

In the southwest of England there is a region called Cornwall. It is only about three hours by train from London, but it feels very different from the capital. The population is less than half a million people, and there are no cities. The biggest town has only twenty thousand people. What it lacks in numbers, however, it more than makes up for in natural beauty. There are beautiful beaches with some of the best surfing in the whole of Europe. There are also many pretty villages, full of brightly painted cottages. Many families spend their summer holidays there because the pace of life is slow. It is a great place to relax and forget your troubles.

There is another reason why Cornwall is popular with tourists: pasties. Pasties are a form of meat and vegetable pie. Traditionally, pasties contain beef, potato, onion and turnip. The meat and vegetables are cut into small pieces, wrapped in pastry and cooked in an oven for about an hour. Some cooks like to put curry powder into their pasties, or even use lamb and mint, but most local people will tell you that the traditional pasty tastes the best.

To make a really good pasty is not easy. It is not something you can simply learn from reading a recipe book. If you are lucky, you can get a friend to teach you, but Cornish people are often said to be unfriendly – they like to keep their secrets to themselves. The difficult part of making a good pasty is getting the pastry right. If it is too dry, it will not taste good. If it is too greasy, it will make you feel sick. When it comes out of the oven, the pastry should look golden brown and melt in your mouth.

Instead of being round like most pies, pasties look like a rugby ball, wide in the middle, and thin at the ends. Many years ago, the men of Cornwall worked deep down underground in the mines where they dug for tin. They would go down the mine in the morning and not come back up until evening, so they had to take their lunch with them.

Their wife or mother would make them a pasty every day for their lunch.

While digging for tin, the miners would sometimes find a poison called arsenic. It was not always easy to see, especially in the darkness of the mine. Sometimes arsenic would get on their hands, without the miners realizing it. Underground, there was nowhere for the men to wash their hands. To avoid being poisoned by any arsenic on their fingers, the men would hold their pasty by one corner as they ate it. When they had finished, they would throw away the bit of the pasty they had been holding.

All of Cornwall's tin mines are now closed, but the Cornish pasty remains one of Britain's most popular types of traditional fast food. You can even buy one on the platform in London as you wait for the train to take you to Cornwall for your summer holiday.