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relax



Over the last decade, cauliflower sales in Britain have fallen by

35%



1/4

of Britons skip breakfast

SOURCES: KANTAR, WORLDPANEL/IGD

Southeastern promise

FOOD Nicholas Lander finds plenty to like about summer in the city and its environs

London in August has become the cool place to be. While those whose holidays are governed by the school term have to leave the capital, those who are left behind discover another side to the city. Less crowded Tube trains, more parking places

and shorter queues at the box office.

They also discover that it's much easier to book a table at their favourite restaurant. Until a few years ago, many of the capital's top restaurants followed the French custom of closing for two or three weeks – as so many still do in Paris – to take their annual

holidays. Happily, this is no longer the case. As a practice it is far too costly and, as an exercise, in customer relations it is little short of disastrous.

The same principles apply to the growing number of fascinating places to eat within a 90-minute journey time of central London.

LONDON

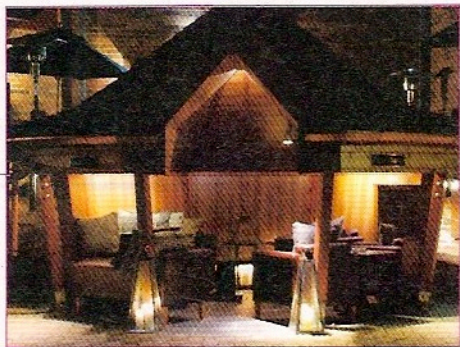
If the weather doesn't behave, don't despair. For a long, leisurely lunch head for the basement of **Le Gavroche** and the best lunch deal in town (£48 for three courses including service and wine).

Wine lovers will have fun either at **Terroirs** by Charing Cross Tube or **Vinoteca** in Smithfield. Those who feel the same way about Indian food will enjoy **Amaya** in Knightsbridge, **Rasoi Vineet Bhatia** in Chelsea or **Zaika** by High Street Kensington tube. Fans of Chinese roast duck will enjoy either branch of the **Four Seasons** in Queensway or on Gerard Street in Chinatown, where the food is as good as the décor in unprepossessing.

August 12th is the opening of the grouse shooting season, and the chefs at **Rules** in Covent Garden, the **Goring Hotel** in Victoria and at **Le Café Anglais**, Bayswater, all do it justice.

BRIGHTON, EAST SUSSEX

A 40-minute journey from Victoria Station, Brighton has undergone a renaissance in the last few years as a growing number of smart new hotels and restaurants have opened up. These include a branch of the **Hotel du Vin**, with its great wine list and 'cigar shack' (below); a



RELAX AND CHATEAUX

branch of **Jamie's Italian** that delivers as much fun more swiftly and less expensively; and **Bill's** at the Depot, a café within a food shop, where there is always a queue. Two favourites are **Table** in the Myhotel close to the Brighton Pavilion and **Terre à Terre** in the Lanes, which serves some of the best vegetarian food in the country.



BRAY, BERKSHIRE

This 16th-century village, an hour's drive along the M4 from London or by train from Paddington to Maidenhead and then a short taxi ride, has become home to five excellent restaurants. Its original charms were first discovered by French chef **Michel Roux**, whose **Waterside Inn** (above) has just celebrated 25 years of holding three Michelin stars. The dining room overlooks the banks of the river Thames and, in good weather, there is no lovelier place to eat.

Bray's reputation was sealed when **Heston Blumenthal** opened **The Fat Duck** and subsequently took over **The Hind's Head**, the village pub next door. While **Blumenthal's** chefs confine their culinary experiments to the former, **The Hind's Head** has become the place to eat some of the best British food: potted shrimps with a watercress salad, a burger using venison from the Queen's Balmoral estate, Eton Mess, a pudding named

after the nearby school, and, many say, the best chips in the land. Close by are the **Caldesi** in Campagna for elegant Italian food and the relaxed **Riverside Brasserie** close to Bray Marina.

WHITSTABLE, KENT

This seaside town on Kent's north coast is easily accessible by train from Victoria station or down the M2 close to Canterbury, and its narrow streets, unspoilt beaches and distinctive Victorian architecture attract a broad spectrum of visitors. Whitstable's culinary claim to fame is epitomised by its nickname, 'The Pearl of Kent', a consequence of the oyster beds nearby. These, and its fishing fleet, have spawned numerous unpretentious and good value fish restaurants. The most renowned are **The Whitstable Oyster Fishery Company** and **Wheeler's Oyster Bar** with more recent competition from the **Crab & Winkle**, **Jojo** (below) and **Samphire**. Close by in Faversham, **David and Rona Pitchford** continue to run **Read's**, a restaurant with six bedrooms, to the highest standards.



details

Nicholas Lander is restaurant critic of the *Financial Times*

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