

Food in the UK



7. Food in the UK

Many visitors to Britain find the food boring and bland. Bland means without spice, taste or interest. The British often boil vegetables until they are soft. They roast, grill or fry meat, often without many spices or herbs. That's why the British use salt, pepper and sauces such as tomato ketchup, mustard and gravy.

The good news is that British people eat food from lots of other countries too, especially Italian, Chinese and Indian dishes. In large British cities you will find restaurants offering foods from many different countries. Chicken tikka masala is as popular as fish and chips these days.

Britons, both men and women, take an interest in food and cooking. Recipe books are bestsellers and cookery programmes are very popular. TV chefs are some of the most famous people in Britain. On the other hand, many people eat 'fast food' such as pizzas and hamburgers.

On average the British work more hours a week than most other Europeans. So people don't have much time to shop for and cook fresh food. Supermarkets sell 'convenience food', pre-cooked dishes that can be heated up and served in 5 to 20 minutes. The British also buy a lot of frozen and tinned food. The microwave oven is a great time saver in many homes.

In short, the food scene in Britain is mixed. Here is an idea of what you might expect during a normal week. Notice that meal times may differ from those in your country.

Breakfast

This is often a quick meal, usually between 7am and 8am just before people leave home for work or college.

Light breakfasts are common, especially during the working week. They include: cereal (such as cornflakes, muesli, etc.) with milk, toast and jam or marmalade, A glass of juice (orange, grapefruit, etc.); tea or coffee. Tea is usually black with milk added and sometimes sugar.

Notice that this is a cold food breakfast. If you are used to warm food for breakfast, you may prefer the cooked breakfast.

Cooked breakfasts are less common, but some people eat eggs - boiled, scrambled, poached or fried - with toast. Notice how the British eat boiled eggs with a teaspoon.

A traditional breakfast: a choice of fried sausages, bacon, eggs, tomatoes, mushrooms, baked beans and bread. This is a big meal and people usually eat it when they are on holiday or staying in hotels. Some people may eat it if they have physical jobs and need to eat a lot for breakfast.

Mid-morning break

Usually a short break for a snack and a hot drink at about 11 o'clock. Tea or coffee with biscuits, a chocolate bar, crisps or fruit. You will notice that British people eat a lot of snacks between meals, such as fruit, biscuits, crisps ('potato chips' in American English), and chocolate bars. Eating snacks in the street is quite normal.

Lunch

Lunch is usually eaten at some time between 12 and 1.30pm. Lunch usually lasts 30 to 60 minutes. Some families call this 'dinner'. Most people eat a light lunch on working days. This usually includes sandwiches, some fruit such as an apple or orange, and a biscuit or chocolate snack of some kind. Your host will ask what you prefer. You can then buy a hot or cold drink to go with it.

For lunch most Britons choose from: sandwiches/ pizza/ a bowl of soup/ cold meat with salad/ a jacket potato/ baked beans on toast*/ a burger/ a heated 'ready' meal*
(*These lunches are usually prepared at home)
To one of these many people add a packet of crisps, fruit or chocolate.

Mid-afternoon break

Another short break for a hot drink, usually tea, and snack.

Dinner

Usually early evening at any time between 6pm and 8pm. Some families call this meal 'tea' or 'supper'. What do people usually eat for dinner?

Traditional British food

Meat (beef, chicken, pork or lamb) or fish with potatoes, boiled vegetables and gravy. The meat is usually roasted, fried or grilled. Meat pies are also popular. For example, chicken pie, steak and kidney pie, and shepherd's pie (with minced meat and mashed potato). In general you may find that the British eat more meat than in your country. The potatoes may be boiled, mashed, roasted or baked. Chips are popular in Britain, especially in families with young children. People buy them in plastic bags and keep them in the freezer. They cook the chips from frozen in deep fat fryers, pans or ovens.

Common vegetables include carrots, peas, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, broccoli, green beans.

In the winter, stew is popular. This is like a thick soup, usually with meat and vegetables.

For dessert apple pie, ice cream, cake or fruit are popular. The British often eat dessert as the last part of a main meal.





International food

Pasta (spaghetti bolognese, lasagne, ravioli), pizza, curry with rice., Chinese food.

Takeaways

(Collected from a shop or restaurant and eaten at home): Fish and chips, Chinese food, Indian food, Hamburgers.

Meals at weekends

Meals and meal times may be different at weekends if people are not working. Some families like to enjoy their free time without having to spend a lot of time cooking.

Takeaways are popular time savers at weekends. Other families may enjoy cooking and having a big family meal. This often happens on Sundays. Outdoor barbecues in people's gardens are also popular during warm weather.

Special diets

More and more people are becoming vegetarian. This means they do not eat meat. Others are vegan. They do not eat anything connected to animals, such as meat, cheese, milk and eggs.

Some people have allergies to wheat or dairy products and cannot eat them. Others do not eat certain foods for religious reasons.

If you cannot or do not want to eat certain foods for any reason, tell us about it before you come to Britain. We can then choose the right family for you.

Study tips

Watch what, how and when British people eat. Do you notice differences between British families? How are eating habits different from your country? For example, what fruit do the British generally eat and how do they eat it?

Also write down recipes that you would like to take back to your own country. Ask your host for recipes or copy them from recipe books. Ask other students about their eating experiences in Britain. Is their experience similar or different from yours?

Things to know about food and eating with your hosts

- Expect the food to be different. Try to be 'open-minded'. Take the opportunity to try lots of new, different foods. You might like them.
- Be prepared to try everything once. You only have to taste it. If you don't like it, you won't have to eat it.
- Tell us and your hosts before you arrive if you have a special diet, especially if you are a vegetarian or cannot eat certain foods. We will be happy to help you.
- Tell your hosts what you like and don't like. They will not be offended.
- If you have any difficulties with the amount or quality of the food you get with the host family, speak to the Accommodation Officers at Kings. They will be able to advise and help you.
- If you really miss food from your country, offer to make your host family a meal. Most supermarkets sell international food and spices.
- Cold water from the tap is perfectly safe in Britain. However, many people prefer bottled water.

Language tips

Here are some polite questions and answers you can use while eating with your host family.

Question: Would you like a second helping? (= Would you like some more?)

Answer: Yes, please

OR

Answer: No, thank you. That was very nice but I'm full up now. (= I can't eat any more)

OR

Answer: No, thank you. That was delicious but I want to save some room for dessert.

Question: You haven't eaten very much. Didn't you like it?

Answer: It was lovely. I had a big lunch/ I don't feel very hungry tonight.