

## Food

# Escavèche de Chimay

Escavèche de Chimay is thought to date back to the Spanish occupation of Belgium under Charles Quint in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and has held an EU protected geographical indication (PGI) since February 2021. It is a cold-served cooked fish coated in a jellied, vinegar onion sauce, a description that might sound off-putting. The fish melts in your mouth along with the creamy or gelatinous sauce, and goes great with fries, in a sandwich or with bread and a salad. It also pairs naturally with a Trappist beer for a refreshing bite.

Though it was originally made with river fish, saltwater fish also became popular after the Second World War, especially dogfish from the North Sea, with an eel-like texture and taste.

Escavèche de Chimay is closely tied to Wallonia's metal-working industry, which created many artificial lakes and ponds. When the industry declined at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and almost completely after the Second World War, the ponds were converted into fishing areas. These bodies of water were well-stocked with fish, so much so that the owners found themselves with more than they could eat.

Chimay locals living between the Sambre and the Meuse rivers then developed their own way of preserving the fish. They placed cooked fish in pots, over which they poured a hot starchy vinegar sauce with onions, spice, seasoning and, occasionally, lemon. While still liquid, the sauce coats the entire fish, forcing out any air bubbles, and thus preventing mould from forming. Immediately afterwards, the pot is hermetically sealed, and the preparation is chilled so the sauce sets.

Today, producers of Escavèche de Chimay are still based in the vicinity of the old forges in the southwest of the country (Hainaut region). Three manufacturers claim the IGP for their products: Escavèche du Val d'Oise (property of the Chimay group, offers a variant with a local trout and one with tomato sauce), Escavir and Fagnes & Saveurs.

