

Pricing gap between pubs and restaurant closes

Eating out in a pub is becoming more expensive with menu prices increasing year-on-year, according to the latest **Menurama** research from foodservice expert Horizons.

The biannual Menurama survey, which analyses changes and trends on the menus of 115 eating out brands across hotels, restaurants, quick service outlets and pubs, reveals that while the average price of three courses in a restaurant has fallen 4.6% year-on-year, from £21.65 to £20.66, the average price of three courses in a pub has risen 7.4% from £17.38 to £18.67 during the same period.

An average main course dish in a pub now costs £9.39, up 10.7% from £8.48 a year ago [Winter 2012 v Winter 2013]. While an average main course in a restaurant now costs £10.95, down 3% from £11.29.

Year-on-year the average price of a starter in a pub has risen 2.7% to £4.93, up from £4.80. Restaurants, on the other hand, have reduced the cost of their starters over the same period dropping by 9.2% to £5.16 from £5.68.

Desserts saw a similar price rise in pubs over the past 12 months with a hike of 6.1%. In Winter 2012 the average price of a dessert in a pub was £4.10, rising to £4.35 a year later. Restaurants reduced their dessert prices by 2.8% from £4.68 to £4.55.

This is the fourth consecutive period of price increases in pubs, perhaps reflecting the improvement the sector is seeing in its food offer and the cost of producing better quality food. Restaurants have now shown two consecutive periods of price decreases, with pricing now back to Winter 2011 levels.

Said Horizons' director of services Nicola Knight: 'These results indicate that restaurants, in particular, are still feeling the squeeze going into the New Year and have taken fairly drastic action to keep customers coming in. Overall operators have returned to the price points of Winter 2012 from higher levels set over the summer and have also used record levels of meal deal promotions to attract customers in. It is clear from our data that the pub sector is starting to feel more confident, evident in the fact their prices have risen as they feel able to pass on rising costs to their customers.'

The survey revealed the use of meal deals reached a new high, with 76% of brands surveyed using meal deal promotions in Winter 2013, compared with 59% in Summer 2013 and 70% in Winter 2012.

Menurama revealed that 23% of all adult menu items were part of a meal deal compared with 12.7% in Summer 2013 and 21% in Winter 2012. Pubs and restaurants continue to be the main users of meal deals.

'It's clear that rather than abandoning meal deals as a promotional tool, operators are now using them as a fundamental part of their Winter promotional package at a time when they need to encourage consumers to dine out,' added Nicola Knight.

In terms of food trends, Menurama highlights the growing popularity of premium cuts of steak such as rib eye and sirloin, while rump steak is appearing less often on menus. Traditional roasts are also seeing something of a revival, with roast chicken and roast beef making their first appearances in the top 20 main course dishes.

The survey also found an increasing use of health and lifestyle descriptions on Britain's menus. Some 23% of eating out brands now list a gluten-free option on their menus, an increase of 37% year-on-year. More menus are describing dishes as 'healthy' (up 13% since Summer 2013), the use of the term 'five a day' is up 33%, while mentioning 'omega 3' on menus has risen 25%.

Other trends include the growing popularity of pulled meats such as pork, beef, chicken and ham, up 105% year-on-year. Quinoa and arancini (rice balls) were recorded on menus for the first time, while the number of lobster dishes featured on menus has risen 11% year-on-year.

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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.

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