The Covid-19 pandemic has affected all of our lives. The various lockdown and social distancing measures around the world have dictated where we can go, whom we can meet and where we can eat. For lovers of fine dining, the crisis has taken away one of life’s great pleasures. But it has also emphasised the importance of restaurants, and the contribution they make in our world.

Through this anonymous online survey, Fine Dining Lovers consulted its wide readership of gourmets and gastronomes to gain an insight into attitudes and behaviour around food and restaurants during the coronavirus crisis.

The results show the extent of the lockdown globally, and how it has affected the lives of responders. It reveals much about attitudes to food delivery and take-away, and shows the extent to which lovers of fine dining are prepared to roll up their sleeves in their home kitchens for a taste of something special. Some have used the time wisely to develop new skills, while others are eager to get back to what they love best – fine dining. Above all, we learn what exactly it is about dining in restaurants that people miss most.

Fine Dining Lovers was impressed with the enthusiastic response it received to this survey, and will use its findings to better inform its content going forward. But these insights might also be an invaluable source of information for chefs and restaurant industry professionals, as they plot a course out of lockdown and towards a brighter future for restaurants.
Who answered our questionnaire?

- 7917 complete interviews across the globe
- 38% living in big cities
- 73% females
- 33% usually eating out in a restaurant daily or several times in a week

Main Findings

88% of respondents are experiencing a full lockdown when it comes to eating out in their home countries. Overall, our respondents miss the social aspect of restaurants, while 20% miss exploring new things.

Which of the following best describes the restaurant business in your country right now?

- All restaurants are closed, only selected delivery or take away is allowed
- Restaurants are partially open with strict service or timing restrictions
- Restaurants are open with limited service or timing restrictions

Question: while restaurants are locked down, what do you miss most about eating out?

- Sharing time with friends at the table: 40%
- Going out to try something new: 28%
- Someone else cooking for you: 16%
- Visiting my favourite restaurant: 13%
- Convenience in terms of time: 2%
- Convenience in terms of budget: 1%
A third of respondents are frequent restaurant visitors, as expected among fine dining lovers. Prior to the lockdown, participants were not keen on delivery or take-away, yet a quarter of them now use these services more than before.

Half of all respondents expressed a willingness to return to normality. But it appears that the lockdown will not massively change their attitude toward delivery and take-away. Fine dining lovers miss the restaurant experience.
As you might expect from lovers of fine dining, they want to indulge themselves. But most preferred delivery and take-away to cooking at home. Those loyal to a favorite restaurant were more likely to order take-away than delivery.

What is the main reason you ordered restaurant **home delivery**?

- I didn’t want to cook: 42%
- I wanted to treat myself: 35%
- I wanted to try something different: 20%
- Missed my favourite restaurant: 19%
- Try something I can’t cook myself: 18%
- Not enough time for cooking: 10%
- I was alone at home: 5%
- Queues for food shopping: 3%

What is the main reason you ordered **take-away** from a restaurant?

- I didn’t want to cook: 42%
- I wanted to treat myself: 39%
- I wanted to try something different: 17%
- Missed my favourite restaurant: 23%
- Try something I can’t cook myself: 16%
- Not enough time for cooking: 10%
- I was alone at home: 5%
- Queues for food shopping: 3%

Lockdown lessons: the cooking skills people learned

60% of respondents declared they learned new skills during the lockdown. The main skill learned was baking, followed by new cooking techniques. Reducing food waste was high up the list of new skills learned. 26% took recipe recommendations from chefs.

Question: which cooking skills did you learn during the lockdown?

- Baking: 46%
- New cooking techniques: 39%
- Reducing food waste: 33%
- Cooking healthy meals: 31%
- Cooking traditional recipes of your country: 27%
- Cooking recipes recommended by chefs: 26%
- Cooking recipes from other countries: 22%
- Cooking quick meals: 21%
- Knowledge about ingredients: 21%
- How to preserve food: 12%
Returning to restaurants

Safety appears to be the key driver towards eating out again in the short term. Respondents expect safety measures to be implemented by operators, yet feel guidelines should be supported by governments. Safety will drive restaurant traffic more than any other restaurant initiative.

Quote: which of the following circumstances may influence your decision to eat out again in the short term?

- Safety measures taken by restaurants: 69%
- Safety measures enforced by governments: 50%
- Special incentives and deals: 20%
- When other people I trust start eating out again: 18%
- Exclusive experiences: 16%
- Media saying eating out is safe: 10%
- None of the others: I will wait for a vaccine and the crisis to be 100% sorted: 19%

Key Takeaways

- While the results might not apply to all consumers, they are representative of ‘fine dining lovers’. A high number of regular restaurant visitors responded, and some 53% declared they planned journeys around food, which shows that the sample is skewed toward consumers who value a particular kind of food experience.
- Consumers with these attitudes miss the social aspect of dining out, but they also crave the pure ‘fine dining’ experience, not to mention exploring new things.
- The fine-dining experience is difficult to recreate in the home. Survey participants were disappointed by restaurant closures, and neither cooking at home, nor take-away or delivery could fully compensate. Delivery and take-away seem to be ‘temporary’ solutions for fine diners.
- They are eager to visit restaurants again.
- Safety is the key factor in convincing people to return to restaurants.
- An interesting facet of the overall results is that fine dining might be key to the recovery of restaurants. Contrary to other available sentiment studies, which show that functional restaurant visits such are likely to recover first, these results suggest that lovers of fine dining can be a key target group in building a profitable road to recovery for the industry.
About FineDiningLovers.com

FineDiningLovers.com is the international digital platform for foodies by S.Pellegrino and Acqua Panna. Exploring the culture of taste and the pleasure of conviviality, FineDiningLovers.com offers every day original and inspirational food-related stories, interviews with the world’s most famous chefs, news, trends, videos, photos and recipes. Online since March 2012, the magazine considers food more than just taste: a sensorial, social and cultural experience. Expert gourmands, curious foodies as well as the most innovative chefs know the site and consider it one of the most influential online magazines for fine dining and gastronomy.

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