



Do we go to Italy for the Roman ruins or the *risotto*?

Holidays are now as much about cuisine as culture

Before a holiday, I make a plan. Not of the museums I'm going to visit or the beach books I'm going to read, or even what I'm going to pack, but of what I'm going to eat.

I start by meticulously counting out the meals. A mini-break might just include five lunches and dinners; but a whole week could include 12 lunches and dinners, 13 if I squeeze in a late supper after arriving on the late flight, 14 if I can find a Sunday lunch spot¹ that opens early enough to snatch² brunch before heading home.

Drawing up the itinerary involves studying guidebooks, surfing the internet and begging Twitter for recommendations. Where is hot? What should I order? Is it unreasonable to have two Michelin star meals in a day? Sightseeing is restricted by questions such as: is there a decent café near the Colosseum? Or: does that day trip to see one of the world's largest glaciers mean we'll miss supper?

Many holidays are conceived, booked and entirely organised around eating at one particular restaurant. I've travelled to California just to eat oysters and tapioca at Thomas Keller's French Laundry and to Copenhagen to nibble on³ fried moss by crumbling plaster walls in Noma. Tourist boards, meanwhile, are marketing "cuisine", as opposed to

"culture": if we like the food, then we're more likely to choose that place as a holiday destination.

This is not a new phenomenon. Michelin invented gastro-tourism 100 years ago with its red restaurant guides for drivers. While a one-star restaurant was worth stopping at, and a two-star worth making a detour for, a three-star restaurant was defined as "worth a special journey".

According to a recent study we put on weight on holiday. America leads the way as a heavyweight destination, with holidaymakers gaining an average of half a stone⁴ over two weeks, probably has more to do with super-sized portions and the culture of snacking. The truth is, eating has become a leisure activity in itself. It has always been true on cruise ships – from the all-night supper to the four-hour breakfast sessions, pool-side lunches, afternoon teas, five-course dinners and unlimited room service. But these days, the way we view eating abroad has changed. Cuisine has become part of the cultural experience, not aside from it.

A visit to Italy is as much about *risotto* as Roman treasures. As you open your mouth, open your mind.

(Adapted from www.telegraph.co.uk)

¹ place

² to grasp abruptly

³ to bite

⁴ *Diapiccioli English for Tourism resources*

⁴ about 3 Kg



Answer the following questions.

- 1) How does the author of the article plan her holidays?
- 2) How important is the role of food in choosing a tourist destination?
- 3) Who invented gastro-tourism?
- 4) What has a recent study shown as far as holiday eating habits?
- 5) How has the attitude towards eating abroad changed in the past few years?
- 6) Explain the statement “*Cuisine is part of the cultural experience, not aside from it*”.

