

The proof of the pudding is in the eating

by A. J. Dalton

1 They say a country's cuisine is a reflection of its culture and national character. Therefore, the UK has always been a diverse country, since every region has its own traditional foods. For example, traditional Scottish cuisine is famous for its robust character: haggis, Aberdeen Angus beef, shortbread and whisky. Wales is well known for its lamb and leeks. Ireland is synonymous with Guinness, Irish whiskey and Irish stew. Food produced in specific areas of England also have a wide reputation. Yorkshire is known for its savoury Yorkshire pudding, Cornwall for its Cornish pasty, Lancashire for its black pudding (blood sausage), and so on.

2 There are of course dishes common to the whole UK as well. Everyone (except vegetarians) likes a full English breakfast (fried eggs, bacon, sausage, baked beans, fried mushrooms and fried tomato) in the morning, followed by a Sunday roast (a roasted joint of meat, with roast potatoes, vegetables and gravy) for lunch, perhaps followed by fish and chips or a pork pie for dinner. For dessert, there are dozens of famous British cheeses to choose from (e.g. Stilton and Cheddar), cakes or sponge and fruit puddings with custard (a vanilla sauce).

3 With such a range of foods and approaches to cooking, why then did British cuisine have a bad international reputation for about 50 years (1950 to 2000)? There are a number of possible reasons. One is that during the Second World War and for decades after it, there was food rationing in the UK, meaning cooks and chefs were limited by the ingredients they had to work with and lost some of their traditional skills. Another is that British food tends to be 'heavy' because of the colder climate – Britons need big meals to keep the body warm. As a result, British meals tend to be unsuitable for and unpopular among people from warmer countries in Europe and around the rest of the world. Finally, for a long time, British cuisine did not compare well to the cuisine of its nearest neighbour: France. France introduced the refined style of cooking known as 'nouvelle cuisine', and French wines, thanks to France's warmer climate, were always considered better than British wines.

4 Yet British cuisine has had a better international reputation for the last decade or so. Why is that? One reason is definitely that the wide range of ethnic groups in the UK has given British cuisine new ingredients, flavours, 'fusion' combinations and techniques.



Curry, which is originally an Asian dish, is now officially the most popular food in the UK, whereas sandwiches used to be the most popular. With significant numbers of Polish people coming to the UK recently, Polish food shops can be found in almost every British city. Most cities have a Chinese quarter as well.

5 Another reason for the improvement in British cuisine is climate change. The UK is considerably warmer now than ten years ago. Today, farmers can grow new herbs like coriander, to meet the demands of increased curry sales. In addition, there has been a boom in growing garlic in Scotland. Even British wine is now respected by the French people, since it is easier to grow and ripen grapes in the UK.

6 One last reason for the improvement, however, is the large number of cookery programmes on British television. British people are more educated about food than ever before. British chefs such as Gordon Ramsay and Marco Pierre White are internationally famous and even have television shows in the USA.

7 So what are the results? In 2009, British restaurants received more Michelin stars than in any other previous year. *The Michelin Guide* (first established in France) sets the international standard for restaurant cuisine. With so much good food to eat, perhaps it is not surprising the UK now has an obesity problem.

Activity 1: Summaries

There are seven paragraphs in the article. Match them to the summarising statements below.

- a The press and media have helped the British people to know much more about food.
- b Britain today is very multicultural, which has introduced foreign influences into British cuisine.
- c British cuisine has always included a lot of variety.
- d History and climate have played a large part in determining the character of British cooking.
- e British agriculture has also begun to change.
- f There are traditional meals for different times of the day.
- g British cuisine now wins international awards.

Activity 2: Matching

Match the words with a similar meaning. One answer is given.

- 1 meal (c)
- 2 considerably
- 3 well known
- 4 since
- 5 techniques
- 6 today
- 7 large
- a now
- b because
- c dish (1)
- d skills
- e famous
- f much
- g significant

Activity 3: Categories

Put the following foods into the correct category, either 'savoury', 'sweet' or 'drink'.

- Whisky
- Black pudding
- Yorkshire pudding
- Custard
- Tea
- Guinness
- Curry
- Sponge pudding
- Cake

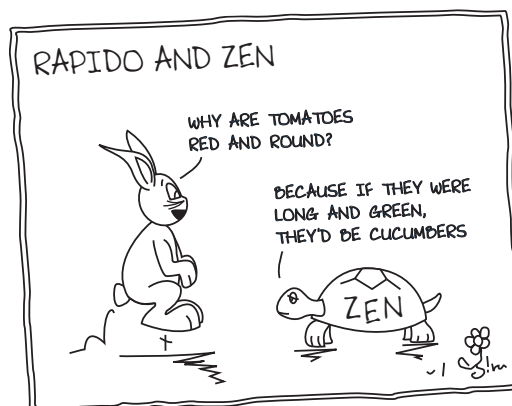
Fun corner

Find the odd one out in each set of three words.

- 1** Dairy products
 - a milk
 - b cheese
 - c biscuits
- 2** Vegetables
 - a apple
 - b potato
 - c peas
- 3** Fruit
 - a carrot
 - b banana
 - c pear
- 4** Puddings
 - a trifle
 - b tart
 - c roast
- 5** British breakfast
 - a cereals
 - b fish and chips
 - c toast
- 6** Meat
 - a pork
 - b beef
 - c beans
- 7** Carbohydrate
 - a rice
 - b eggs
 - c bread

Word of the day

A 'foodie' is a slang term for someone who knows a lot about food and likes to visit high-quality restaurants.



- Answers**
- Activity 1
- a 6
 - b 4
 - c 1
 - d 3
 - e 5
 - f 2
 - g 7
- Activity 2
- 1 c
 - 2 f
 - 3 e
 - 4 b
 - 5 d
 - 6 a
 - 7 g
- Activity 3
- Drink: tea, whisky.
 - Guinness
 - Savoury: Yorkshire pudding, black pudding, curry
 - Sweet: sponge pudding, custard, cake