



Get up and go

Nothing says weekend like a relaxed brunch. **Rachel Walker** picks the top spots in the country to feast on pancakes, eggs benedict or the classic fry-up

One of my earliest food memories is of being perched on a bench, dressed in a ballet leotard and georgette skirt, beside my friend Holly, our feet not quite touching the ground. Every Saturday, we would work our way through a pile of pancakes, before springing about in a hall for an hour, propelled through the lesson by batter and lemon and sugar.

This was my first taste of “brunch” — a joyous meal that broke the monotony of the weekday breakfast, and marked the start of the weekend. The ballet classes stopped when I was 11, and the pancake tradition stopped, too. But it didn’t call a halt to brunch, just a diversification.

There have been muffins dictated by the seasons — raspberry, then plum, then apple. There was a period instigated by my brother discovering how to make hollandaise, and another marked by my husband’s enthusiasm for a homemade smoker.

A weekday breakfast is defined by rules: fibre and five a day, slow-releasing energy and sugar-free cereal. The weekend brunch is the backlash. It’s a meal where towers of buttermilk pancakes are drowned in maple syrup and garnished with bacon. Hell, it’s a meal where pre-midday drinking — bellinis, bloody marys, mimosas — is wholly acceptable.

The hazy origins of brunch are thought to date back to hunt breakfasts, where platters of chicken livers and kidneys were served alongside rice pudding and sloe gin. A more metropolitan version evolved in 1930s America. Hotels took advantage of waning church attendance, and the fact that restaurants were closed on Sunday morning, to pioneer a new activity.

Mid-morning became the time to indulge in American classics such as eggs benedict, bagels and buttermilk pancakes. But the concept of brunch travelled and, with it, dishes from all over the world became incorporated into this lawless, modern-day smorgasbord of a meal: french toast, Mexican huevos rancheros, Indian akuri, Swiss bircher.

When the word “brunch” was first recorded, in an 1895 article in *Hunter’s Weekly*, it was described as “cheerful, sociable and inciting. It is talk-compelling. It puts you in a good temper, it makes you satisfied with yourself and your fellow beings, it sweeps away the worries and cobwebs of the week.” More than a century later, little has changed.

LONDON AND SOUTHEAST

TOP BRASS

Nopi, Soho, London W1

The shakshuka at Nopi is enough to make you reassess the merits of a fry-up. It arrives in a small copper skillet — two baked eggs with runny yolks, nestled in a spiced tomato sauce and topped with smoky labneh yoghurt flecked with fresh herbs. There are juices (carrot, ginger and apple is refreshing), but in this polished Ottolenghi outpost, the best accompaniment is something from the “breakfast bubbles” section.

ottolenghi.co.uk/nopi

SUPER-SOPHISTICATED

The Wolseley, Piccadilly, London W1

Unspeakable glamour, exquisite dishes and people-spotting potential have turned breakfast at the

Wolseley into an institution. The remarkable building started life as a car showroom and in 2003 was relaunched as a restaurant, styled on the grand cafes of Vienna and Parisian brasseries. The menu runs the gamut from lighter breakfasts, such as bircher muesli and yoghurt, to the full English and old-school offerings including kedgeree and devilled lamb kidneys.

thewolseley.com

A WORK OF ART

Berners Tavern, Fitzrovia, London W1

The smoked ham omelette has the nutty taste of Lincolnshire poacher running through it, and the avocado on toast with chorizo and a poached egg is laced with Vietnamese dressing. It fits with the dining room’s utter extravagance: the walls are adorned with gilt-framed



paintings and the ceiling with elaborate cornices. On Sundays, the breakfast menu expands into a brunch that ranges from the sublime (house granola with raspberries and yoghurt) to the decadent (baked lobster omelette).

bernerstavern.com

SPILL THE BEANS

Caravan, King's Cross, London N1

Founded by three New Zealanders, Caravan's second outpost, in a converted grain store, is known for selling some of the best coffee in London — the beans are sourced from single estates and roasted on site. The “world food” has a cult following — try the plump batons of rhubarb stacked on grilled coconut bread with lemon curd cream cheese, or jalapeño cornbread with two fried eggs, black beans and guindilla chilli peppers. Be warned: you can't reserve for weekend brunch, so you need patience or an early start to get a table.

caravankingscross.co.uk

BOTTOMLESS BELLINIS

Bourne & Hollingsworth, Farringdon, London EC1

Outside, Bourne & Hollingsworth is a black brick industrial building, but, inside, hanging ferns and floral furnishings create the feel of a prohibition bar merged with an Edwardian orangery. The unlimited bellinis and bloody marys might be the lure, but the food is faultless, too, with dishes such as potato hash, duck egg, smoked salmon and hollandaise providing enough substance for one more glass of fizz.

bourneandhollingsworth.com

MIRACLE CURE

The New Club, Brighton

The morning after the night before, Brighton locals flock to this hip, NYC-inspired joint. Both the sausage and bacon brioche buns come with a “hangover cure dressing”, and the “hard” brunch beverages include the breakfast club, which uses house-infused bacon vodka, and Kentucky fizz — bourbon with prosecco. There are towers of buttermilk pancakes

for those with a sweet tooth, and 100% arabica coffee is a handy pick-me-up.

thenewclubbrighton.com

COASTAL CLASSIC

Wyatt & Jones, Broadstairs

After your morning walk around the sandy crescent of Viking Bay, Wyatt & Jones's fishermen's kipper breakfast, served with sharp mustard butter, is the perfect reward. The Broadstairs restaurant has earned a reputation for its delicious home-baked bread and its beautifully cooked fish. With views that stretch far out to sea, there can't be many better places to eke out a morning with the papers.

wyattandjones.co.uk

WEST AND SOUTHWEST AUTHENTIC OXFORD

Old Parsonage Hotel, Oxford

This wisteria-clad 17th-century former parsonage in central Oxford couldn't be further from the bustle of the high street, with a serene atmosphere more akin to one of the colleges. Brunch is a civilised, starched-linen affair. Toasted almonds and roast apricots with porridge, crab and avocado on toast and fresh leaf teas are all highlights.

oldparsonage-hotel.co.uk

WELL SOURCED

Poco, Bristol

The eggs come from nearby Haresfield Farm, the streaky bacon is sourced from Sandridge Farm and the sourdough is made at the local Hart's Bakery, but Poco is also about inspired food. A Moroccan scramble arrives with creamy eggs spooned over sourdough, and harissa and mutton merguez sausages. The coffee is strong, the open kitchen humming and the atmosphere relaxed. The new branch in London is already creating a buzz.

eatpoco.com

BANG ON TREND

Bakers & Co, Bristol

At home, I stick to salted butter on toast; at Bakers & Co, I order soft cheese, maple syrup, walnuts and bacon on custard toast. The cookies



are flavoured with salt, chocolate and rye, the sourdough is made from a 200-year-old culture from Lapland, and the Colombian coffee has sour cherry and cocoa notes. When it comes to modern cafe culture, the founders have done their homework.

bakersbristol.co.uk

SEA FRONT

Idle Rocks, St Mawes

Sitting in the Idle Rocks dining room, looking out over the bay at St Mawes, it's hard not to plump for fish — an omelette Arnold Bennett or the Cornish smokehouse kippers. Local ingredients are at the heart of the set-price breakfast, which also includes artisanal breads from nearby Da Bara Bakery and porridge topped with clotted cream.

idlerocks.com

NORTHWEST CLEANED-UP

Common, Manchester

This Northern Quarter hang-out used to be known for its “dirty burgers”, but a recent menu overhaul has seen it clean up its act.

Now Common has a first-class bakery and a breakfast menu offering homemade beans on rye bread, and smoked salmon with asparagus and a poached egg. Hang around to midday when brunch merges into lunch and the reuben sandwich with salt beef, emmental and sauerkraut becomes available.

aplacecalledcommon.co.uk

COME OOLONG

Leaf, Liverpool

Single tea infusers cover the tables at Leaf, which was converted into a cinema before returning to its 1920s glory days as a tea room. The “full breakfasts” include vegan, vegetarian and pescatarian, though the winning dish comes from the “light breakfast” section — cinnamon toast with a generous dollop of crème fraîche and a mixed-berry compote.

thisisleaf.co.uk

FISH FIRST

Little Fish Cafe, Douglas, Isle of Man

In this harbourside cafe on the Isle



Start the weekend Leather sofas for hunkering down on at Steam Yard Coffee Co, Sheffield, above, breakfast bloody marys at Bourne & Hollingsworth, left, and a brunch favourite, eggs florentine, far left

of Man, a bun topped with a fillet of fish, pickled beetroot and horseradish cream seems like the ideal breakfast. The small, sweet Little Fish Cafe is only yards from its older sister, 14North. The two of them showcase island produce, so locally smoked salmon and Manx queenies both appear on the brunch menu.

littlefishcafe.com

BRUNCH ON THE MOVE

Tebay Services, Cumbria

Sitting in Tebay Services with a coffee and a homemade Cumberland sausage for the road, it's easy to forget it is primarily a service station on the M6 rather than a farm shop and cafe. However, it teems with produce from local farmers, and has a cheerful atmosphere as other travellers relish their break. It's no prosecco-fuelled urban brunch, but for locally sourced ingredients, it's a winner.

tebayervices.com

EAST, MIDLANDS AND NORTHEAST

SMOKE SIGNALS

Creake Abbey Cafe, Norfolk

The grounds of a 13th-century Augustinian abbey are home to the Creake Abbey Cafe, a deli and a smokehouse. The brunch menu

features sausages made on site and bacon from the smokehouse. Combine food with one of the many events such as guided herb walks or farmers' markets.

creakeabbeycafe.com

SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Yorks Bakery Cafe, Birmingham

Did you know that poached rhubarb and labneh yoghurt are good on toast? Or that caramelised apples are delicious with coconut milk porridge? Well, neither did I, until I explored the Something Different section of Yorks Bakery's breakfast and brunch menu. The Birmingham cafe has an industrial feel — but the food shifts the focus to the colours and textures of the beautiful dishes.

yorksbakerycafe.co.uk

SUPERCOOL

Steam Yard Coffee Co, Sheffield

A Steve McQueen is one of Steam Yard Cafe's most popular orders: a doughnut and Square Mile Redbrick coffee (£3). Come weekend brunches, things get cooler: a "fronut" is a halved doughnut, stuffed with Peak District Dairy ice cream. Enjoy with a signature Steam Yard Cold Brew in the sun-trap courtyard, or hunker down in one of the leather sofas.

steamyard.co.uk

FOR TEA LOVERS

Quilliam Brothers, Newcastle

This tea room doubles up as an art-house cinema, and does a great Saturday brunch, too. Choose from more than 60 loose teas — from Russian caravan and finest jasmine to oolong — to sip alongside delicious dishes such as eggs royale, which includes lapsang souchong-smoked salmon. The cafe has a cosy feel and serves its teas in individual china pots with teacups and saucers.

quilliambrothers.com

WALES, SCOTLAND AND IRELAND

MODERN WELSH

Pitch, Cardiff

This Cardiff city-centre cafe is known for its modern twist on traditional Welsh ingredients: a laverbread omelette served with chorizo crisps, and a full Welsh breakfast that comes with potato and leek hash browns. For those in need of a boost, an earl grey martini tops the great "breakfast cocktail" menu.

pitchcardiff.com

HARBOUR FRONT

Harbourmaster Hotel, Aberaeron

The purple hotel on Aberaeron's quayside has a brunch menu that incorporates the ingredients on its doorstep. There's a Welsh rarebit made from a strong local cheddar and garnished with Talsarn bacon. Those keen on seaweed can order the Welsh breakfast, which comes with laverbread and all the other classics.

harbour-master.com

GUILT-FREE

Urban Angel, Edinburgh

Those who think Scottish breakfasts are all about tattie scones and lorne sausage can think again. Slices of avocado piled on toast smeared with creamy ricotta and topped with broad beans, mint and lime is a reviving start to the day. The cafe's all-day brunch menu also invites diners to build their own plates, with options such as thyme portobello mushrooms and spinach, nutmeg

and lime alongside the standard sausage, bacon and black pudding.

urban-angel.co.uk

SCANDINAVIAN SNACKS

Kaffe O, Belfast

The coffee is roasted in Copenhagen, the ceramics are Danish-designed and the Scandinavian menu includes a porridge and yoghurt bar with pick-your-own toppings — it's no surprise that the owner, Orla Smyth, lived in Denmark before trading in corporate law and setting up Kaffe O. Despite the Scandi minimalism, the cafe radiates Irish warmth. There's even a kids' menu featuring options such as the "knickerbocker glory" — Greek yoghurt, fruit and granola.

kaffeo.coffee

STYLE AND SUBSTANCE

Established Coffee, Belfast

In truth, Established is only a couple of years old, but it has already made its mark. The new-wave coffee shop has substance as well as style. Not only does it serve great coffee (often featuring guest roasts), but the ever-changing brunch menu includes curveballs such as honey waffles with cardamom-poached nectarines, or scallion flatbread with whipped feta and orange-chilli sambal.

twitter.com/established

TWISTS ON A CLASSIC

Whitefriar Grill, Dublin 2

Aungier Street seems an odd location for this casual bistro restaurant. The room has the (now formulaic) faux-rustic aesthetic, with exposed brick walls, rough-hewn wood and blackboards, but there's creativity on the menu. Classic eggs benedict is enlivened with gambas, the black-pudding waffles come with whipped foie gras, and there's a truffle egg toast with asparagus and wild mushroom for under €10.

whitefriargrill.ie

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