

## Britain's menus reflect changing nature of eating out

Eating out operators are continuing to adapt to the changing demands of consumers with menus featuring more hand-held, easy-to-eat foods as Briton's plump for casual dining over formal occasions.

The latest research, undertaken by foodservice consultancy Horizons in June 2014, shows while burgers are still the nation's number one main course dish, their popularity has peaked. Some 17% fewer dishes on menus featured burgers compared with last year while hot dogs continue to become ever-popular, appearing on 86% more menus than they did this time last year, with pork ribs the second biggest riser at 15%.

The survey found that operators are taking a more inventive approach to burgers, perhaps in a bid to boost sales, offering more gourmet versions of the long-term number one dish. Byron, for example, has a Miami Slice, a 6oz burger with potatoes, salami, cheese, smoked paprika ketchup in a sourdough bun while Fayre & Square sells a pizza burger - a cheeseburger with tomato sauce wrapped in pizza bread.

The Menurama research reveals that American-themed dishes continue to gain popularity with the provenance of dishes now referred to on menus. Examples include Chicken Louisiana Skins and New Yorker Crunchy Salad at Frankie and Benny's, New Yorker on Rye at Pret A Manger and Slow Roasted Pulled Pork Denver Fries at Best Western.

This innovation extends to new variations of old favourites like coleslaw (or 'slaw') which now comes in a variety of flavours. Blue Cheese Slaw with chopped jalapenos is on the menu at Gourmet Burger Kitchen, with Asian Slaw at TGI Friday's and Spicy Slaw at Brewer's Fayre.

Salted caramel is one of the newest flavour combinations to feature on menus. Non-existent in Summer 2010, salted caramel now appears in 37 dishes, growing 12% in popularity year-on-year.

One of this year's favourite cuts of meat has been the little-known flat iron steak, which can now be seen on 17 menus including those of Beefeater and Screem. The steak, a cheaper cut, is taken from the shoulder of the animal.

'We are seeing a high level of innovation on menus,' commented report author Nicola Knight, Horizons' director of services. 'Many of the ideas are coming from the US, but street food and ethnic flavours are also influencing menus. Operators are also working hard at providing customers with something new, often by putting a twist on old favourites.'

One example are the new toppings being added to macaroni cheese, a dish rarely seen on menus a few years ago. Pitcher & Piano sells Crayfish Mac 'N' Cheese, while Revolution's menu features Fennel Sausage Mac 'N' Cheese.

The biannual Menurama research, which surveys the menus of 116 branded hotel, pub, restaurant and quick service outlets in the UK, reveals how menus are becoming more explanatory and accommodating dietary needs more readily. The term 'gluten-free' was found on 8% more menus year-on-year, with 'wheat-free' and 'flourless' appearing as alternative descriptions. This is expected to show a significant increase as the allergens regulations come into force later this year.

'Operators are working hard at providing consumers what they want. Breakfasts menus are now offering more healthy options, such as Bircher muesli, while sharing dishes continue to be popular - wings and sliders in particular,' added Knight.

The survey also reveals how operators are adapting their menus to incorporate some of the latest high street trends. Japanese Katsu dishes are now featuring on some pub and restaurant menus and street foods such as burritos served on planks or 'trash can' lids are also becoming more mainstream.

### TOP SIX MENURAMA FINDINGS

1. Burgers are still the most frequently found dish on menus, although their popularity has peaked
2. Japanese Katsu dishes, Middle Eastern flavours and Korean foods are appearing on mainstream menus
3. Presentation is becoming more innovative with food served on 'planks' or 'trash can lids' echoing street food
4. Meal deal promotions are becoming less frequent
5. Free-from dishes have risen 9% since Summer 2013
6. Sharing dishes such as sliders are a firm favourite on casual dining menus, up 64% since Summer 2013

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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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