

Eating out reserved for special occasions as consumers cut-back spending

Eating out is becoming a treat reserved for special occasions with consumers demonstrating increasing caution with their discretionary spend as economic uncertainty persists.

Some 33% of respondents to a new Horizons' QuickBite survey on eating out cited a special occasion as their reason for eating out in the previous two weeks, including Christmas, up from 23% in July 2011.

Convenience (30%), meeting friends (30%) and not wanting to cook (22%) were the other key reasons for deciding to eat out, according to the YouGov study of 2,034 respondents conducted earlier this month.

The survey, which quizzed people on their eating out habits over a two-week period at the end of 2011, showed a marked decline in the frequency consumers ate out ? down to 2.1 occasions in December 2011 from 3.3 times last year*.

Over a quarter (27%) said they had not eaten out at all in the previous two weeks, with cost being the most commonly cited reason.

However, while consumers may be cutting back on the number of times they eat out, they continue to spend more when they do ? up from £10.29 a year ago to £13.80*.

?We have noted the tendency of consumers to eat out less, but spend more for sometime and this appears to be an ongoing trend. It also seems consumers now need a good reason to eat out ? such as a special occasion ? and are less inclined to eat out as a matter of course or on impulse,? commented Emma Read, director of marketing and business development at Horizons.

?Heavy snowfall last year makes it a bad year to compare with, but even so the frequency of eating out shows a significant decline, something we don't expect to change throughout 2012. It is also clear from this research that cost is the key reason behind this fall.?

The QuickBite survey also reveals the emergence of a more discerning diner with the quality of food (79%) being the most mentioned factor when deciding where to eat out. Price came second (70%), followed by cleanliness (64%), standard of service (55%) and ambience (51%).

An interesting and varied menu was important for 47% of respondents, while 41% choose a venue that won't rush them.

Pub restaurants are the most common places to visit, accounting for 18% of all meals eaten out ? up from 17% last year*. Takeaway and delivery are the second most popular option, accounting for 14% of all eating out.

But it seems that habit remains the strongest factor when choosing an eating out venue with 35% of respondents opting for a familiar venue, up from 31% in July 2011. For 17% the decision on where to eat out is an impulsive one.

Recommendations proved important in the choice of dining venue. Some 16% of respondents' venue choices were influenced by recommendations and of those, 86% were from a friend or family member. Reviews or websites were mentioned as influential to 7% of respondents.

Average spend through the restaurant sector (including drinks) was £17 per head with pub restaurants coming in slightly cheaper at £15.80 per head. Average spend in a takeaway or delivery outlet is £11.

?Pub restaurants are slowly taking market share from other restaurants as consumers seek good value for money, a convenient location and a more casual eating out experience. We have also seen a huge improvement in the food offering of many pubs, particularly the big brands, which is proving popular with consumers.

?What's clear in this market is that diners are becoming more demanding, but are loyal to their favourite outlets,? added Emma Read.

(ends)

* Year-on-year comparisons refer to a previous telephone survey undertaken for Horizons in December 2010 by Ipsos MORI.

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Editor's Note

Horizons helps its clients make better business decisions by providing accurate and detailed information about the foodservice market, its trend, and opportunities. The company provides consultancy services, workshops and statistical information based on its model of the sector and database of key accounts across Europe.

Please note: All figures in this survey, except the year-on-year comparisons, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2,034 adults, of which 1,456 have eaten out in the last two weeks. Fieldwork was undertaken 4-6 January 2012. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

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