

Introduction by Loyd Grossman

Over the last 30 years there has been a sea change in palates and tastes across Europe. Rather than relying on the same traditional, home-grown recipes, we are all more likely to try each other's cuisines, whether cooked by professionals or ourselves.

This extensive research shows the extent of this change, and reveals how Britain has come to the fore of culinary adventurousness in Europe.

It shows striking differences between nations' tastes and opinions of their own food, and how age and education affect what we eat and where we eat it.

This study also investigates how open we are to appreciating the cuisines of other countries. Brits are confident enough to point to foreign cuisines as 'the best in the world', unlike our French and Italian counterparts. Don't Britons rate their own food very highly? Or are we just modest? I hope it is the latter, as British cuisine is currently enjoying something of a renaissance.

There's nothing to stop everyone from becoming more adventurous with their food. This report explores the different factors likely to affect how adventurous we are with food; the truth is everyone has the opportunity to try something new.

Loyd Grossman

Executive summary

A total of 5,336 adults from Britain, Italy, Germany, France and Spain were polled by TNS/Ncompass International during July 5-9 2007.

The participants were given a list of 22 food types, and asked which they had eaten at home, at a restaurant, or as a takeaway in the last 12 months.

The foods were: British, French, Spanish, Italian, German, Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Thai, American, Mexican, Indonesian, Greek, Mongolian, Brazilian, Moroccan, Lebanese, Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Korean, Hungarian and Polish.

The study recorded the number of international dishes eaten by at least five per cent of the population at least once. Grossed up, that represents at least 1.2m Spaniards, 1.9m Brits, 2.5m Germans, 1.9m French and 1.5m Italians.

The study found:

- The British are the most adventurous cooking at home, with more than five per cent of the population eating at least 12 different types of cuisine from five different continents, including Spanish, Thai, Greek, Moroccan and Japanese.
- The Spanish are most adventurous overall, with more than five per cent cooking, eating out and having takeaways from 17 different cuisines, with Britain a close second at 16.
- The French are least adventurous in their food tastes overall, eating only 13 types of non-native food at home, restaurant or takeaway, followed by Italy and Germany (both 14).
- Britons are more open to enjoying foreign foods and are confident enough to praise the cuisines of others as 'the best in the world' – unlike the French and Italians, who are reluctant to describe any cuisine bar their own as excellent.
- British Southerners are the only sub-group in any country who actually give top marks to a foreign cuisine rather than their native food.
- Of the four Continental European countries, Spain has the most affection for British cooking...while the Germans liked it the least.
- Italians are the most reluctant to cook new dishes, trying just six cuisines at home, and only three foreign types of takeaway.
- Chinese food dominates our culinary habits. In Britain while we may say Italian is the finest non-British cuisine in the world, we actually eat Chinese more often.
- Age is a factor, with a peak around the age of 25 for being most adventurous linked to the natural curiosity of youth, followed by a second, lower peak in the late 30s and early 40s, when people have more to spend on exotic ingredients.
- The better your education, the greater the variety of foods you will try. Those with no GCSEs had tried far fewer cuisines than graduates. Of the cuisines which both eat, a far smaller proportion of the less qualified eat them.

Table 1 – League table

Showing number of different types of food eaten more than once in the past year by over 5% of the population

Country	At home	At restaurant	Takeaway	Home, restaurant or takeaway
Spain	8	15	6	17
Great Britain	12	10	5	16
Italy	6	11	3	14
Germany	11	11	5	14
France	11	11	7	13

British food trends

A total of 1,013 Britons – 514 men, 499 women - were surveyed on their food tastes.

A quarter said the best cuisine in the world is British, but others strongly suggested Italian (19%), Chinese and Indian (both 12%).

Whatever Britons say is the best food to eat, it is abundantly clear which international cuisine they eat the most of, cooked at home or at restaurants - Chinese.

In fact Chinese is close to matching and perhaps overtaking British food as the most popular type of cooking. A total of 85 per cent of Britons quizzed had eaten their own native food in the last year – while 81 per cent had eaten exotic Chinese.

Breakdown

a) At home

The British are the most likely of all of the countries surveyed to cook a variety of international dishes to eat at home. The most popular were Chinese (eaten by 56 per cent); Italian (53%); Indian (50%); American (26%); Mexican (25%); Thai (17%); Spanish (16%); French (14 per cent); Greek (11%); Caribbean (7%); Japanese and Moroccan (both 6%)

The cuisines at the bottom end of the survey were German food, tried by 5% followed by Indonesian and Polish (3%); Lebanese, Hungarian and Bangladeshi (2%) and Korean (1%).

Only four per cent had not cooked any of the foods.

b) At a restaurant

The British were slightly less adventurous when it came to eating out – 10 cuisines had been tried by more than five per cent of the population, according to our survey, second only to the Spanish who had tried 15.

The most popular were Chinese (45%); Italian (44%); Indian (43%); American (26%); Thai (20 %); Spanish (18%); French (16%); Mexican (15%); Greek (14%) and Japanese (9 %).

These were followed by Caribbean food (5%); Moroccan, Lebanese and Bangladeshi (4%); German and Indonesian (3%); Korean and Mongolian (2%) and Hungarian, Brazilian and Polish (1%).

c) Takeaway

Surprisingly, given the alarming rise in obesity in the UK, Britain does not appear to be takeaway king of Europe. More than five per cent of the population had had five international types of takeaway food in the last year – below France and Spain and equal to Germany.

Our favourites were Chinese (66%); Indian (43%); Italian and American (both 19 %) and Thai (8%). Fish and chips is still popular – with 46 % opting for British takeaway food.

d) Age

For almost all foods, the young dine out more than the older groups. But the survey may sound the death knell for many French restaurants. While 23 % of the 55-64 group have eaten French in the last year, only 12% of the 25-34-year-olds have, dramatically bucking the trend.

Eating favourites like Italian, Chinese and Indian at home are pretty constant across the British age ranges, but there are some significant differences with other foods.

Youngsters were twice as likely as their parents to go for Hamburger and Fries, with 40 % of the 16-24 age group eating American food at home. This compares to 18 % of 45-54 year olds.

As many as 4 % of 16-24-year-olds had eaten Lebanese at home, compared to one per cent of the older age groups.

e) Region

There are marked regional differences, possibly linked to the availability of ingredients for more exotic foods, fewer international restaurants and less disposable income in the north for meals out.

Southerners are far more likely to eat Thai at home than Northerners (20%/14%); a similar pattern is shown with Moroccan food (8%/4%).

Southerners are almost twice as likely to eat French food in a restaurant than Northerners (22%/12%). The same goes for Japanese food (12%/5%).

People from the Midlands are more likely to choose British food in a restaurant (70%) than Southerners (64%) and Northerners (62%), and the same goes for a takeaway (50%/41%/47%).

The only food that Northerners ate at a restaurant more than Southerners was Chinese (47%/44%).

Midlanders are not fans of pizza, with only 13% opting for Italian takeaway, compared to 23% of Northerners and 20% of Southerners. Their favourite is Chinese (70%), higher than the other regions.

Northerners and Midlanders rate British food higher than their Southern counterparts. 29 % of Northerners and 27 % of Southerners thought British was the world's finest cuisine, but the largest proportion of Southerners voted Italian the best (20%).

f) Education

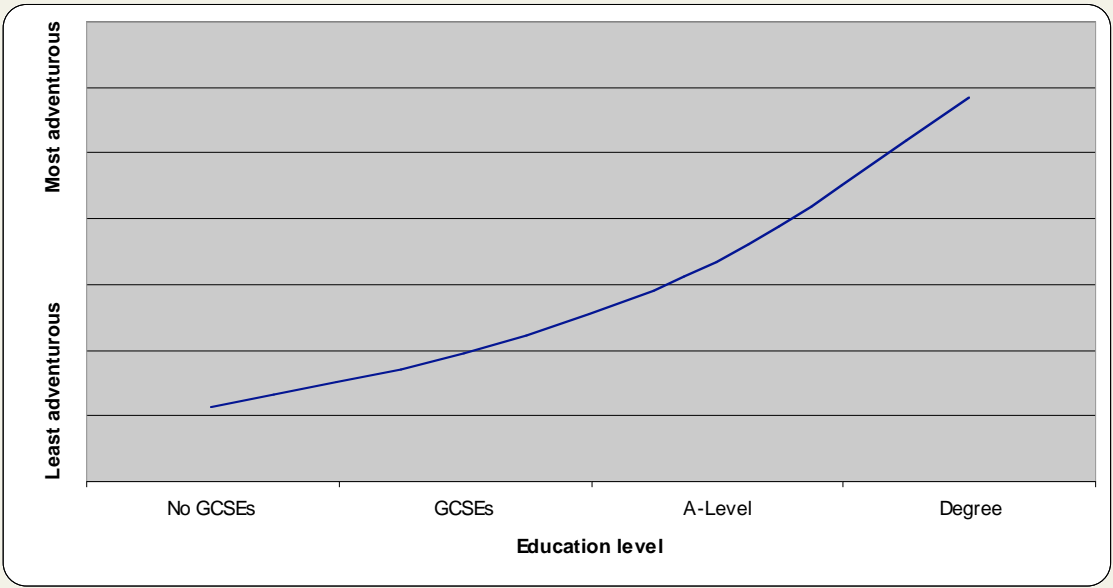
Educational attainment affects how likely you are to eat different types of food. (See Table 2)

Those with a degree are more likely to be adventurous with all kind of foods, but there are some significant differences.

Only 1 % of those who left school aged 16 with no GCSEs, cooked French food at home – but this rose to 22 % if you are a graduate.

Instead, the lower achievers preferred to eat British food at home (70%) but also Chinese (43%) and Indian (33%). None of the 95 unqualified school leavers polled had tried Indonesian, Brazilian, German, Lebanese, Hungarian or Polish food at all. By contrast, among the 266 graduates polled, all of the 22 food types had been tried.

Table 2 - How adventurousness is affected by education levels in Great Britain



European food trends

a) France

A total of 1,045 French people were polled.

Almost four fifths (79%) said French cuisine was the best in the world. Chinese food came a very poor second. (5%.)

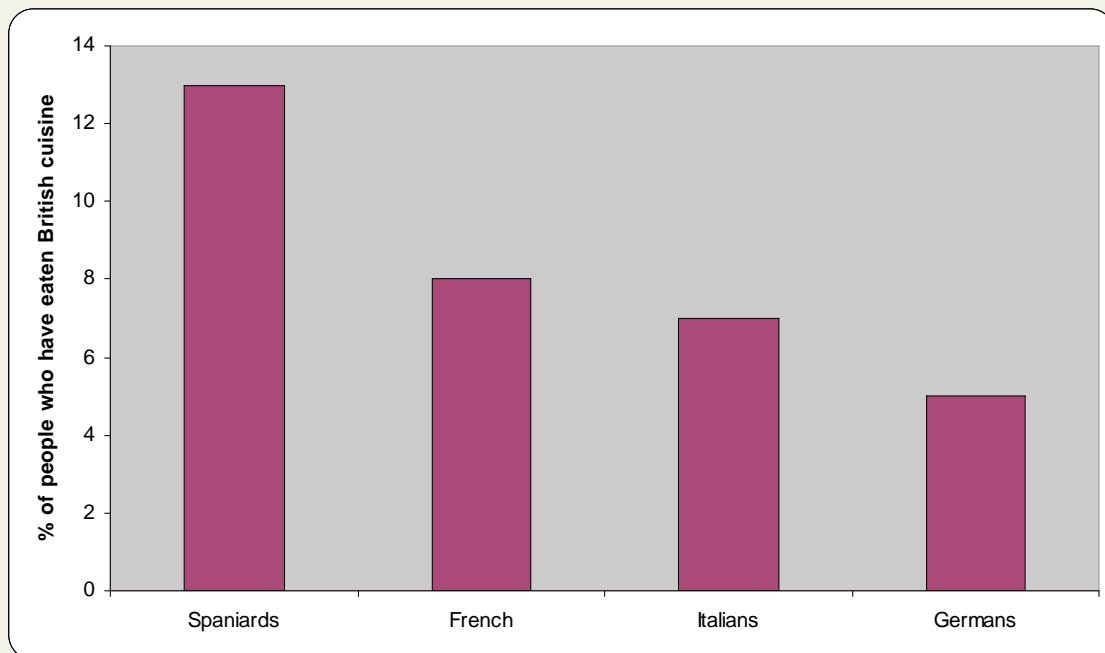
Despite vast improvements in British cuisine, the French don't have much time for it. Only 5% have cooked it at home and only 2% have had a British takeaway. The lack of British restaurants in France goes some way to explaining why only 3% have eaten British food at a restaurant.

Instead, apart from their own food, their top choice for cooking at home is Italian (57%) then Chinese (36%). Of all the countries surveyed, the French are the most interested in cooking Moroccan (23%) with the obvious link with North African immigration in the country.

Chinese is the most popular food to eat at a restaurant (49%) but interestingly American is the top choice for takeaway (31%).

Overall, 8% of French people had British food at least once a year at home, in a restaurant or a takeaway. (See Table 3)

Table 3 – Who has eaten British food at least once in the last year – apart from the British?



b) Spain

A total of 1,069 Spaniards were polled.

Half (49%) said Spanish was the best cuisine in the world, but a large minority (22%) thought French was top. 1% said British food was the finest.

The Spaniards really don't like trying out other nation's dishes at home; just eight types were tried at least once by more than five per cent of the population.

The top cuisine to eat at home was Italian (53%) followed by Chinese (27%) and Mexican (21%).

Italian food was the favourite to try in restaurants (57%), with Chinese following closely at 56%.

Roles were reversed when it came to takeaways, with 42 % opting for Chinese and 29 % for Italian.

British meals out were more popular with the Spanish, with 8% having tried them at least once – probably the traditional English fried breakfast so widely advertised in holiday areas.

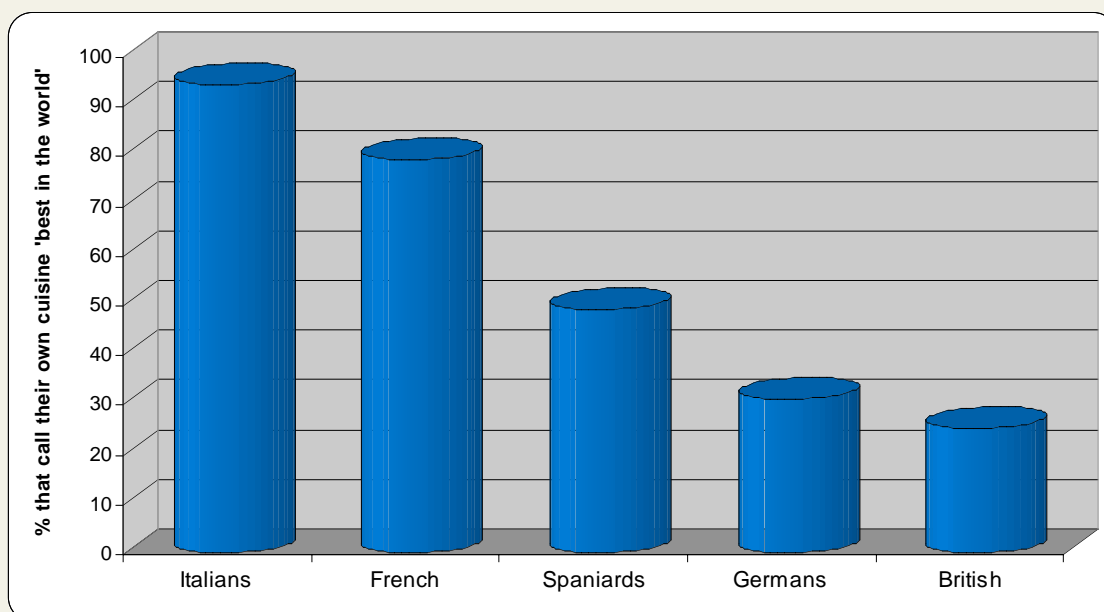
Overall, 13 % of Spaniards had British food at least once a year at home, in a restaurant or a takeaway.

c) Italy

A total of 1,106 Italians were polled.

A staggering 94 per cent said Italian food was the best in the world. (See Table 4)

Table 4 – Who has the highest opinion of their own food?



Italy has the least time for any other food at home – not surprising given the skill of their domestic cooks and their tasty repertoire.

12 % said they had not tried any of the 21 cuisines listed apart from their own at home.

Only six different international foods were tried by more than five per cent of the population. These were Chinese (11%), Spanish and Mexican (both 10%), French (7%), American and Greek (both 6%). Only 3 % ate British food cooked at home.

Chinese food was the most popular to eat both at a restaurant (41%) and at a takeaway (26 %).

Overall, 7% of Italians had British food at least once a year at home, in a restaurant or a takeaway.

d) Germany

















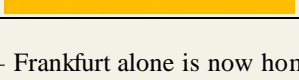
A total of 1,103 people were polled.

Almost a third (31%) thought German food was the best cuisine in the world, but 18% said Italian was the best. None said British.

The winning combination of Italian and Chinese came to the fore once again, with 60 % and 38 % respectively eating them at home at least once a year. Greek was also popular at 26%. Hungarian – possibly because of its geographical proximity – polled well, on 11 %. The same countries' foods were popular for meals out and takeaways.

A minority of Germans are very adventurous, making Korean, Indonesian, Greek, Polish and Mongolian more popular in Germany than the other four countries – albeit in small quantities. (See table 5 overleaf)

Table 5 – Where each food type is most popular – not including countries of origin

Food	Country where most popular
Chinese	
Indian	
Thai	
Caribbean	
Bangladeshi	
Japanese	
Moroccan	
Lebanese	
American	
Mexican	
Brazilian	
Korean	
Indonesian	
Greek	
Mongolian	
Hungarian	
Polish	

This is perhaps influenced by immigration – Frankfurt alone is now home to more than 7,000 Koreans.

Overall, 5 % of Germans had British food at least once a year at home, in a restaurant or a takeaway – the lowest of all four Continental European countries quizzed.

Profiles

Based on the research, we created five typical profiles of a British eater – and compared them with their European counterpart.

a) 19 year old male student from Leeds

- Favourite takeaway: Chinese
- Number of international cuisines consumed over the last year: 15
- At home, he is most likely to cook a Chicken Tikka Masala

The same 19-year-old student in France would prefer a fast food burger meal as their takeaway of choice and would consume the same amount of international cuisines, 15. However, at home they are very loyal to their country's cuisine and are most likely to cook up a mushroom crepe.

b) 26 year old single female professional from London

- Favourite take away: Thai
- Number of international cuisines consumed over the last year: 16
- Most likely to cook a dahl at home

Her contemporary in France would much prefer to take away a pizza than a Chinese and eats 14.5 different international dishes each year. At home, she'd go Italian, preferring to cook up a spaghetti carbonara.

c) 35 year old married man, a manager from Manchester

- Favourite takeaway: Indian
- Number of international cuisines tried over the last year: 14.3
- Most likely to cook a Chinese stir-fry at home

His contemporary in Spain would prefer a Chinese takeaway and eats 16 different international cuisines a year. The 35-year-old Spaniard is more likely to cook a pasta dish in their own kitchen saving their keen Chinese consumption for out of the home.

d) 47 year old mother and part time accountant from Lincolnshire

- Favourite takeaway: Pizza
- Number of international cuisines consumed over the last year: 12.5
- Most likely to cook a lasagne at home

Her contemporary in Italy isn't a big fan of takeaway (one third of this age group do not eat takeaway at all) but if she chooses to get food delivered she will play it safe and choose Italian food! She eats 15 different international cuisines every year. She of course loves to cook a delicious traditional Italian meal, but when it's not Italian she is likely to be cooking a Spanish-style paella.

e) 70 year old retired man from Shropshire

- Favourite takeaway: Fish and chips
- Number of international cuisines consumed over the last year: 12
- Most likely to cook something traditional like bangers and mash at home

His contemporary in Germany would prefer their Chinese as a takeaway rather than at home. He has been a bit more adventurous, consuming 14 different international cuisines in the last year. When at home, the retired German likes nothing better than a currywurst, mixing his love of German food with his appreciation of Indian flavour.

Five ages of food

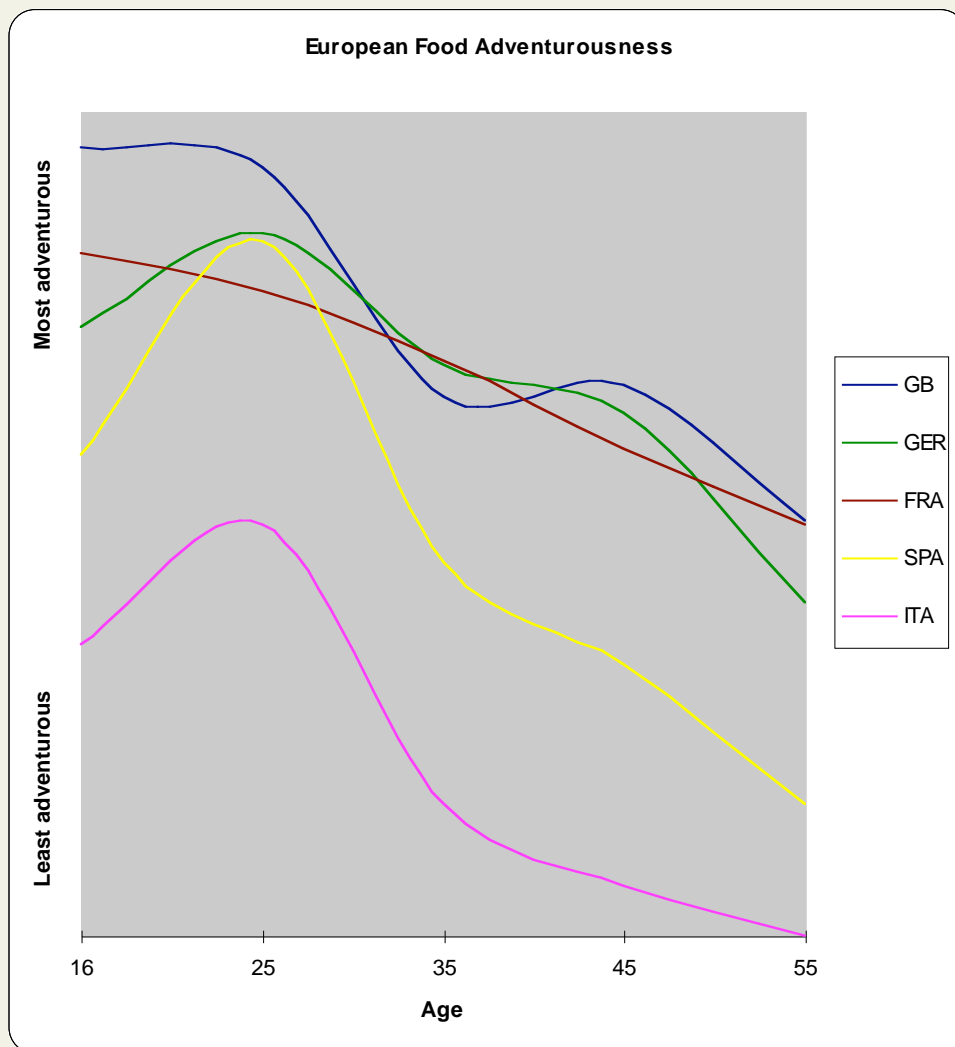
The research clearly shows that in all the countries there are 'five ages of food,' with your years linked to the range of cuisines you are prepared to try. (See table 6)

These five ages are Discovery (teens), Adventure (mid 20s), Pragmatic (mid 30s), Expert (mid 40s), Comfort (50 plus).

The research shows:

- The younger you are, the more likely you are to eat different foods.
- There is a peak at around age 25, when the largest proportion of people eat lots of different foods. But they do not necessarily eat them again and again.
- There appears to be a second 'age of adventurousness' in the late 30s/early 40.
- This may be linked to having more money, and being able to buy higher quality international ingredients and meals out.

Table 6 – the Five Ages of Food



Conclusion

Far from the days of suet puddings and sausages and mash, Britons are now branching out and becoming culinary experts inspired by both our European neighbours and those much further afield.

Once, Britons thought they were being adventurous simply by eating at a foreign restaurant. Now they are happy to cook the very food themselves – and maybe try and better it.

This is shown by our experience with Italian food – we love it, and many of us are not scared to admit we think it's the best in the world.

We do go for Italian takeaway – such as pizza – but we far prefer cooking it at home when we can choose to cook all manner of different pastas with sauces and sophisticated baked dishes not generally available at a pick-up pizza joint.

Other countries are notably adventurous – the Spanish particularly so. And the less popular cuisines from eastern Europe have comparatively more fans in Germany than anywhere else.

The French are not as open minded – and it may come back to haunt them, as young Brits turn away from eating out at traditional French establishments.

For it is the British who want to cook and eat an increasingly exotic array of foods.

The key to all this is the British love of international travel. Holidaymakers try new dishes then want to cook them at home. And they are specific – they want not just Indian foods, but from specific regions, Goan or Keralan, say, according to supermarket bosses.

As a result ranges in supermarkets are widening all the time with more exotic fresh vegetables and larder staples. In its oriental range, Waitrose now stocks not only Chinese foods, but Japanese, Malaysian and Thai.

But the nature of travel has changed too. University students meet with others from many different cultures from all over the world – and share their food.

They then may go on gap years, with the chance to try this food 'in situ.' Later in their careers, graduates will go on twice as many holidays as non-graduates, continuing their experimentation with food.

And a new phenomenon, the older 'backpacking' traveller going to hidden away locations, may explain in part the second 'peak' in adventurousness with food in later life.

Whatever the reasons, it seems the days of the microwave meal may be numbered, and pride in home cooking rediscovered.