

The cost of eating out

For the first time, the price of a meal out in an expensive restaurant has passed £100! Do restaurants overcharge?

1 How often do you eat in a restaurant? How often does your company pay? Compare your answers with a partner.

Every day Quite a lot Sometimes Rarely Never

2 Complete both parts of the survey results with the following city names: *London, New York, Paris*. Then check your answers by scanning the article below.

The cost of eating out	Data: based on a survey by the <i>Sunday Times</i> newspaper, UK
(1) Average cost of eating out	£52.75 [.....] / £44.83 [.....] / £44.35 [.....]
(2) Average number of times people eat out per week	3.3 [.....] / 2.9 [.....] / 2.5 [.....]

Restaurant prices soar

Can anybody really afford to eat out nowadays? Eating out in a capital city has always been expensive, especially for those paying for themselves and not passing on the bill to their company. The price of a meal for one has risen to well over £50.00 per person in London. That's about £8.00 more than in New York (£44.83) and the French capital (£44.35), according to a new survey run by the British newspaper, the *Sunday Times*.

The survey compared the price of a four-course meal, not including wine and not including service. The cheapest bottle of wine in a London restaurant was found to be £16.00, with 12.5% the typical service charge. The survey also reported that in the most expensive restaurants in London, you can expect to pay more than £100.00 per meal. This is the first time

that this figure has been passed. It is no surprise that people in London eat out less often than in the other two cities – on average just 2.5 times a week, compared to 2.9 in Paris and 3.3 in New York.

Restaurant owners say that they are forced to charge high prices due to high rents, staff costs and the expensive cost of ingredients. They defend their prices by saying: 'If we didn't charge high prices, we wouldn't make any money'. They have however received strong criticism from those who say that these reasons are 'just an excuse'. The critics say that everyone complains about the price of eating out – except those with an expense account! They argue that if there is a recession, the business clientele will disappear, leaving empty tables. Are the prices charged fair, or is the restaurant trade in London yet another example of 'rip-off Britain'?

3 Read the whole article. Why do the restaurant owners charge high prices? What do the critics say?

4 Find words and phrases in paragraph three from their definitions below.

- (a) a system that allows you to get back from your employer money spent while working
- (b) a period when trade is not successful and there is a lot of unemployment
- (c) the customers of a shop, hotel, restaurant etc considered as a group
- (d) something that is more expensive than it should be (informal)

Definitions from or based on the Macmillan English Dictionary 2nd Edition (Text © Bloomsbury 2007)

5 Discuss the following questions in small groups. Be ready to report your findings to the class.

- (a) Would you pay £100 per head for a meal? Justify your answer.
- (b) Do you think restaurants charge a fair price, or do they overcharge? Give examples.
- (c) What else in Britain or your own country could be described as a 'rip-off', in your experience?