

Restaurant Trends - UK - September 2009

Report Price: £1500 / \$3000 / €2250

What is this report about?

Restaurant service trends have been gradually altering over the years in line with consumers' changing use of restaurants. The overriding trend is that eating out has become increasingly informal over the years as the reasons for eating out extend beyond special occasions to include simple refueling, to escape from household chores and so on.



Key issues covered in the analysis

- As eating out has become more casual, restaurants' service formats have changed as a consequence. Almost 25m people eat out for special occasions and 15m eat out as a regular treat, and for these diners, the full table service format forms part of the 'special' experience. While high-end restaurants may be a little too extravagant for some in the current climate, the brasserie-style concept is becoming a very acceptable way to trade down from fine dining.
- Some of the more casual reasons for eating out include "just feeling like it" (over 18m people) as a "chance to get out of the house" (10m) or to "escape from cooking and washing up" (9m). For these more casual diners, restaurants have developed the concept of fast, casual dining – a hybrid of fast food service and mid-market table service - such as Nando's and Gourmet Burger Kitchen.
- The recession has had a major impact on the eating out habits of almost 10m adults and a further 9m have cut back on their frequency of eating out. Special offers and promotional deals are one way that restaurants are encouraging people visit their venues, and 11m people are taking advantage of such offers.
- Almost all diners choose a main course, but 24m rarely eat three courses nowadays. 22m choose a starter and the same number a dessert. The cheese board has generally low take up among 2m diners.
- More casual dining has also helped the rise of the sharing platter (7m people like to share food with others at the table) and snacks and light bites (7m people eat light meals in restaurants).
- There is still some adventurousness in the eating out market with 16m often ordering new or different foods or dishes in restaurants. Self-service formats can be tempting in this regard; almost 10m like to be able to try lots of different things at self-service bars.

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