Stirritup

A GUIDE TO:

2026/2027 FOOD TRENDS

WestCountry
FOODSERVICE

For help, advice or further information on anything covered in this guide simply contact our team.

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This guide draws on data and insights obtained from thefoodpeople and Lumina Intelligence.

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SMALL BITES, BIG EXPERIENCES: THE NEW RULES OF DINING OUT

Dining is now about more than just filling plates, it's about fun, craft and meaningful experiences. Diners are seeking value that goes beyond price, looking for meals that deliver quality ingredients, thoughtful technique and a sense of occasion. From immersive cookery classes and tasting menus to bottomless brunches and interactive counter service, food is becoming more of an experience to savour, not just a necessity.

Operators are responding by elevating humble ingredients and formats. Mini meals, snackable dishes, bar bites and playful desserts transform everyday dining into moments of joy without stretching budgets. Fried chicken, burgers, and even the humble bread course are being re-celebrated for their craft, while dessert bars and showstopper sweets satisfy cravings and tap into the "lipstick effect" (affordable indulgences that feel like a treat). Secret menu items, limited-edition dishes and social-media-worthy presentations add excitement and generate a fear of missing out, turning meals into shareable experiences.

Value now means quality, creativity and satisfaction. Midweek curry nights, workers' lunches and family bundles show how venues offer everyday affordability without losing flavour or imagination. Smart menu design and well-executed counter service help manage costs while letting diners enjoy smaller, impactful dishes without compromising the sense of occasion. Think light bites, adult happy meals or single-course desserts.

Across the board, diners are embracing a spirit of curiosity and joy. They want new flavours, playful formats and elevated comfort, whether that's exploring global cuisines, embracing the rise of snacks and value meats or indulging in food therapy through breakfast, sarnies or dessert. Dining is personal, experiential and joyful: small bites, bold flavours and crafted moments are redefining what it means to eat out well.

THE HEALTH TRENDS *Driving a Food Revolution*

Health-conscious eating is continuing to shape menus and innovation. Consumers are seeking meals that balance flavour with nutrition, often prioritising high-protein, fibre-rich, plant-forward ingredients and are becoming increasingly portion conscious. Clean labels, shorter ingredient lists and transparent sourcing are increasingly important, as diners look for reassurance and control over what they eat.

SMALLER APPETITES, SMARTER MENUS

Originally designed for diabetes support, GLP-1 drugs are now influencing demand across the food landscape. An estimated 1.6 million UK adults used weight-loss drugs such as Mounjaro between early 2024 and early 2025 with a further 3.3 million people saying they would be interested in using such drugs in the next year.[1]

Diners want meals that satisfy without being overwhelmed, such as dishes rich in protein, fibre and slow-release ingredients that help maintain fullness while still delivering flavour. For caterers, this opens opportunities: smaller plates, layered snacks, high-protein breakfasts and mini desserts can all meet changing appetites while adding interest to menus.

TOP TIP

Grazing menus and small plates encourage sharing, boost spend and help reduce food waste.

PLANT-BASED REIMAGINED

Plant-led eating is gaining new momentum too. Consumers are leaning into whole vegetables, pulses, grains and fungi as nutrient-dense essentials. Ingredients once seen as “humble” like potatoes, mushrooms and brassicas are enjoying star status. Chefs are roasting, fermenting, charring and seasoning them with global inspiration. Stuffed cabbages, skewer-ready mushrooms, richly seasoned beans and social-media favourites like tomato flights position plants as hero dishes rather than sides.

GUT HEALTH AND THE FUTURE OF FOOD

Gut health remains a major driver. Concepts such as “30 plants a week,” polyphenol-rich purple foods and fermented staples are shaping choices. At the same time, consumers are becoming more sceptical about ultra-processed foods (UPFs), seeking transparency, shorter ingredient lists and a sense of control.

However, the ultra-processed foods conversation is evolving. It’s no longer just about methods of processing – diners are asking more nuanced questions about nutrition, provenance and intention. Functional foods with clear benefits, cleaner labels and smart reformulations are gaining traction. Pair this with ongoing High Fat, Salt and Sugar (HFSS) reform, which continues to encourage innovation: non-HFSS indulgences, reimagined snacks and lighter takes on family favourites are thriving as operators balance regulation with creativity.

Together, these trends signal a future where health-conscious eating is more personalised, tech-enabled and flavour-forward – with plants, proteins and thoughtful decisions shaping plates and menus in 2026.

[1] University College London https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2026/jan/16-million-uk-adults-used-weight-loss-drugs-past-year

TOP TIP

For care and education caterers, the move toward smaller, nutrient-dense meals presents a clear opportunity. Protein-rich mini dishes, fibre-forward sides and lighter desserts support changing appetites, meet nutrition standards and keep menus appealing at every life stage.

SNACK TO THE FUTURE: HOW SMALL BITES ARE TAKING OVER

The classic "three meals a day" structure is giving way to a world built around snacks, small plates and playful picky bits. Busy schedules, shifting appetites and a craving for fun, flavour-packed food have turned snacking into a mealtime of its own. These snacks aren't afterthoughts - they're standalone moments of joy, layered with bold ingredients, indulgent toppings and clever textures.

Consumers are eating little and often. They're reaching for mini meals, loaded bites and snack-meal hybrids that feel satisfying without slowing them down. Topped-and-loaded toast, upgraded pastries, gourmet crisps with dips and small-but-mighty treats scratch the itch instantly. It's about joy, spontaneity and the freedom to follow cravings four, five or even six times a day.

Restaurants are embracing this shift wholeheartedly. Bar menus are expanding, small plates are becoming signature dishes and formats built for grazing and sharing offer low-commitment ways to explore new flavours. Sliders, skewers, sticks and bites, these formats make discovery fun and social while keeping costs in check.

TOP TIP

Small plates and snack-style meals work perfectly in environments where routines, appetites and time pressures vary. From mid-morning bites in hospitals to grab-and-go options in colleges, these formats offer flexibility without compromising nutrition, flavour or cost control.

FROM BREAKFAST BASIC TO CULINARY CANVAS

Toast is becoming a category all of its own. Sourdough acts as a backdrop for smashed peas, burrata, miso mushrooms, tomato medleys, ricotta with roasted fruit and squash blossoms. Fish-forward options like anchovy, mackerel and trout add instant depth, while dukkah, caponata, chilli crisp, mint oil and pickles bring global character.

NEXT-LEVEL NIBBLES: MASHUPS THAT BREAK THE RULES

Format mashups continue to dominate both timelines and menus. Croissant buns, swavoury sandwiches, brownie-cookie hybrids and baklava fusions deliver textural play, visual drama and pure fun. Expect even more inventive mashups – banana pudding inspiration, pierogi reinterpretations and dish-in-a-bagel toasties that merge comfort with creativity.

RECIPE · RECIPE

Smashed Peas on Toast with Poached Egg and Crispy Bacon

Start your day with this vibrant Smashed Peas on Toast. Creamy, zesty peas sit atop golden sourdough, crowned with crumbled feta, a perfectly poached egg and crispy bacon. Quick to make, full of flavour and packed with texture, it's a simple yet satisfying breakfast or brunch that never disappoints.

COOKING TIME: 21 MINUTES
PORTIONS: 2

INGREDIENTS

- 100g Country Range Choice Garden Peas, defrosted
- 25ml Country Range Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- 1 Country Range Bacon Rasher, cooked
- ¼ finely diced red onion
- Juice and zest of ½ a lemon
- 2 slices of sourdough bread, toasted
- 2 poached eggs
- 25g crumbled feta

METHOD

1. Crush the peas with the red onion, olive oil, lemon juice and season to taste.

2. Rub a little olive oil into the slices of sourdough and griddle in a hot pan until golden.

3. Spoon a generous amount of peas onto the toast and top with crumbled feta, a hot poached egg and a sprinkle of bacon lardons.

FROM SKIRT TO SHIN

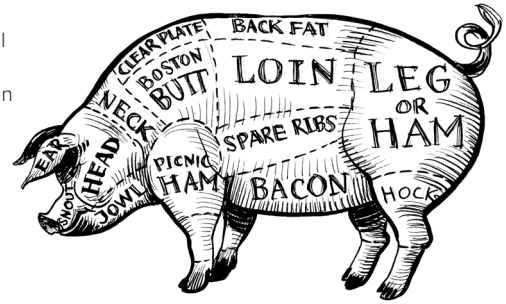
The Delicious Rise of Value Meat

Meat is enjoying a confident revival — but with a fresh perspective. With plant-based eating now fully woven into everyday life, diners are happily returning to the butcher's counter in search of craft, character and flavour. This time, however, it's the value cuts taking centre stage: neck, collar, belly, wings, shin, skirt and more are being elevated through slow cooking, smart marinades and global techniques like char siu, pibil, pastrami and croquetas.

Consumers are still cost-conscious, and that's reshaping how they approach meat. "Value" doesn't mean compromising — instead, it means choosing less expensive, non-premium cuts that still deliver on tenderness, richness and quality. Provenance matters more than ever; where and how an animal is raised is a major point of difference across both retail and restaurants. Whether someone buys flank or fillet, ethical sourcing and great husbandry remain non-negotiable.

This renewed curiosity is inspiring chefs to get creative. Animal fats are back in the spotlight — used not only to deepen meaty dishes, but also to layer umami and kokumi into vegetables, seafood and even pastries.

Cuts once considered "tough" like shin, skirt, collar and lamb breast, are being transformed into melt in the mouth, slow-braised dishes that offer extraordinary depth for the price. Time has become part of the story: menus proudly call out braising hours, ageing processes and slow rendering techniques. Charcuterie made from value cuts including pastrami, bresaola



TOP TIP

Value cuts are ideal for large-scale catering. Slow-braised beef, flavour-packed mince and versatile chicken thighs deliver comfort, consistency and depth while keeping costs under control.

and cured belly adds depth, longevity and flexibility to menus.

And then there's proper mince! Made from named cuts like brisket, belly, rump and shoulder. No mystery, just flavour. It's becoming a culinary chameleon, delivering dishes inspired by keema, larb, picadillo, arayes and global sausages from merguez to sai oua. Even comfort classics like meatloaf and mince on toast are being given a gourmet glow-up.

Chicken, the most-consumed meat across much of the Western world, is stepping into a new era. It offers comfort, versatility and value — all essential in tight financial times. Roasted, fried, glazed or stuffed, it pairs beautifully with everything from mashed potato and gravy to vibrant global flavours.

But as costs rise, attention is shifting to smaller and lesser-used cuts: thighs, drumsticks, flats, drumettes and even 'hidden' gems such as oysters and rib meat. Offal, including hearts and livers, is being paired beautifully with Mexican, Levantine and East Asian flavour profiles, bringing exciting new dishes within reach.

Shin of Beef Cottage Pie

You can make this recipe with oxtail or any other cuts of meat that benefit from low and slow cooking.

SERVINGS: 2
COOKING TIME: 120 MINS
PREP TIME: 30 MINS

INGREDIENTS

- 300g Signature by Country Range Mashed Potatoes with Butter
- 100ml Country Range Red Cooking Wine
- 500ml Country Range Beef Bouillon Mix
- ½tsp Country Range Dried Mixed Herbs
- 2 Country Range Dried Bay Leaves
- 50ml vegetable oil
- 250g diced shin of beef
- 1 small diced onion
- 1 small diced carrot
- 1 stick of diced celery
- ¼ sliced small leek
- Season to taste

METHOD

1. Pre heat the oven to 200°C / 180°C fan.

2. Brown the chunks of shin of beef in hot oil and remove from the large pan.

3. Add the diced veg and continue to fry.

4. Add the beef back in to the pan and season with a little salt and pepper.

5. Add the red wine, mixed herbs, bay leaf, beef stock and simmer for 2 hours.

6. Once the stock has reduced and the meat is tender and decant into a suitable dish.

7. Prepare the Signature by Country Range mash as per pack instructions and pipe on top of the meat.

8. Bake in a hot oven for 20 mins and serve with buttered runner beans.

COMFORT, CRAVINGS & EVERYDAY HAPPINESS

People are embracing food as a source of joy, comfort and everyday celebration. With life feeling fast, full and sometimes overwhelming, food has become a reliable way to reset, reconnect and spark a little happiness. This isn't about replacing therapy; it's about finding small, uplifting moments throughout the day: a perfect pastry, a nostalgic treat, an overstuffed sandwich or a playful dessert for breakfast.

Diners are seeking dishes that feel good emotionally as well as physically — foods that offer warmth, familiarity and a touch of fun. Carbs are having a triumphant moment thanks to their natural comfort factor: fries, cookies, golden toast, hash browns, pillowy breads and all the pastry goodness. These aren't "guilty pleasures" anymore, they're joyful rituals.

At the same time, people want their money to work harder for happiness, not just hunger. Bigger breakfasts, generous sandwiches, dressed-up salads and shareable snacks are giving consumers that sense of everyday happiness without blowing the budget.

RISE AND DINE: BREAKFAST GOES BIG

Breakfast has become a moment of delight rather than a rush. It's relaxed, social and increasingly adventurous. Plates are loaded with hash browns, fried chicken, bold sauces, eggs and dinner-worthy meats like short rib or beef tongue. Global spins on Eggs

TOP TIP

Try adding "Build-Your-Own Breakfast Boards" as a fun, interactive sharing plate for your menus.

Benedict such as Reuben-style, tajín-spiked and Bourguignon keep flavours relevant while maintaining comfort.

Breakfast sandwiches are also enjoying a golden age. Whether it's a tarted-up bacon–egg–cheese on milk bread, a carne asada breakfast burrito or a Persian kabob sando, consumers are embracing bold flavours inside the familiar, comforting format of a morning sarnie. It's playful innovation at its most accessible.

STACKED, PACKED & PROPERLY DELICIOUS

Sandwiches are also entering the spotlight. Classic combos are being reinvented with better ingredients and clever techniques: heirloom tomatoes in BLTs, tuna mayo with more personality, labneh replacing cream cheese, turkey paired with a tarragon dressing or mortadella stepping in for ham. Sourdough, smart pickles, slow-cooked meats and condiments like gochujang, kimchi or aioli create memorable layers of flavour.

Together, these trends point to a delicious truth: food therapy is joyful, generous and rooted in everyday moments that brighten the day.

RECIPE · RECIPE ·

Sauerkraut Reuben Toastie

A timeless deli classic elevated with a homemade touch — this Reuben sandwich is the perfect harmony of rich, tangy and savoury. Layers of tender sliced pastrami or beef meet smooth, melting Swiss cheese, sharp American mustard and crisp gherkins, all nestled between slices of hearty rye bread.

COOKING TIME: 20 MINUTES
PORTIONS: 2

INGREDIENTS

- 6 Country Range Sliced Gherkins
- 1tsp Country Range Pink Peppercorns
- 1kg sliced white cabbage
- 2 shallots, sliced
- 2tbsp Maldon sea salt
- 1tbsp caster sugar
- 1tsp caraway seeds
- 1 bunch chopped dill
- 50g cooked beef or pastrami, sliced
- 2 slices rye bread
- 2 slices Swiss cheese or medium cheddar
- 1tbsp American mustard

METHOD

1. To make the sauerkraut – place the sliced cabbage, salt, dill, caraway, peppercorns and sugar in a clean bowl and massage the cabbage with gloves on until all incorporated.

2. Press all the ingredients and brine into a sterilised large kilner jar and press down the cabbage bellow the brine with a small saucer or suitable weight and close the lid.

3. Store in a cool dark area and open the lid every day and stir to release all the fermenting gasses and air bubbles.

4. Refrigerate after 2 weeks if all the bubbles have stopped.

5. To make the sandwich – layer the beef, sauerkraut, cheese, gherkin and American mustard in the rye bread.

6. Warm in the oven for 5 minutes and serve.

GLOBAL FAVOURITES
New Flavours

This year diners will continue to embrace cuisines from around the world. Dishes from China, the US, the Mediterranean, India, Japan and Mexico still dominate midweek meals and weekend treats. But familiarity is being re-energised with new stories, regionality and playful upgrades that feel both authentic and exciting.

STARS, STRIPES & SECOND HELPINGS: AMERICA'S COMFORT CLASSICS RETURN

America's influence runs deep, and the country's 250th anniversary only adds to the nostalgia. Diners are craving diner-style classics: grilled cheese with tomato soup, chowder, curly fries, fried chicken with biscuits, sloppy joes and ice-cold floats all elevated with better ingredients and clever upgrades. Italian-American staples like Sunday sauce, garlic bread, meatball subs and lasagne, continue their reign. Desserts are thriving too, key lime pie, peanut butter & jelly and banana pudding flavours are jumping into doughnuts, croissants, French toast and icebox cakes.

TOP TIP

Introducing global dishes through familiar formats helps broaden appeal without risk. For schools, colleges and healthcare venues, this approach supports inclusivity, curiosity and menu rotation while keeping flavours approachable and operationally simple.

TOP TIP

Try featuring "Regional Provenance" as a way to refresh familiar menu items with regional specific dishes

WOK THIS WAY: CHINA'S FLAVOUR RENAISSANCE

Chinese cuisine is having a renaissance. Diners want regional specificity like Lanzhou lamian, Xinjiang lamb skewers, mapo tofu and malatang (a spicy, Sichuan-style hot pot street dish), and they're equally excited by the new wave of Chinese fine-dining. Think XO-glazed char siu, sesame prawn toast with caviar, and delicate wontons in aromatic broths. "No rules" fusion is also thriving: Chinese pantry staples like soy, chilli crisp and Sichuan peppercorns are inspiring next-gen creations, from mala pasta to Chinese-Jewish latkes and Chinese-American comfort classics reimagined with more depth and technique.

THE RISE OF NEXT-GEN INDIAN EATING

Curiosity is steering diners toward regional dishes: Keralan meen pollichathu, Amritsari fish, Malvani chicken and Kolkata jhalmuri. Fine-dining interpretations and global mashups including; caviar pani puri, roti tacos, samosa nachos and naan paninis bring playful innovation. Breakfast also benefits with idli, dosas and masala fry-ups stepping into the spotlight.

FRESH FINDS FROM ITALY & SPAIN

Italian and Spanish favourites remain beloved, but new trends encourage diners to explore further. Italy offers carciofi alla Romana, friselle Pugliesi and cauliflower Milanese, while Spain tempts with fideuà, bacalao dishes, savoury churros and pintxos with creative twists.

Drink trends in both countries focus on low-ABV, citrus-forward aperitivos like the Garibaldi, spritz-style Spanish drinks such as Tinto Verano, dessert-inspired lattes, and a growing demand for experiential, sessionable options beyond alcohol.

Across these cuisines, global comfort is evolving with familiar formats, elevated ingredients and the thrill of discovery in dishes that feel both comforting and new.

EMERGING TASTES: SOUTH AMERICA AND SCANDINAVIA

Diners are increasingly seeking flavours that go beyond the familiar, they are looking for dishes that feel adventurous but still comforting. Two regions are capturing attention: the bold, spice-forward cuisines of South America and the ingredient-led, minimalist elegance of Scandinavia.

SOUTH AMERICAN FLAVOURS: BOLD, VIBRANT, UNMISSABLE

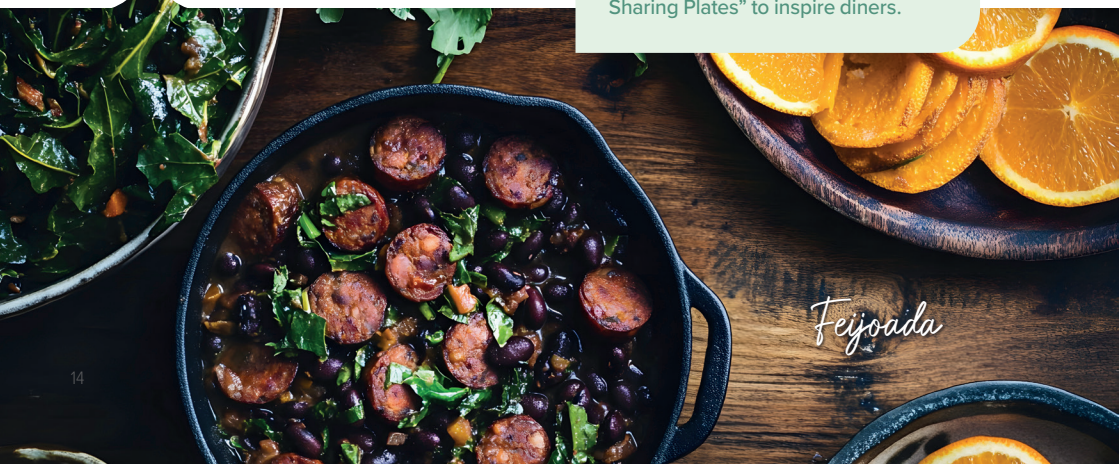
South American cuisines are gaining momentum, with Peru leading the charge. Its fusion of indigenous, Spanish, Japanese and regional influences makes it endlessly exciting. Ceviche stays a global staple, joined by tiradito, grilled octopus and aromatic meats layered with chilli, citrus, coriander and herbs. Lighter salads and plant-based plates shine in warmer months, while hearty stews offer comfort in cooler seasons. Chicharrón and other fried snacks make perfect starters or mid-afternoon treats.

Brazilian food brings fire and flavour. Churrasco cooking dominates, especially in rodizio-style restaurants where meats take centre stage. Feijoada delivers rich satisfaction, while moqueca, a coconut-based fish or vegetable stew, adds warmth and freshness. Street-food favourites such as coxinha, croquetas and dadinho de tapioca bring fun textures and easy indulgence.

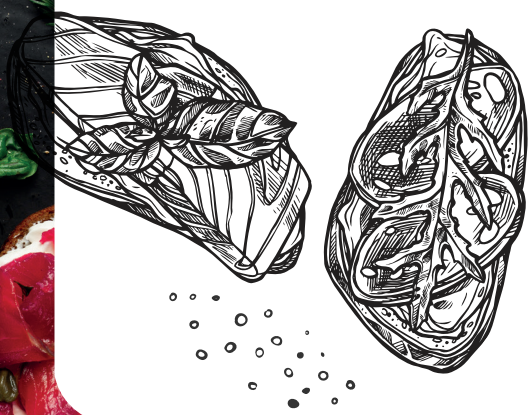
Argentina's culinary identity centres on fire-grilled beef, chimichurri, empanadas and provoleta. Italian and Spanish influences shape pasta, pizza and chorizo traditions, while dulce de leche features as a signature indulgence across desserts. UK diners are embracing the region's diversity, from vibrant sharing boards to single plates packed with flavour.

TOP TIP

Try highlighting "Peruvian Ceviche & Tiradito Variations" or "Rodizio-Style Sharing Plates" to inspire diners.



gravlax salmon with cream cheese on rye



Swedish kanelbullar cinnamon buns

SCANDINAVIAN FLAVOURS: MINIMAL, MODERN, HYGGE

Scandinavian cuisine, spanning Sweden, Denmark, Norway and increasingly Finland, and Iceland, is riding a wave of interest thanks to the principles of New Nordic cuisine; seasonality, simplicity and respect for ingredients and the global influence of chefs like René Redzepi. Signature Scandinavian dishes include smørrebrød, salmon, meatballs and smörgåsbord traditions. While classic pastries are gaining wider recognition with hygge-inspired fika concepts and sweet buns.

Modern Scandi cuisine is about elevating the everyday. Fresh, high-quality ingredients shine through minimal intervention, think pickled vegetables, rye breads, delicate pastries and smoked or cured fish. Scandinavian bakery is no longer niche. Bakery culture is booming, with hygge-inspired fika rituals introducing cinnamon buns, cardamom breads, almond pastries and layered cakes to cafés across Europe. These dishes offer comfort, craft and calm, the perfect counterbalance to fast-paced daily life.

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