

Speyside distilled: Whisky, wool and walking

By MICHELLE LOCKE
Associated Press

ABERLOUR, Scotland — Forget the three Rs. I went to Speyside, Scotland's "single-malt capital of the world," to brush up on the three Ws: whisky, wool and walking.

Striding beside the River Spey on a misty afternoon, a warm sweater from a local mill wrapped around my shoulders, an even warmer dram of whisky awaiting me at my hotel ahead, I realized I'd reached peak Speyside status.

Educational mission accomplished. Or, to quote Scottish poet and noted whisky fan Robert Burns, "Gie me ae spark of Nature's fire/ That's a' the learning I desire."

Dreaming of drams and doing a little whisky wandering of your own? Here are a few pointers to the Speyside region's must-sees.

GETTING THERE

Speyside is located in northeast Scotland and the closest airport is Inverness. From there you can rent a car or take the train to the Elgin, Aviemore or Keith stations, whichever is closest to your accommodations. If you are traveling from London you may want to consider the Caledonian Sleeper that runs from Euston station to Inverness and is a fun way to step back in time to a slower and more gracious form of transport.

WHERE TO STAY

Dufftown is home to several distilleries and has rail service to Keith during the summer. You'll find a number of B&Bs here. Book ahead since rooms are limited. The pretty village of Aberlour has the Aberlour and Cardhu distilleries as well as The Dowans Hotel, which has a very good restaurant and well-stocked whisky bar, plus rooms ranging from small but well-designed singles that start at around \$100 a night to luxe suites. In the heart of the village, you'll find The Mash Tun, a whisky bar and restaurant with four rooms. Also of note is the Quaich bar in the Craigellachie Hotel, home to hundreds of whiskies.

GETTING AROUND

There are buses, but car is the easiest way to get around. If you're not renting, you can book a driver by the day or take taxis. Since taxis are limited, it's best to ask your hotel or B&B host to set up rides a day ahead.

WHISKY

Speyside is known for its single malts, whiskies made at a single



This photo taken June 29, 2016, shows the ruins of Elgin Cathedral. It is an impressive sight, especially the 13th-century west front, in Elgin, in Scotland's Speyside region. The cathedral is across the street from Johnstons of Elgin, maker of fine cashmere.

distillery from malted grain, usually barley. Big names include The Glenlivet, Glenfiddich and The Macallan. More than a dozen distilleries are open to the public. Pick the ones that mean the most to you for whatever reason and plan accordingly. See this website for a helpful interactive map: <https://www.visitscotland.com/see-do/food-drink/whisky/distilleries/>.

The area hosts an annual Spirit of Speyside Whiskey Festival; the next is scheduled April 27-May 1.

Three distilleries to consider:

Glenfiddich and Balvenie: These neighboring Dufftown distilleries offer contrasting experiences. At Glenfiddich, you'll tour the distillery, visit the warehouses where the barrels age and finish up with a tasting. Tours start at around \$13, reservations recommended. The Balvenie distillery has a traditional,

working malting floor as well as its own cooperage on site. It's recommended you book four weeks ahead. Tours start at \$50 and for an extra \$30 or so you can bottle your own bottle of Balvenie. Glenfiddich has a restaurant and just around the corner are the atmospheric ruins of Balvenie Castle, open to visitors April-September. Check out the nearby field, you may see some Highland cattle with their adorably fringed faces.

The Macallan: The Macallan is in Craigellachie (pronounced CRYGELL-ah-kee) and is the whisky James Bond likes to drink. Construction is under way on a new distillery; check the website for traffic information. The Six Pillars tour, about \$19, offers an excellent and in-depth look into what goes into making and aging a single malt whisky and finishes with a tasting of four whiskies. Reservations required. The distillery



In this photo taken June 28, 2016, a worker at the cooperage of the Balvenie distillery in Dufftown, in the Speyside region of Scotland, works on a whisky barrel.



This photo taken June 28, 2016, shows the line up for a whisky tasting at the Glenfiddich distillery in the Speyside region of Scotland. The distillery is one of several in the area that can be visited.

is set in an extensive estate backing on to the Spey and visitors can walk around the area.

WALKS

The Speyside Way runs about 65 miles from Buckie, on the northeast coast, to Aviemore, near the Cairngorm mountains. Bikes allowed on some parts of the route. Find out more here: <http://www.speysideway.org/>

WOOL

Elgin is home to Johnstons of Elgin, maker of fine cashmere. Free guided tours of the mill are available; reserve ahead to make sure you're not disappointed. More details here, <http://www.johnstonscashmere.com/us/mill-tour/>. If you are at all into cashmere goods, this is well worth the time. You'll follow the

life cycle of cashmere, from fluffy ball of uncarded fiber to the colorful, chattering looms that weave fabric to the lush scarves, knitwear and other finished products. A restaurant is on site — the scones are highly recommended — and, of course, there's a well-stocked gift shop. Just across the street are the stark yet elegant ruins of Elgin Cathedral, open April-September. In the village of Knockando (knock-AN-doh) you'll find the historic Knockando Woolmill, which has been producing woven fabric for 200 years and has a pretty garden setting, a gift shop selling unique woven goods and an excellent small cafe. Closed during the winter, opens for the season in March.

This sheet-pan salmon supper will start 2017 just right

By MELISSA D'ARABIAN
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New year new you. Right?

So let's get right down to it: If healthy eating is complicated and time-consuming, we will lose interest before Valentine's day has arrived. That's why sheet-pan salmon suppers are so terrific — they take minutes to make, and yet the healthy fats in salmon are filling. Today's recipe features salmon alongside super-quick-cooking asparagus, which tastes sweet and less grassy when roasted. This incredibly simple recipe will start off the 2017 menu rotation right.

Sheet-pan suppers are perfectly quick for weeknight eating, and versatile enough that you can swap out ingredients to match your tastes and your fridge. Don't have salmon? Use sea bass or cod, no problem. Just pay attention to the cook times, particularly as you swap out veggies — you may need to pre-cook harder vegetables like broccoli or cauliflower. (Tip: you can do a quick microwave steam to par-cook slower-cooking ingredients like potatoes before placing them on the sheet-pan.) You can even use frozen fish fillets



Sheet-pan supper of salmon and asparagus.

for this recipe if you add a little cooking time (use an instant meat thermometer to check for doneness).

Since my daughter is gluten-sensitive, I use almond flour for a bit of bread-less breaded texture on top of the salmon, but feel free to use crunchy panko breadcrumbs if you prefer. Herbes de Provence is my go-to dried herb blend, and

it can be found now in most well-stocked grocery stores, and is a worthy little splurge. Otherwise, use a mix of dried oregano, marjoram and thyme and the results will still be delicious.

A final weeknight strategy: you can prep this whole dinner ahead of time on your sheet tray and stick it in the fridge. Then, when you get home, pop the whole

thing into the oven for a dinner that is even faster than microwaving a frozen lasagna. You'll save both time and calories, and who couldn't use that in 2017?

Food Network star Melissa d'Arabian is an expert on healthy eating on a budget. She is the author of the cookbook "Supermarket Healthy."

EASIEST SHEET PAN SALMON

Start to finish: 20 minutes

Servings: 4

- 4 fillets salmon, skin removed, 5 ounces each
- ½ cup almond flour or almond meal (can substitute panko bread crumbs)
- 1 ½ teaspoons dried herbes de Provence (or dried oregano or thyme)
- ½ teaspoon granulated garlic
- 1 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 bunch of asparagus, cleaned and trimmed, about 1 pound
- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- ½ teaspoon salt, divided
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- lemon wedges for serving

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F and cover a baking sheet with parchment paper.

Pat the salmon dry gently with a paper towel.

On a small plate, mix the almond flour, herbs, garlic, lemon zest, half the salt, and pepper with a fork until well-blended. Sprinkle or brush the lemon juice even on top of the salmon fillets. Dip the top of the salmon fillets into the almond flour crumbs, gently pressing them into the top of the fillets, evenly dividing the almond flour and herb mixture among the fillets. Place the fillets on the sheet pan. Toss the asparagus with the olive oil and remaining salt. Place around the salmon fillets. Cook until salmon reaches 135 internal temperature and asparagus is tender, about 15 minutes. Serve with lemon wedges.

Nutrition information per serving: 293 calories; 133 calories from fat; 15 g fat (2 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 78 mg cholesterol; 357 mg sodium; 8 g carbohydrate; 4 g fiber; 3 g sugar; 33 g protein.