

# In the kitchen



This month Paola Westbeek samples Finistère's 'pink gold' - delicious, fresh langoustines

Finistère in Brittany boasts more than 1,200km of varied coastline with everything from sandy beaches and rugged cliffs to fishing ports where seafood lovers can indulge in regional specialities such as lobster, oysters, sardines and, of course, langoustines.

Also known as 'Dublin Bay prawns' or 'scampi', these slender, rosy-peach crustaceans are roughly the size of large prawns (11-14cm), but are actually part of the lobster species. They live burrowed away in the sandy or muddy soils of the north-eastern Atlantic Ocean at depths between 15-800m and are caught by trawlers, with a large part of the French catch coming from the Celtic Sea and the Bay of Biscay.

If you're in the area and want to witness the arrival of fishing boats loaded with crates of glistening langoustines, head to Guilvinec, one of the main ports located in Pays Bigouden in Brittany's south-west. The spectacle takes place daily starting at 4.30pm and can best be viewed from the panoramic terrace of the fishing discovery centre Haliotika - La Cité de la Pêche.

Part of the fresh catch goes straight to the fish markets (*criées*) and the rest makes its way to restaurants where you can sample the 'pink gold' in all kinds of preparations: grilled, flambéed, served in creamy sauces, chopped into tartares and even thinly sliced and served 'carpaccio' style.

The ultimate way to experience their sweet, tender flesh, however, is by boiling them. For two people, you'll need approximately one kilo



of langoustines (20-30) and four litres of court bouillon made with white wine and aromatics such as onions, carrots, peppercorns and fragrant herbs.

Once the bouillon comes to the boil, plunge in the langoustines, clamp on a lid and give them no more than two or three minutes. Cook them any longer and they'll not only lose their delicate flavour, but will also become pasty and tough. Drain the langoustines (never rinse them with cold water!) and cool for approximately half an hour.

When purchasing langoustines, make sure their eyes are black and the shells unblemished. Though langoustines can be enjoyed year-round, they are most abundant from April through August.

If the thought of eating (rather than cooking) langoustines sounds more appealing, Le Suroit, not far from the busy fishing port of Loctudy, serves them in hearty fish dishes and even on pizza. For a real treat, though, drive to nearby Ste-Marine and grab a seat at the lively waterside terrace of Bistrot du Bac where they are offered in their purest form - alone or as part of a decadent *fruits de mer* platter.

## serve with...

Freshly made mayonnaise, thick lemon wedges, rye bread, semi-salted butter and a bottle of chilled Muscadet.

