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**A Greener Stranraer Oyster Festival on the menu**

Stranraer Oyster Festival has revealed its full programme for 2023 alongside a pledge to ‘go greener’ and help safeguard the wild, native oyster bed that the festival celebrates.

Michael Caines, Tony Singh, Julie Lin and Felicity Cloaks are among the chefs demonstrating their culinary flair. They’ll join local chefs, artisan traders, musicians and skilled oyster shuckers at the three-day festival in south west Scotland.

Taking place from Friday 15th to Sunday 17th September, Stranraer Oyster Festival has quickly become established as one of the biggest food festivals in Scotland, and a must-visit for oyster enthusiasts, with visitors attracted from all over the UK.

As part of their commitment to the environment, festival organisers have pledged to return the shell of every oyster consumed at the festival back to Loch Ryan, to help grow the native oyster bed, located just a short distance from the festival site.

Allana Hardie of Stranraer Development Trust, the community organisation that runs the festival, explained:

“The beauty and ecological importance of Loch Ryan and its wild, native oyster bed is at the very heart of Stranraer Oyster Festival, and we have always been mindful of our responsibility to manage the festival sustainably. This year we want to go even further. We’ve reviewed every area of festival and site management to see where we can reduce our environmental footprint.

“Collecting back the oyster shells to return them to Loch Ryan has so many benefits. It reduces waste from the festival, it will create valuable shell habitat for young oysters which will help the oyster bed grow, and it will naturally sequester the carbon that’s embodied in the oyster shells.”

With almost all of the UK’s native oyster beds overfished to near-extinction in previous centuries, Scotland’s last wild, native oyster fishery is not just nationally important; it’s important at a species level. The oyster shell circular collection scheme is just one of the green initiatives undertaken this year, which has been partly inspired by Dumfries and Galloway Council’s Greener Events Toolkit. Other eco-friendly festival measures include marine litter picks, improved waste management and using a ticketing provider that offsets carbon emissions through tree planting.

The festival is supported through Dumfries and Galloway Council’s Major Events Strategic Fund and EventScotland’s National Events Funding Programme. The work of Stranraer Development Trust is also supported by Kilgallioch Community Fund and South of Scotland Enterprise.

Councillor Ian Blake, Chair of the Council's Communities Committee said:

“The Oyster Festival is the perfect recipe for a great day out or weekend break in Dumfries and Galloway. The promotion of local produce and the wonderful unspoilt environment is a real tonic for visitors. It’s fantastic that the Festival is back and stronger than ever since the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Councillor Jackie McCamon, the Vice-Chair of the Communities Committee said:

“Stranraer’s regeneration is really taking shape and the Oyster Festival helps to showcase the beautiful setting the town has. This year’s Festival once again will celebrate Loch Ryan, our local food and drink industry and provide a huge economic boost for Stranraer and the wider Wigtownshire area.”

Paul Bush OBE, VisitScotland’s Director of Events, said:

“The Stranraer Oyster Festival is a fantastic celebration of Scotland’s natural larder and Dumfries and Galloway is the perfect stage for such a food and drink event. I’m delighted to see that the festival has again attracted such a high quality line up of guests with Michael, Tony, Julie and Felicity joining an already packed programme in the region.”

**Why Stranraer Oyster Festival Matters**

For a town that was defined for decades by being the main ferry port to Northern Ireland, it was feared - once the ferries left town - that Stranraer might lose everything. Stranraer Oyster Festival was born out of community passion to write a new story for Stranraer.

Established to promote Stranraer as a tourism destination and to raise awareness of the unique, experience of Scotland’s wild, native oysters, the festival has had a huge impact on Stranraer’s economy, and its identity.

Launched in 2017 by Stranraer Development Trust, the festival has grown in ambition, in visitor numbers and in economic impact every year it’s been held. After four festivals, independent economic analysis demonstrated that Stranraer Oyster Festival has generated almost £5 million for the local economy so far, supporting hundreds of jobs, showcasing multiple local businesses and organisations, providing volunteering and training opportunities for members of the community, and stimulating tourism development in the area.

Romano Petrucci, Chair of Stranraer Development Trust, commented:

“In a very short period of time Stranraer Oyster Festival has become a hugely important part of Stranraer’s identity, and a real focal point for celebrating the very best that Stranraer and the wider Galloway area has to offer.

“We are looking forward to delivering an action packed festival that entertains, inspires and satisfies our visitors. Loch Ryan’s unique native oysters are of course at the heart of our festival, but this three-day event is about the people and the place too. There is simply no finer way to enjoy our oysters, and our town’s hospitality, than relaxing next to Stranraer Harbour looking out at beautiful Loch Ryan as the sun sets across the water with Ailsa Craig on the horizon.”

Stranraer Oyster Festival is more than just a food festival. It's a community-led initiative, a journey through Scotland's cultural heritage, a unique marketplace, and a sustainable destination.

Romano added: “No one should ever doubt our community’s ability to create, produce and deliver the very best, and the very best is what we will always seek to deliver.”

**About Loch Ryan Native Oysters**

For hundreds of years the wild, native Loch Ryan oysters that thrive at the bottom of the sea loch were a hidden gem – seemingly better known in the fine dining restaurants of London, than they were by local folk. The festival changed all that, and Stranraer Oyster Festival is now a flagship event in the community’s determination to regenerate the town.

Native oysters are considered ecosystem engineers because they help maintain marine ecosystems by filtering water and providing habitat for coastal wildlife.

The oyster bed has been protected by Royal Charter since 1701. Sustainable management of the bed by Loch Ryan Oyster Fishery Company began in 1996 and oyster numbers are believed to have grown from 1 million to 60 million today. Loch Ryan oysters are now being used in native oyster bed restoration projects across the UK and in Germany.

Tristan Hugh-Jones of Loch Ryan Oyster Fishery said:

“We are continually trying to increase the size of the population, so we will fish in a particular area for a season. We’ll take only the largest oysters, about 5% of the total catch, and we tip the small oysters back into a well marked area of the loch. The smaller oysters are put close to each other to give the best possible chance of fertilising eggs and producing spats.

“What is extraordinary about Loch Ryan is the water has a circular movement, so the same water manages to stay in Loch Ryan for the ten days that the larvae need before settling onto natural shell on the floor of the loch. It’s incredibly unique.”

**About Stranraer Oyster Festival**

Tickets cost £6 per day or £12 for the full three-day event for over 12s, with concessions available. Additional charges apply for selected chef demonstrations.

General admission tickets for Stranraer Oyster Festival 2023 can be purchased from [www.stranraeroysterfestival.com](http://www.stranraeroysterfestival.com)

Ends

**Contact details:**

Romano Petrucci of Stranraer Development Trust can be contacted on 07711 034200

For PR enquiries or press passes for Stranraer Oyster Festival contact Lorna Young on 01387 263 886 or email: [lorna@indigowords.co.uk](mailto:lorna@indigowords.co.uk)

Stranraer Oyster Festival welcomes the opportunity to raise awareness of the festival through extended features or broadcasts. Interviews and visits out on the oyster boat are possible by arrangement. Please contact Lorna Young to discuss.

**Festival Highlights**

**Celebrity Chefs**: TV favourite Michael Caines headlines a chef programme at the 2023 Oyster Festival that’s packed with inspiration. Tony Singh is Chef Ambassador of Stranraer Oyster Festival and he returns to the festival for a third time to share his passion for Scotland’s delicious natural larder. MasterChef runner-up Julie Lin will be sharing her Malaysian and Scottish cooking style, and award winning author and Guardian journalist Felicity Cloake will be speaking about her new book. Other chefs taking part this year include Ryan McCutcheon, Helen Cross, Douglas Lisi and David Alexander.

**Landing the Oyster Catch**

The Opening Ceremony of Stranraer Oyster Festival on Friday 15th September at 6pm sees the crew of The Vital Spark land one of the first native oyster catches of the season. The oysters are piped ashore by Loch Ryan Pipe Band and the landing will be followed by an evening of live music, celebrity chef cookery demos and a spectacular fireworks and aerobatics display.

**The ShuckOff!** The Scottish Oyster Shucking Championships takes place on Saturday 16th September, pitting chefs, oyster growers, producers, fishermen and industry professionals against each other in a bid to claim the title of Scottish Oyster Shucking Champion! The winner will go on to represent Scotland at the World Oyster Opening Championships in Galway, Ireland in late September.

**Extreme Pond Dipping:** The crew of the oyster boat will bring ashore a trailer full of an unsorted oyster bed catch. It gives visitors the opportunity to see and touch the shells and creatures that live on and around the oyster beds. It’s one of the highlights of a packed children’s activity programme.

**Artisan Market:** The festival market is an amazing showcase of local food, drink and craft. Some Oysterfest limited editions will include a 2023 Stranraer Oyster Festival blended malt scotch from Dark Sky Spirits, and an exclusive festival cider from Steilhead Cider inspired by the iconic Oystercatcher bird.

**Live Music:** The Oyster Festival party starts early in 2023, with The Big Oyster Bash taking place on the 2nd September, with Big Vern ‘n’ the Shootahs providing the entertainment. Live music continues throughout the weekend, and bands include Pork Pie and Astoria.

**Photos:**

The attached photo shows Allana Hardie with Councillor Ian Blake (left) and Councillor Jackie McCamon (right) with the new Oyster Shell Collection Point sign.

A small selection of photos of previous Stranraer Oyster Festivals are also attached. Higher res images, and a wider selection of photos, are available on request.

**EVENTSCOTLAND – Notes to Editor**

EventScotland is working to make Scotland the perfect stage for events by securing and supporting an exciting portfolio of sporting and cultural events. It provides funding opportunities and access to resources and information to develop the industry.

EventScotland is a team within VisitScotland’s Events Directorate, the national tourism organisation, alongside Business Events and Development teams.  For further information about EventScotland, its funding programmes and latest event news visit [www.eventscotland.org](http://www.eventscotland.org/) or follow Twitter [@EventScotNews](http://www.twitter.com/eventscotnews) and [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/1318281).