsh

A selection of local eggs, fish, beef, chicken, venison, cheese, bread, cakes, wine and beers are just some of the fantastic produce which can be found at your local farmers' market. And for those who want to brush up their culinary skills and impress their guests this Christmas, there are now plenty of cookery schools, offering advice on everything from how to make your own chocolates to how to choose the wine to complement your food. Here's a flavour of the tastiest foodie events taking place in the run-up to Christmas:

Edinburgh New Town Cookery School

This brand-new cookery school

opened last weekend, and is open to all levels of cook, as well as those who simply want to learn more about food and wine. It offers a first-class range of practical cookery courses for adults, children and teenagers and in the run-up to Christmas will present a number of introductory workshops, demonstrations and wine-tasting classes, as well as a teenager's cooking course. Visit www.entcs.co.uk for further details.

Hands-on opportunity to explore Breadalbane

Six businesses have come together to offer visitors the opportunity to get hands-on in exploring the Breadalbane area.



Packages include The Best of Breadalbane Food and Drink Package (£35 per person), which uses some of Scotland's finest soft fruit to make jam just like Granny used to make, followed by a delicious lunch at Delivino in Crieff with plenty of time to pop into the local Sweetie Shop and factory to observe the techniques of traditional Scottish sweetie making. There are also options to sample some fine wines, take a special distillery tour or visit a local chocolatier. The Active Breadalbane Package (starts at £35 per person) and focuses on either walking or cycling around the area. Again, there are lots of added extras such as route maps, packed lunches, guides and recommended stop-off points. Walking tours can also incorporate a visit to Rob Roy's grave and finish with a reviving whisky and stovies at your hotel. www.explorebreadalbane.co.uk

Markets

Local farmers' markets take place in Inverness at the Tesco Extra Car Park on the last

Saturday of the month from 9am-2pm. Tel: 07798 934920.

● In Inverurie, the market is held on the town's Market Place on the second Saturday of the month, from 9am-1pm. Tel: 01467 621195.

● On the first Saturday of each month, you'll find markets in Montrose, in the Town House car park, from 9.30am-1pm. Tel: 01382 370203; On Edward Street, Perth, from 9am-2pm. Tel: 01738 582159, and at the Argyll Street car park, St Andrews, from 9am-1pm. Tel: 01383 730811.

● In Stirling, the market takes to the pedestrian area of Port Street, on the second Saturday of each month, from 10am to 3pm. Tel: 01877 330151.

● Stornoway farmers' market takes place in Point Street and runs every Saturday until the end of December, from 9am-1.30pm. Tel: 01586 554510.

● In Aberdeen, Belmont Street in the city centre is where you'll find the local farmer's market on the first and last Saturday of each month, from 9am-5pm. Tel: 01224 649000.



Edinburgh New Town Cookery School, above and above left

● Edinburgh's markets take place on Castle Terrace every Saturday, plus Tuesday, December 22. A wonderful variety is available of the best in meat, fish, free-range eggs, cheese, seasonal fruit and vegetables, jams, honey and drinks, all direct from the farms of Scotland. www.edinburghfarmersmarket.co.uk

■ For a list of local food and drink suppliers in your area, including farm shops, farmers' markets, food producers and restaurants, log on to www.whatsonyourplate.co.uk or call 0151 472 4000.



Shoppers peruse stalls on Belmont Street, Aberdeen

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Cam Laird with her homemade jams



Edinburgh farmers' market. Photograph: VisitScotland/ScottishViewpoint



Farmer John Sinclair and some of his hens