

Scottish Travel

# COOK UP IN CORK

Darina Allen's renowned Ballymaloe cookery school can transform your diet – or just sit back and enjoy the meals, suggests Jason Allardyce

famous mother-in-law Myrtle, has revolutionised Irish cuisine is no fan of processed bread – or processed anything. And she hasn't been afraid to upset the non-organic appalcart with her forthright views – including a pledge to ban squishy sliced pan with its myriad additives if ever she becomes health minister.

Her enthusiasm is infectious in the converted apple store in east Cork where Allen and her team extol the virtues of time-honoured but forgotten skills.

Twenty-four hours after a storm, a power outage has left them cooking in the dark with very little water, with 60 students on a massively oversubscribed 12-week certificated course. But the lack of mains electricity hardly matters, as there seems enough energy here to power a small town as the food gurus and scores of bright young things spark off each other, learning skills and sharing tips.

The school has gained an international

I could say Ballymaloe's cookery school is the best thing since sliced pan, but I can just imagine Darina Allen arching an eyebrow over her trademark spectacles. This human ball of energy who, like her equally



Darina Allen, below, offers courses on everything from beekeeping to fermentation

reputation since 1983, long before Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall escaped to River Cottage. Supplied by a 100-acre organic farm and local producers, students are taught not just to cook but to work in harmony with the landscape and seasons.

But if, like me, you have just a day to spare, worry not as Allen and co provide daily courses and demos to non-students too. Covering everything from cooking for toddlers, brunch and Sunday roasts to gluten-free cooking and beekeeping, they start from £53. For me it was a chance to learn about fermentation, preparing everything from kefir and kombucha to sauerkraut and Korean kimchi – all gut-friendly superfoods and drinks.

And if that sounds like too much hard work and you'd rather just luxuriate in a gorgeous Georgian hotel, you can literally have your cake and eat it by staying at Ballymaloe House. It's a chance to enjoy magnificent local food in a friendly setting, pampered by people who in many cases have had links with the Allens for generations. The rooms are spacious, the air rich with fresh flowers, the service intimate and the food wonderful.

Cork has long enjoyed a fine reputation for its food and drink, with celebrated brands such as Ballycotton potatoes, Cork Dry Gin, Clonakilty black pudding, Jameson whiskey and Barry's tea. Kinsale is a joyful haven of bars and seafood restaurants, and the Victorian English market in the heart of Cork City, visited a few years ago by the Queen, is a sublime daily competition for attention between artisan bakers, fish merchants, charcuteries and cheesemakers.

Yet Ballymaloe, with its homegrown produce and the best the local area has to offer, is arguably the jewel in Cork's crown. Get up early and help

pastry chef JR Ryall bake scones and soda bread, or have a lie-in before a sumptuous breakfast including overnight-soaked oats with mashed fruits, plus rashers, local fish, white pudding and eggs washed down with a pot of Barry's.

Dinners are still more impressive. How about hot Galway rock oysters with champagne sausage, winter lentil salad with roast red pepper and garden leaves, panfried Ballycotton hake with wilted leeks or garden squash and wild rice cake with pepper relish and garden greens? The dessert tray groans with treats including carrageen moss pudding and the glorious petit fours. At £66.50 it isn't the cheapest dinner around but excellent value all considered.

To work off the calories, try a cliff walk from Ballycotton to Ballyandreen beach. Pop into five-star Castlemartyr resort, a 17th-century manor house, for a drink or a meal and treat yourself at its huge spa.

Alternatively, soak up bustling Cork city or visit the Titanic experience in the seaport of Cobh, known as Queenstown until 1920, and learn of the area's legacy. Much of it is heartbreaking – the town was the departure point for 2.5m of the 6m Irish people who emigrated to North America between 1848 and 1950, and Queenstown was the final port of call for the Titanic.

But the spirit of Cork and its people remains indomitable. Eat and drink it in soon.

Standard rooms at Ballymaloe House start from £187 in the off-season and from £227 from May 1; 00 353 21 4652531, ballymaloe.ie.

For more on the cookery school, visit [cookingisfun.ie](http://cookingisfun.ie). Aer Lingus flies Edinburgh to Cork up to twice daily, fares from £32.99 one way; [aerlingus.com](http://aerlingus.com). See also [ireland.com](http://ireland.com)

Kids' clubs across the Med 10 years ago might be a swing and a sand pit. Today, hotels have upped the ante: from football academies to DJ schools and teen zones, kids' clubs are fun. Here we round up seven of the best. Prices are based on seven nights for a family of four

**THE PELIGONI CLUB, ZAKYNTHOS**

This Brit-owned watersports centre on Zakynthos has a crèche and kids' clubs run by Sharky & George. Teens have their own watersports, mocktail sports bar and dinner events, tennis court and pool. Club from £140 per week; villa sleeps four from £750 per week ([peligoni.com](http://peligoni.com)). Visit [jet2.com](http://jet2.com), [thomascokairlines.com](http://thomascokairlines.com) and [tui.co.uk](http://tui.co.uk) for flights to Zakynthos from Glasgow and Edinburgh.

**MARTINHAL CASCAIS, PORTUGAL**

Martihal has three beach resorts and a new hotel in Lisbon but Cascais is the pick. Opened in 2016, it has a 700 sq m kids' club (6-plus months), 2,300 sq m playgrounds, a 20m zipline and three pools (one covered). Clubs offer surfing, biking, riding and pool parties. From £1,321, B&B ([martihal.com](http://martihal.com)). Visit [ryanair.com](http://ryanair.com) and [easyjet.com](http://easyjet.com) for flights to Lisbon from Glasgow and Edinburgh.

**CLUB MED, PROVENCE**

Under-sixes go free at Club Med, which also has a 15% early booking discount on summer. Its resort at Opio is a belter, with pools and an army to entertain the bairns. The playground is designed by Cirque du



## CHILD'S PLAY

Kids' clubs have upped their game, says Jeremy Lazell

Soleil with 30 circus skills, including trapeze and tightrope. £1,828 ([clubmed.co.uk](http://clubmed.co.uk)). Visit [easyjet.co.uk](http://easyjet.co.uk) for flights to Nice from Edinburgh.

**SANI RESORT, HALKIDIKI**

Not every resort has teen spa sessions, but that's Sani for you. With five hotels, 22 restaurants, suites and villas, it has Brit-

Plenty of teen snorkel space on the four-mile beach at Sani, Halkidiki, northern Greece

run crèches for babes aged from four months. A teen zone offers DJing and dancing, beach volleyball and sailing, a football school with Chelsea FC coaches and a four-mile, pine-backed beach. From £1,582, half-board, at Sani Club, including free kids' club ([saniresort.gr](http://saniresort.gr)). Visit [jet2.com](http://jet2.com) for flights to Thessaloniki from Glasgow and Edinburgh.

**CLUB MAC, MALLORCA**

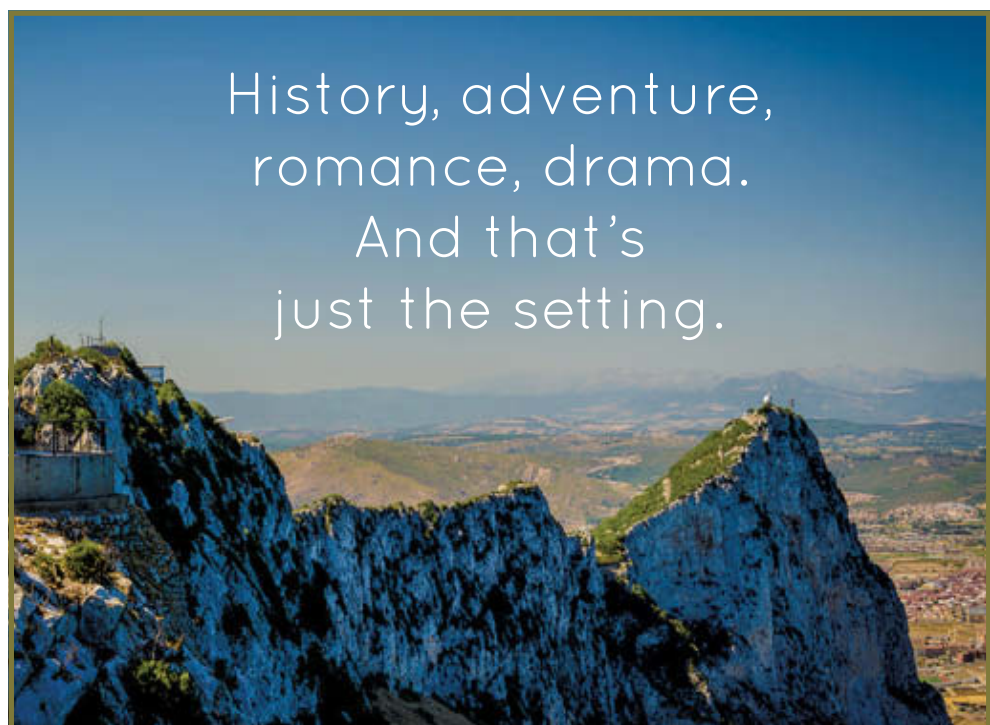
It's not the most upmarket, but at £190 per head, including kids' clubs, meals, drinks and access to the waterpark next door, who's complaining? And Palma has a huge choice of cheap flights. A free bus runs to Alcudia beach, half a mile away; kids' club activities (4-plus) include cooking, football, a disco and reptile show. From £763.67 in a suite ([clubmac.es](http://clubmac.es)). Visit [jet2.com](http://jet2.com), [ryanair.com](http://ryanair.com), [easyjet.co.uk](http://easyjet.co.uk), [barrheadtravel.co.uk](http://barrheadtravel.co.uk), [tui.com](http://tui.com) and [thomascokairlines.com](http://thomascokairlines.com) for flights to Palma from Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness and Aberdeen.

**PORTO ELOUNDA, CRETE**

On Crete, Porto Elounda Golf & Spa Resort has kids' clubs from 4 months, so you can unwind. Or not. Powder Byrne offer families diving; teens can also go climbing, pony-trekking, gorge-walking and golfing. From £6,116, half-board, inc transfers, 20% discount before Feb 28; kids' clubs from £325 ([powderbyrne.com](http://powderbyrne.com)). Visit [jet.com](http://jet.com), [easyjet.com](http://easyjet.com), [thomascokairlines.com](http://thomascokairlines.com) and [tui.com](http://tui.com) for flights to Heraklion from Edinburgh and Glasgow.

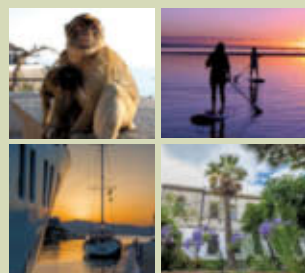
**CHIA LAGUNA, SARDINIA**

It's not cheap, and you'll have to fly from Manchester, but blimey it's worth it. This five-star resort has a football school run by ex-Premier League players and dance led by star choreographer Kevin Adams. From £6,289, half-board, including kids' clubs (3-12 years old); football and dance schools from £354 ([chialagunaresort.com](http://chialagunaresort.com)). Visit [tui.com](http://tui.com) for flights to Alghero from Manchester.



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