

Title:

Scottish Cuisine: Haggis

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Summary:

Haggis is a traditional Scottish highland dish that resembles, in some senses, a rather rough sausage. It is the national dish of Scotland, and Robert Burns, the great Scots poet, who wrote the famous "Address to a Haggis" called the haggis the "chieftain o' the puddin-race." It is a staple of Scottish cuisine, and is served in the traditional manner, as well as in the "haggis supper" (deep fried haggis with a side of French fries) or even as a haggis burger. It is sold prepa...

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Article Body:

Haggis is a traditional Scottish highland dish that resembles, in some senses, a rather rough sausage. It is the national dish of Scotland, and Robert Burns, the great Scots poet, who wrote the famous "Address to a Haggis" called the haggis the "chieftain o' the puddin-race." It is a staple of Scottish cuisine, and is served in the traditional manner, as well as in the "haggis supper" (deep fried haggis with a side of French fries) or even as a haggis burger. It is sold prepared in supermarkets year round. But what is actually in this mysterious and oft-misunderstood food?

Though the traditional response to the question "what is a haggis?" is often answered with a joke about a small highland animal with one pair of legs shorter than the other (to more easily circle the highland hills), the truth is that it is a food designed to let no part of the animal go to waste - hence its popularity amongst the poor in the days of Burns.

While it is sometimes made of deer, the haggis is more often based on sheep. It is a combination of oatmeal and several meats. Normally, the sheep's "pluck" or offal is removed, including heart, liver, and lungs (or "lights"). This is ground, heavily spiced, and combined with onion, suet, spices, and salt. The oatmeal and the other ingredients are mixed with stock and stuffed inside a sheep's stomach. This is the haggis, and it is then boiled and served. Of course, in modern times, a real stomach is just as often replaced with an

artificial casing, and vegetarian-friendly ingredients may replace meat and offal.

Haggis is often served with "neeps and tatties" A "neep" is swede, or rutabaga, and is shortened from "Swedish turnip." Tatties are mashed potatoes. Of course, haggis would not be complete without a "dram" of whisky to wash it down, a tradition referred to as "neeps and nips".

Traditionally, haggis is served at Burns Suppers, on January 25 of each year. That these events, someone recites the "Address to a Haggis." It is then doused with a shot of Scotch whisky and cut with a dirk, a large knife that is a traditional highland sidearm. Often, the haggis is paraded in with a bagpiper.

Unfortunately for haggis lovers, some of the ingredients are illegal and it is sometimes hard to make a "true" haggis. For example, in the United States, it is illegal to sell animal lungs for human consumption, and so at least one ingredient is missing. Imported haggis from Scotland, which contains bits of lung, has even been rated "unfit for human consumption" by the USDA.

Interestingly, haggis is not used only for eating. There is an official Haggis Throwing World Championship in which competitors must throw a cooked haggis as far as possible for atop a whisky barrel platform - the current record some 180 feet. This developed from an even older practice of throwing a haggis for accuracy, usually by a woman tossing it into the apron of a man's kilt. Some would say this is a far better use for a haggis than actually eating it!