

The reinvention of macaroni cheese is a success for Britain's eating out sector

The popularity of humble macaroni cheese continues as mac 'n' cheese clocks growth of over 550% on British restaurant menus since 2010, according to a new survey by eating out analysts **Horizons**.

Mac 'n' cheese has become a firm favourite on British menus loved by both consumers and restaurant operators who can add simple twists to the classic dish with the addition of a range of ingredients or crunchy toppings for a relatively low price. The dish is also being served in restaurants in a variety of ways such as inside a burger or calzone or as a side dish.

'Macaroni cheese was once a cheap, comfort food for home cooking but has now become a favourite on menus. It's a huge success story for restaurants and pubs and shows that chefs have returned to some of our old favourites by giving them a new twist with modern ingredients,' says Horizons' analyst Nicola Knight.

'Macaroni cheese featured in Mrs Beeton's Victorian cookery books but its reinvention in the US as mac 'n' cheese gave it a new life in the UK bringing the dish to an audience of younger diners. Operators love it because it's cheap and quick and easy to produce, offering good margins and is easily revamped with the addition of other ingredients.'

Prices for the dish on UK menus vary from £2.39-£3.75 for a side order, to £5.95-£9.25 for a main course.

Horizons' biannual Menu Trends survey, which tracks changes on the menus of 120 high street eating out brands, also reveals that the pulled pork phenomenon is far from over, with 20% more menus featuring the dish year-on-year.

Hash potato dishes are another revamped dish growing in popularity, listed on 18% more menus this year than last. Hash is being served with ingredients such as halloumi and beetroot, duck confit, eggs or chorizo.

Like macaroni cheese, coleslaw has undergone a similar makeover and re-emerged as 'slaw made with ingredients such as bacon and cranberry, fennel & beet, or as chilli slaw. The popularity of ribs continues too ' up 11% year-on-year ' appearing as a main course or on sharing platters topped with a variety of sauces.

Beefburgers and pizzas are still the nation's more frequently listed dishes although rump steak is becoming a more popular with steady growth over the past two years.

Concerns over healthy foods appear to be increasing with 45% more menus mentioning 'superfoods', while the words 'allergy' or 'allergen' increased 20% year-on-year. The number of vegetarian dishes listed on menus has also risen since last winter, up to 27% of menu items from 23% last year.

The latest Menu Trends survey also reveals that foodservice operators are increasingly offering 'meal deals' in a bid to win market share, with 71% of eating out brands now offering one or more meal deals. Some 6% more dishes were included in meal deals as part of winter menus this year, compared with last year. [ends]

***Menu Trends** [Winter 2016] contains data from menus collected in October and November 2015 from 121 brands including pubs, restaurants, quick service and hotels.

For more details or comment contact Linda Pettit at Tilburstow Media Partners on 01342 832866 / 07973 789853 or email Linda@tilburstowmedia.co.uk. Alternatively contact Horizons on 0844 800 0456 or email info@hrzns.com.

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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