

England's Sticky Toffee Pudding Trail

In a bucolic corner of the country, sweetness awaits at every turn

One spoonful of sticky toffee pudding at a café in northwestern England, and we were euphoric. Surely, this was the last word in extravagance. The pudding before us was warm and spicy, an impossibly moist gingerbread cake larded with chopped dates and sopped with buttery caramel syrup. But when we oohed and aahed, the waitress deflated our culinary egos by admitting that the kitchen secured its pudding from McClure, a big-box restaurant provisions vendor across the road. A clerk at McClure frankly told us, "Our sticky toffee is fine, but if you want the best, you must go to Cartmel. There is none richer."

We set off, heading toward that 12th-century hamlet to hunt for exemplary renditions of the signature dessert of Cumbria



Sticky toffee pudding
(see page 35 for recipe).

ROUTES

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SERVES 8-10

In this version of the classic English dessert (pictured on page 30), adapted from one in Rose Levy Beranbaum's *Rose's Heavenly Cakes* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), dates are soaked in stout beer and then puréed, resulting in a super-moist crumb.

For the pudding:

1 cup stout beer, preferably Guinness Extra Stout
10 large pitted dates
2 cups flour
2 tsp. ground cinnamon
1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
1/2 tsp. kosher salt
1 cup plus 2 tbsp. sugar
6 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened, plus more
1 1/2 tsp. vanilla extract
3 eggs

For the toffee sauce:

1 cup packed light brown sugar
16 tbsp. unsalted butter, preferably Plugrá

1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise and seeds scraped and reserved

1/2 cup heavy cream

1 tbsp. fresh lemon juice

1/4 tsp. kosher salt

1 Make the pudding: Heat oven to 350°. Boil beer in a 1-qt. saucepan. Stir in baking soda and dates; let cool. Transfer to a food processor; purée until smooth. Whisk flour, cinnamon, baking powder, nutmeg, and salt in a bowl. Using a stand mixer fitted with a whisk, beat sugar, butter, and vanilla until fluffy. Add eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition. With the motor running, slowly add dry ingredients, alternating with reserved date mixture, until a smooth batter forms; pour into a greased 9" x 13" baking dish. Bake until a toothpick inserted into the pudding comes out clean, about 30 minutes.

2 Make the sauce: Simmer sugar, butter, and vanilla bean and seeds in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium until sugar is dissolved, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat; stir in cream, lemon juice, and salt. Strain sauce; let cool. Cut pudding into squares; drizzle with sauce.