

Irish  
whiskey

Irish Whiskey 360°

# Food Pairing

A Short guide  
to Irish Whiskey & food pairings





## From farm to fork and from grain to glass, did you know Irish whiskey and food go perfectly together?

**The depth of diversity of Irish whiskey pairs perfectly with the finest and freshest food on the island.**

From Irish cheeses to seafood – oyster – and grilled prawns from cured meat to barbequed meats to even chocolate, add an Irish whiskey and get ready for an explosion of the senses as whiskey and food marry together to bring out the most exquisite and intense flavours of Ireland. In the pub or restaurant – or in the comfort of your home – discover the magic of Irish whiskey and food. Jp McMahon, a renowned Irish chef has provided the following guide on Irish whiskey and food pairings.

Experimentation and an open mind are key when developing your whiskey and food pairing. It does not need to be complex and some of the best Irish food, from bread to cheese and charcuterie, need very little preparation. It is as easy as slicing several cheeses and meats and pairing them with a few whiskeys. Of course, more complex pairings also work but simplicity is key. As your palate gets tired quickly try not to pair too many different flavours together at once.

# Bread & Butter



**Simplicity is key here. Good soda bread (or sourdough) and farmhouse butter is all you need to set up a simple food pairing that will delight.** Because of the density of the bread, and natural oiliness of the butter you need a whiskey which has sufficient texture to stand up to the bread, but also robust flavour delivery on the palate. When tasting whiskey and different breads, butter the bread and cut up into little squares. Lighter breads (such as white country loaf or batch bread) will pair better with single malts. More robust breads (such as wholemeal soda bread) work better more mature whiskeys.

## Highlighted pairings

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Lighter white soda bread will pair well with single malts or pot stills.

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Try adding seeds to the soda bread (if baking in house) to complement the nutty nature of mature, sherry-finished Irish whiskeys.

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Peated whiskeys work well with wholegrain breads, such as rye and wholemeal.

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Due to the aged quality of whiskey, it is best to serve the whiskey with wholegrain bread as opposed to white bread due to the hearty quality of the whiskey.

# Irish Farmhouse cheeses



**Ireland is famous for its cheeses and the country now has a farmhouse cheese movement to rival any country in the world.** Whiskey pairs extremely well with cheese due to the ways in which the cheese acts as a foil for the robust quality of the whiskey. If you're tasting several cheeses with a number of whiskeys, start with the lightest and work up towards the richest. Always finish with a blue, as the robust quality of this cheese tends to affect other cheeses. When building your cheese board, pick four different cheeses (goats, cheddar, smoked, blue). Always allow the cheese to come up to room temperature before serving. The cheese should be the same temperature as the whiskey.

## Highlighted pairings

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Goat's cheese (St. Tola, Galway Goat Farm) works well with many Irish whiskeys from single malts to lighter, sweeter single grains or blends.

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Mature cheddars (such as Hegarty's or Coolattin) work well with both single grain and Bourbon-matured whiskeys. A light and sweet blend can also cut through the richness of the mature cheddar. Because of the subtlety of most Irish hard cheddars, they work with a broad range of Irish whiskeys. It can be fun to line up four different whiskeys with the same cheddar and see how the cheese affect they essential character of the whiskey.

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Sheep's cheese (such as Rockfield) pair with lighter, sweeter single grains or blends.

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Brie style cheeses (such as Ballylisk) pair with pot still and single malt.

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Smoked cheeses (such as Gubbeen or Knockanore) pair well with sherry-finished single malts or pot stills.

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Peated whiskeys work well with smoked cheeses and hard cheddars.

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Blue cheese (such as Crozier Blue, Young Buck, Kearney, or Cashel Blue) favours single malts (particularly either sherry-finished or peated) or sherry-finished pot stills. The richness of the sherry flavour cuts through the deep flavour of the cheese and provides a beautiful pairing that complements both cheese and whiskey.

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Pair fortified wine driven whiskeys with more of the richer and more robust cheeses.

# Charcuterie



Ireland produces a great variety of charcuterie now, from Gubbeen salami to McGeough's smoked lamb. Due to their aging cured meats have the great depth in flavour. For pairing with Irish whiskey you can choose a variety of different cured meats, from pork and lamb to beef and game; and experiment with different whiskeys from light to sweet and mature. Experiment with different whiskeys from light to sweet and mature with different cured meat. Sweeter bourbon-matured whiskeys also compliment the dry saltiness of most cured meats.

## Highlighted pairings

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Pair sliced salami with single grains or blends.

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Smoked cured meat work with peated whiskeys or blends.

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Cured Beef (such as Bresaola, corned beef, or pickled ox tongue) will work with more mature whiskey, and sherry finished single malts.

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Spicy cured meats, such as chorizo, will work with sherry-finished pot stills.

# Fish & Shellfish



**Shellfish such as prawns, scallops, oysters, mussels, and crab are ideal to pair with Irish whiskey.** Because of the unique clean flavour shellfish, they are well paired with both stronger, spicier whiskeys to draw out flavour. Pairing with seafood is a great way to showcase the versatility of Irish whiskey while also showcasing some of the amazing seafood found in Ireland. With seafood, texture is a big element which can be complimented by the right whiskey.

## Highlighted pairings

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Depending on the garnish for oysters you can pair with different whiskey, i.e. Tabasco or hot sauce with spicier whiskey; lemon juice or buttermilk with blends.

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Mussels can be steamed in a little peated Whiskey for a unique tasting opportunity.

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Freshly dressed crab on brown bread and butter is a good pairing for whiskey with a clean flavoured finish. You can also try the crab and brown bread with three distinct whiskeys for a little fun.

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Smoked fish, such as salmon, eel, tuna, and mackerel with peated whiskey or a lovely spicy pot still. You can also arrange different smoked fish to try with different whiskey from delicate to mature and spicy. The smoky nature of the fish will compliment many different varieties.

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Fresh seafood, particularly fatty fish such as salmon will in general go well with blends and single malts.

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Whiskey cream sauces work well with firm white fish such as monkfish.

# Meat



**The natural flavours of Irish whiskey will work most meats, from beef to chicken, lamb, and pork – including in sandwiches.** Grilled meats pair well with strong malty, peaty or spicy whiskeys, while mature whiskey that are finished in sherry barrel will match that charred flavoured of most meats. As meat carries a stronger flavour than fish, it can drown out the subtle qualities of lighter whiskeys, except that is if you're serving beef tartare.

## Highlighted pairings

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Beef tartare with blended whiskeys.

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Steaks or steak sandwich pair well with single malts. If using horseradish, take into account its spicy character.

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Grilled chicken salad with hazelnuts will match the flavour of malted and unmalted barley in pot still whiskeys.

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Try little pots of lamb stew with peated whiskeys.

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BBQ duck, ribs and pulled pork work well with many Irish whiskeys from single malts to sweeter single grains or blends.

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Irish whiskey not only pairs well with meat and cheese (such as a slider or burgers) but is also great to use as an ingredient in marinades and sauces due to its rich, sweet flavour profile.

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Whiskey sauce pairs perfectly streaks and pork fillets.

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Try adding a dash of peat whiskey to chicken before grilled, breading or flouring.

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The flavours of southern fried chicken as well as Moorish spices (cumin, coriander, and cinnamon) work well with spicy pot still.

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Lamb curry (or other types of curry) can match more mature whiskey due to their deeper flavours.

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# Chocolate & other desserts



**The higher the cocoa content the more robust and rounded the whiskey.** Try a few squares of good quality 70% chocolate with a pot still or a sherry matured whiskey. Nut and truffle flavoured chocolates will showcase spicier tones of pot still Irish whiskey. Flavoured chocolate such as salted caramel or orange chocolate balance with the malt in the single malt Irish whiskey. Blends pair well with small dairy based desserts, such as cheesecake. If pairing whiskeys with desserts, serve with a selection of smaller desserts so customers can try and match with different whiskeys. Due to the strength of whiskeys, smaller portions of desserts work better as the sugar content of the dessert can mask the flavour of the whiskey.

## Highlighted pairings

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Try a crème brûlée (with vanilla, orange, or lemon zest) with a pot still.

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Dark Chocolate mousse with pot still or sherry matured whiskey.

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Fruit panna cotta (such as rhubarb) pair with blended whiskeys.



