



View across  
Crail harbour

Bite-size break.

# A cosy Neuk

A quiet fishing haven, the East Neuk of Fife on the east coast of Scotland produces some of the nation's finest ingredients from both land and sea. Norman Miller explores its pretty coastal villages, enjoying quality fare wherever he goes, from crab shacks to fancy restaurants



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Creels at Crail harbour – and a fresh catch at Reilly Shellfish; herring being smoked on Crail quay; superb Scottish mussels; colourful starter at Craig Millar in St Monans; apt decor at the Cocoa Tree Cafe, Pittenweem; perfect spot for a cuppa at Crail Harbour Gallery & Tea Room

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP, OPPOSITE Seafood and fishy crafts at Crail Harbour Gallery & Tea Room; local tippie Crail Gin; seawater pool at St Monans; earthenware from Crail Pottery; sandy beach at Elie, near Kilconquhar; see the past come alive at Crail Museum; courtyard at food co-operative Bowhouse

## QUAY STROKES

From April to September, shack up with **Reilly Shellfish** (reillyshellfishcrail.com), serving just-landed – and prepped – crab and lobster from a little hut on Crail’s exquisite 16th century walled harbour. Down the coast, **East Pier Smokehouse** (eastpier.co.uk) in St Monans is a different quayside beacon, serving the likes of house-smoked sea bass with apple, onion and pink peppercorn chutney, roast scallops in smoked garlic herb butter, plus top-notch cullen skink (chunky smoked haddock and potato soup).

Take your pick of batterers vying for the fish and chips crown by Anstruther harbour. **Anstruther Fish Bar** (anstrutherfishbar.co.uk) has twice bagged Scottish takeaway of the year accolades with servings including crumbed Pittenweem prawns, and smoked haddock and mozzarella fish cakes. But its neighbour, **The Wee Chippy** (theweechippy.anstruther.co.uk), won the Best Fish and Chip gong at the 2023 Scottish Restaurant Awards – so (ahem) plaice your bets...

## POSH NOSH

The Good Food Guide’s Best Local Restaurant in Scotland 2023 is the **Kinneuchar Inn** (kinneucharinn.com). This 17th century pub in the handsome inland hamlet of Kilconquhar balances a relaxed ambience with a bold field-to-fork menu using produce from the surrounding Balcaskie Estate, as well as novel pairings like mussels with east coast-cured guanciale.

Carved from a fisherman’s cottage by St Monans harbour, **Craig Millar @ 16 West End** (16westend.com) has sea views from inside and out on the terrace. The simple menu descriptions (‘smoked salmon, mustard and dill’) belie the panache of its cooking.

Just one street – but a world – away from Anstruther’s harbourside chippies, Michelin-starred **The Cellar** (thecellaranstruther.co.uk) occupies a former smokehouse, where local lad Billy Boyter brings high-end tasting menu reverence to Scottish ingredients with offerings like kelp and lovage broth. For dessert, how about apple and marigold sorbet with black olive isomalt (it’s a fancy sugar substitute)?

## CRACKING CAFFS

The **Cocoa Tree Cafe** (pittenweemchocolate.co.uk) gets versatile with Pittenweem Chocolate Company’s award-winning (reduced sugar) artisan products in a space overlooked by a dramatic giant cocoa-themed bronze relief. Try an intense dark choc mochaccino or reshape your ideas of savoury with a thick mixed bean stew enriched with cocoa.

The suntrap terrace at the **Crail Harbour Gallery and Tea Room** (crailharbourgallery.co.uk) might

just be the loveliest place in Scotland for a cuppa, fronting a little stone-floor interior selling local crafts alongside homemade cakes and simple, zingingly fresh seafood lunches.

At Bowhouse (see Outlets, below), **Baern** (@baern\_cafe) showcases hyper-local produce via seductive sandwich combos such as slow-cooked pork, pickled cucumber and five-spiced aubergine, alongside savoury plates melding spelt, acorn squash, Scottish blue cheese and pickled cherries. Or just enjoy a cuppa with a Fife cheddar, nigella and apple butter scone.

Further south, Lower Largo’s **The Aurrie** (theaurrie.com) is a café in a former 1860s Baptist church – a blessed backdrop for top-notch coffee, fresh salads and sandwiches, plus iconic Scots vittles such as square-and-spicy Lorne sausage.

## OUT-THERE OUTLETS

Just behind St Monans, **Bowhouse** (bowhousefife.com) food co-operative hosts forward-thinking producers such as socially aware bakers **Scotland The Bread** (scotlandthebread.org) and fervent fermenters **Angry Culture** (angryculture.co.uk). Grab a drink too in the taproom at **Futtle** (futtle.com), where old farmhouse brews are re-imagined using wild yeasts from its old wood rafters, alongside an in-house record shop selling rare vintage vinyl.

In Anstruther, **Aeble** (aeble.co.uk) is Scotland’s first specialist cider shop, set up by Jaye Hutchison to prove apples can create tipples as complex and elegant as champagne.

**Greens** (@crail-greens) in Crail, meanwhile, is a grocer stuffed with local food and drink, such as Crail Gin made with botanicals including blueberries, samphire and sea kelp.

## WHEN YOU’RE NOT EATING...

Delve into Fife’s maritime heritage at Anstruther’s **Scottish Fisheries Museum** (scotfishmuseum.org), then study some broader social history at the little **Crail Museum** (crailmuseum.uk) – before a crafty browse at nearby **Crail Pottery** (crailpottery.com).

Get out on the water to spy seals and puffins on cruises from Anstruther to the **Isle of May**, 5 miles offshore, then head inland to **Scotland’s Secret Bunker** (secretbunker.co.uk), a time capsule of Cold War memories in a labyrinthine 1950s nuclear bunker.

A statue marks the Lower Largo birthplace of **Alexander Selkirk**, whose 19th century stranding inspired Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, while the Fife Coastal Path takes you past the windmill at St Monans, looming over a tempting tidal sea pool. @



## WHERE TO STAY

### The Shoregate

With a pared-back modern fine dining restaurant overseen by chef Craig McAllister, this restored 1740s Crail house offers four roomy bedrooms with chic Scandi-influenced styling.

Scrumptious breakfasts too – try the omelette Arnold Bennett.

Doubles from £230 B&B, [theshoregate.com](http://theshoregate.com)

### The Crusoe

In a 19th century granary by Lower Largo’s sandy beach, The Crusoe’s seven sea-view rooms combine a soft New England palette with the joy of waves lulling you to sleep. It retains the friendly vibe of a village pub too – albeit one serving dishes like salmon with crab rösti, crispy kale and shellfish broth.

Doubles from £200 B&B, [thecrusoe.com](http://thecrusoe.com)

For more information about the East Neuk, visit [welcometofife.com](http://welcometofife.com)