

The taste of legends

Baltic Outlook journalists Natali Lekka and Chris Yeomans visit Nottinghamshire in search of history, legend and culinary delights.

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NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND VISITENGLAND



Newark Market

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The English county of Nottinghamshire is steeped in history and legend. From the famous Robin Hood to numerous kings and lords, many have traversed and left their mark. Today's visitors can get there much faster than the horses and carriages of medieval times, and our easterly starting point of Newark-on-Trent is only one hour and 15 minutes by train from London's King's Cross station.

The bustling market town of Newark brims with tales from yesteryear, and it has played a notable part in two of the most significant wars in English history. During the Wars of the Roses (1455-1487), King Edward IV of England passed through the town en route to battle the wearers of the Red (Lancastrian) Rose gathered at Doncaster. Some two centuries later, Newark became a Royalist stronghold during the English Civil War (1642-1651) and it was here that King Charles I surrendered to the Scots in 1646. He was later put on trial by the English parliament and executed. The town castle still bears the scars of that conflict and is a must-see, its three dungeons providing a dark and claustrophobic

reminder of the country's sometimes violent past. In 2015, Newark plans to open a National Civil War Museum devoted to this key event in English history.

One of the most striking things about Newark-on-Trent is the large number of independent retailers and restaurants, giving the high street a more bespoke nature than in other market towns of a similar size. Known as a foodie's paradise, Newark has restaurants that cater to all appetites and budgets. Our first culinary stop was at *Gannet's Day Café*, a family-owned bistro housed in an elegant Georgian building near the castle. It serves organic, locally sourced produce and a seasonal menu. The choice was plentiful, the service friendly and the ingredients super fresh.

Locally sourced food is a feature of many of the restaurants that we visited, reflecting a pride in the specialties and delicacies of the region. Our next destination was *G.H. Porter Provisions*, a smokehouse and delicatessen dating from 1890. There we were greeted by a fine selection of regional produce, including cured, unsmoked and smoked meat. We

feasted our eyes on the traditional stuffed chine dish (cured pork with parsley), haslet, Poacher cheeses smoked on site in a traditional basement smokehouse, locally sourced black pudding, sausages, ham, bacon, pork pies and preserves, not to mention an encyclopaedic range of specialist coffees, teas and tobacco products from around the world, ground to the customer's specifications on the spot.

The emphasis on the bespoke and traditional runs at the heart of the business, which uses a traditional meat cutter and a 1950s coffee roaster. We toured the basement smokehouse and gained a unique insight into the production process. In the building above the smokehouse, the famous poet Lord Byron printed some of his first works.

Just a short walk away is *Stray's Coffee House and Bookshop*, another family-run business with an emphasis on top-quality food and drink at fair prices. Its renowned head chef Warren Jones has cooked for royalty and celebrities. As we perused the menu over afternoon coffee and cake to the strains of jazz music (the place also hosts jazz events), we felt that this was the perfect place to relax after a packed day. Following a leisurely walk along the canal – a key part of the region's industrial past – we headed at dusk for our final culinary experience of the day.

The *Danube Café & Restaurant* is a curio of the Newark restaurant scene. Mixing central and southeastern European food with locally sourced ingredients has proven to be a successful concept. The service was excellent, the food beautifully presented and delicious (the rare Transylvanian steak was cooked to perfection), and the selection of Central European wines and beers was extensive.

As night fell, we took a short taxi ride to the award-winning four-star *Kellam House Hotel*, an early 20th-century Edwardian manor house set in 3.5 ha of grounds and just a short taxi ride from the centre of town.



Newark market goods



Robin Hood statue at Nottingham Castle



Newark Castle

Southwell Minster



Apple country

We left Newark the next morning with the best of impressions and drove west for 20 minutes to Southwell, a bustling marketplace and foodie destination bursting with character. Often referred to as the jewel of Nottinghamshire's crown, this quaint little town on the edge of Sherwood Forest lives and breathes food with its multitude of shops selling organic bread, quality cheeses, homemade cakes and jams, free-range eggs and local honey.

Our first stop was the impressive 12th-century Norman Southwell Minster with its unusual pepperpot spires, magnificent stained glass windows and world-famous Leaves of Southwell stone carvings. Southwell Minster is said to be the best-kept secret among the country's 42 English cathedrals. Considerably damaged during the Civil War, it was restored extensively in the mid-19th century to become the Cathedral of Nottinghamshire.

Next to the minster, the Archbishop's Palace with its Sensory Gardens recently opened to the public following a 1.26-million-pound refurbishment from the Heritage Lottery Fund. This was the place where King Charles I spent his last night as a free man before being captured by the Scots.

Aside from its colourful history, Southwell is also known as the home of the much-loved English Bramley cooking apple, first cultivated there over 200 years ago. According to legend, a local girl named Mary Ann Brailsford planted a few apple pips in her garden in 1809, one of which grew to become the first Bramley apple tree. The apple took its name after Matthew Bramley, a local butcher who bought the cottage and garden in 1846.

Today, the original tree still bears fruit in a private garden on Church Street. Dubbed "king of the cooking apples", the Bramley is loved throughout the world and boasts a particularly strong fan base in Japan. Britons consume more than 100 million Bramley apples per year in traditional apple pies and other dishes, in what is calculated to be an annual 50-million-pound industry. Every October, locals celebrate their love for their favourite apple with a Bramley Apple Festival.

The best way to get to know the hidden history of this picturesque town is by going on a heritage walk. We went on a Bramley Apple Trail Walk that took us to Burgage Manor, the house where the aforementioned Lord Byron spent three years of his life lodging with his mother. Sadly, the old train station that once played a significant role in transporting the local apples to other

Lord Byron



Southwell Minster



Autumn walk





Bramley apples



Delilah Fine Foods, an award-winning traditional delicatessen and tapas-style food bar



Don't miss the opportunity to taste and buy over 1000 different food products from around the world

BRITONS CONSUME MORE THAN 100 MILLION BRAMLEY APPLES PER YEAR IN TRADITIONAL APPLE PIES AND OTHER DISHES

parts of the region is no longer in existence. We also visited the Southwell Workhouse, a place where poor people laboured in often harsh conditions in exchange for shelter. It is the only institution of its kind to survive fully intact from that period.

After a long walk, it was time to rest and try some local delicacies at the *Clock House* café and tea house in Upton, which is within walking distance of the workhouse or just a short taxi ride away. Acclaimed

head chef Edward Halls boasts many years of experience working in *Michelin*-star restaurants and as a private chef at Kensington Palace. Now he serves delicious afternoon teas and wonderful homemade lunches, all made from locally sourced food.

Halls' specialty is baked dishes. Sitting outside in the café's garden surrounded by Bramley apple trees, we chose the caramelised Bramley apple (picked from these same trees!) and frangipane tart with clotted cream. Next to the café, the British Horological Institute, housed in a building that dates back to the 10th century, offers a wealth of information about clocks. Sadly, the institute is open to the public only a few times per year, including the two Sundays at the beginning and end of British Summertime, when the



Nottingham Castle



Legendary Stilton cheese



Another traditional raw milk blue cheese named Stichelton is made on the Welbeck Estate in Worksop

country's clocks are accordingly set one hour forward and back again.

Modern meets traditional

Nottinghamshire brims with history and culinary traditions. Eager to experience both, we headed west to Nottingham, the county capital, which has been built on top of more than 400 man-made underground sandstone caves. Visitors can go on subterranean tours to discover how the caves were once used as tanneries, bomb shelters, dungeons, breweries and even homes. Here you will also find the Galleries of Justice Museum, the only one in Europe to boast an underground gaol dating back to the 18th century and considered to be one of the most haunted buildings in the UK. Other secret underground passageways allegedly lead to the legendary Norman Nottingham Castle.

However, our interests lay more above ground in the pubs and restaurants of this bustling city. We started at *Delilah Fine Foods*, an award-winning traditional delicatessen and tapas-style food bar in the heart of Nottingham. Sangita Tryner and her dedicated team of foodies give visitors the opportunity to taste and buy over 1000 different food products from around the world. Passion for food runs through the veins of this independent deli, which has been voted Best Deli-Café in Nottingham for four years running and Best Independent Deli in the UK by *BBC Good Food Magazine*.

It is here that Sarah, *Delilah's* cheesemonger extraordinaire, talked to us about Stilton, one of 150 cheeses on sale at the deli. This quintessential English blue cheese, whose history goes back to the 18th century, bears its own EU-protected

HERE, YOU CAN ALSO FIND THE SCHOOL OF ARTISAN FOOD, WHICH OFFERS A WIDE RANGE OF COOKING LESSONS TO VISITORS

The *Castle Rock Brewery* tour gives a fantastic insight into the process of ale-brewing



Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem claims to be England's oldest inn



Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem has been serving ale to weary travellers for over 800 years

certification trademark, meaning that Stilton can be produced in dairies from only three English counties: Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire. Stilton's creamy, piquant flavour has rightfully earned it the title of King of English Cheeses. In 2014, it was crowned champion at the International Cheese Awards in Nantwich.

In Nottinghamshire, cheeses such as the traditional Stilton and the Shropshire Blue are made by one of three major artisanal producers: *Colston Bassett*, *Stichelton Dairy* and *Cropwell Bishop*. Stichelton, a traditional raw milk blue cheese, is made on the Welbeck Estate in Worksop, which is known among foodies to be the heartland of English blue cheese. The estate houses one of the UK's top ten farm shops, according to *BBC Good Food*. Here, you can also find the School of Artisan Food, which, as Sarah explained, offers a wide range of cooking lessons to visitors and professionals alike, celebrating traditional cooking methods from cheese-making and cider-brewing to bread-baking.

As with its cuisine and architecture, Nottinghamshire's pubs and beer-brewing establishments offer a mix between the old and the new, where international novelties complement local traditions. The *Castle Rock Brewery* tour in Nottingham gives a fantastic insight into the process of ale-brewing. The brewery's link with the past is further accentuated by a modern-day reincarnation of the local medieval hero Robin Hood, who conducts tours of the facilities, showing visitors the hops in the mash tun (the vat used for brewing) and the various types of barley used for the brewery's award-winning ales, among other things.

The centre of Nottingham is compact, walkable and home to notable bars. The *Canal House* -- which offers a wide selection of ales, international lagers and ciders -- actually features a canal with a boat inside its premises. Meanwhile, *Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem* claims to be England's oldest inn, dating from 1189, its name harking back to the age of the Crusades. With its glass-encased galleon and 'fertility chair' this establishment is a curio right under the shadow of the castle.

After the brewery tour, we stopped at *Ned Ludd's*, a gastropub and restaurant that pairs stunning, locally sourced artisanal food with finely crafted beers, ales and ciders. Keen on trying something local, we went for the Nottingham pie, a beef brisket with creamy mash and Stilton cheese; and the Homity pie made from potato, leak and local Colwick cheese in cider cream. We paired our food with *Ned Ludd's* signature drink,



Woodland path in Sherwood Forest

Starkey's Bramley Apple Martini (rum and vodka with Starkey's Bramley Apple puree and apple juice topped with vanilla cream and crumble garnish.) The cocktail, which you can only find here, has been featured at VisitEngland's Tourism Week and has represented Nottingham all the way to Frankfurt.

Our last culinary adventure of the day was at *MemSaab*, voted Best Indian Restaurant in Nottingham for several years in a row and ranked amongst the top three Indian restaurants in the country according to the *Sunday Times*. We were in for a real treat. Friendly and welcoming, with dishes cooked to perfection, *MemSaab* was a truly sensory dining experience. We chose the signature tandoori ostrich as a starter – a delicious dish made from locally farmed free-range ostrich fillet infused with garlic and red chilli.

We ended the day by staying at the independent boutique *St. James Hotel*, recently refurbished to resemble the luxurious grand palazzos of Venice and only a stone's throw away from the castle. Nottinghamshire, like a good lesser-known book, is an understated gem waiting to be discovered. **BO**

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