

British food

Foreigners often laugh at the British. They say, "In Britain you get hot chips with everything!" But even the British don't eat chips with their meals. To prove that, we decided to let you read an extract from a letter written by Pete Phrase, the chief cook at Daphne's in London, to his foreign friends.

"...I am always both amused and annoyed when I hear foreign people criticise British food. "It's unimaginative," they say. "It's boring, it's tasteless with totally overcooked vegetables." I have a theory about British cooking, and I was interested to read that several famous cookery writers agree with me. My theory is this. Our basic ingredients, when fresh, are so full of flavour that we haven't had to invent sauces and complex recipes to disguise their natural taste. What can compare with fresh peas or new potatoes just boiled (not overboiled) and served with butter? Why drown spring lamb in wine or cream or yoghurt and spices, when with just one or two herbs it is absolutely delicious?"

If you ask foreigners to name some typically English dishes, they will probably say "fish and chips" and then stop. It is disappointing, but true, that there is no tradition in Britain of eating in restaurants, because our food doesn't lend itself to such preparation. British cooking is found in the home, where it is possible to time the dishes to perfection. So it is difficult to find a good English restaurant with reasonable prices.

It is for these reasons that we haven't exported our dishes, but we have imported a surprising variety of cuisines from all over the world. In most cities in Britain you'll also find Indian, Chinese, French and Italian restaurants. In London you'll also find Indonesian, Lebanese, German, Spanish, Mexican, Greek... Cynics will say that this is because we have no "cuisine" ourselves, but, well, you know what I think!"

Traditional British food is usually described as plain, conservative and unvaried. There are many popular jokes about it. "The British Empire was created as a by-product of generations of desperate Englishmen roaming the world in search of a decent meal," remarks American journalist Bill Marsano.

Indeed, classic British dishes are not too dainty, but they are nourishing, natural and tasty, a lot of attention here is paid to the food quality. Residents of Great Britain prefer local food to imported products, so nearly all fish, milk and meat products are produced within the country and vegetables are grown by local farmers.

Meals during a day in Britain traditionally include breakfast, lunch, dinner and supper. Dinner is always the most substantial meal during the day. For dinner the British often have soup and then the main course, such as meat, poultry or fish with vegetables or mashed potatoes. It is followed by a dessert, for example, the most ubiquitous apple pie. Meat dishes are presented in British cuisine in a large variety. Probably, the most delicious of them is succulent roast beef, which is grilled and served with vegetables, roast potatoes or Yorkshire pudding. Apart from beef, the British cook steaks of pork, lamb and sometimes turkey or chicken.

Supper in Britain is the last meal of the day, and usually it consists of something light, for example, a bowl of cream soup, naturally, often skipped.

As for drinks, it's impossible to imagine British cuisine without tea. Contrary to popular belief, tea is not always served with milk. The British drink tea with and without sugar, with lemon, cinnamon, honey and so on. But tea and milk is a classic combination, not a favourite of mine, though."

It often seems to foreigners that British food...

1. ...hasn't been cooked long enough.

2. ...often tastes too hot and spicy.
3. ...doesn't include raw vegetables.
4. ...is lacking in variety of dishes.