

# What a din: London's eateries too noisy

Diners struggle to hold a conversation above the racket in more than half of the restaurants, writes **Katie Gibbons**

With a feast of Michelin stars, London's restaurants are among the best in Europe. According to a new survey, they are also the loudest.

More than half of the capital's food venues are too noisy to hold a conversation, with decibel levels the same as a lawn mower. In the worst cases, you might as well be eating your dinner next to a bin lorry.

Sound data was collected randomly at 1,350 popular London eateries for a survey. In over half of cases decibel levels were above 76 dBA, defined as safe for hearing but difficult for conversation. Anything above 80 dBA is considered unsafe for the human ear.

The readings for London showed that noise levels were the highest in Europe and second only to San Francisco worldwide. During peak times, 50 per cent of London restaurants exceeded the dangerous noise level of 80 dBA, and 80 per cent hit the point at which chitchat becomes a struggle.

The figures were released by SoundPrint, a global app that allows users to search for restaurants, cafés and bars by sound levels on a database generated from recordings and sound measurements submitted by other users.

The app was created by Gregory Scott, who suffers from hearing loss. As a single man living in New York, he often found it impossible to hear women he went on dates with. He started recording the decibels in venues so he could adjust his hearing aid and shared his list of "quiet places" with people in similar situations, which led to the idea of a crowdsourced database.

"Forty or fifty years ago restaurants were a place for conversation, they had soft furnishing, carpets, drapes which meant that even in a packed dining room you could talk with ease over a meal," said Scott. "But things have changed in the last 30 years. Some restaurants are now like a nightclub or bar." Many factors have contributed to rising noise



Noise levels of 93 dBA, regarded as unsafe, were recorded at the Duck and Rice restaurant in Soho. The Health and Safety Executive says that employers must provide hearing protection to staff regularly exposed to 85 dBA



levels, from the fashion for stripped back hard surfaces and open-plan kitchens, to rising rents meaning that many restaurants pack tables into tight spaces. Others are in former industrial buildings with poor acoustics.

Scott said: "Simple things like having an espresso machine on the bar or music playing can raise the sound levels significantly." Music does not have to be particularly loud to generate overall unsafe sound levels, he added. Because of the Lombard effect, where noise breeds noise, even limited background music can lead to shouting as guests raise their voice over one another to be heard.

Teri Devine, associate director of inclusion at the national hearing loss charity RNID, said: "Loud background music and environmental noise are the key factors making it impossible for people with hearing loss to

## Clamour in the cantinas

Ten of London's loudest restaurants in data submitted to SoundPrint app

Shak-Fuyu in Soho	94 dBA
Duck and Rice in Soho	93 dBA
Lobos Meat and Tapas in London Bridge	92 dBA
Rosa's Thai Café in Spitalfields	91 dBA
Morito in Hackney	90 dBA
Prawn on the Lawn in Islington	89 dBA
Cecconi's in Shoreditch	88 dBA
Franco Manca in Soho	87 dBA
Rocca in Dulwich Village	86 dBA
Hawksmoor in Seven Dials	85 dBA

76 dBA is when a conversation becomes difficult

have a conversation. Restaurants can consider using softer materials to absorb sound, such as carpet, tablecloths and curtains, inserting partitions into open plan spaces, and creating quiet areas. For many people, a combination of excessive noise, challenging acoustic environments, dim lighting, and lack of deaf awareness among staff ruins what should be a relaxing and enjoyable experience."

London restaurants with comfortable sonic atmospheres included Locanda Locatelli, Tamarind, the Ledbury, Lutyen's Grill at the Ned, Rules and Indigo at One Aldwych Hotel.

The app categorises sound levels as quiet, moderate, loud and very loud. It classifies 70 dBA as safe for hearing and great for conversation, 71 to 75 dBA as safe for hearing and conducive to conversation, 76 to 80 dBA as probably safe for hearing but difficult for conversation and 81 dBA as not safe for hearing.

The government's Health and Safety Executive states that employers must provide hearing protection to staff regularly exposed to noise of 85 dBA. Shut up and eat, leading article, page 29

## Prince George bakes cakes for wildlife

Debbie White

Prince George organised a cake sale during lockdown to raise funds for endangered animals in Africa, it was revealed yesterday.

The prince, who turns nine next month, arranged the sale in aid of Tusk, a conservation charity that has spent decades increasing protection for more than 40 threatened species, and more than 170 million acres of habitat.

Charlie Mayhew, chief executive of Tusk, told GB News that George wrote a card highlighting his concerns for endangered animals in Africa.

"Prince George very sweetly did a little cake sale to raise money for Tusk during lockdown and wrote a very sweet card about it, clearly demonstrating his concern for Africa's wildlife," he said. The charity declined to reveal how

much money the prince raised from his cake sale.

Tusk works on conservation projects from the plains of the Serengeti to the rainforests of the Congo Basin.

George's connection to the organisation is through his father, who is patron and a prominent campaigner on environmental issues.

The Duke of Cambridge, who turned 40 yesterday, frequently sends messages to Mayhew "to discuss an issue that has occurred to him".

He has spoken publicly of how he is not willing to look his three children in the eye and tell them that his was the generation which let wildlife such as elephants and tigers go extinct "on our watch".

In 2018 he said: "It's heartbreaking to think that by the time my children, George, Charlotte and Louis, are in

their twenties, elephants, rhinos and tigers might well be extinct in the wild."

Prince William said that some rhinos he saw on a trip to Africa "are so threatened they have more bodyguards than I do".

George is interested in wildlife and was delighted in 2020 when Sir David Attenborough visited Kensington Palace to talk about the natural world with him and his siblings. George and his sister are believed to have pestered the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge to meet him.

The naturalist gave George a fossil tooth from the giant shark *Carcharocles megalodon*. Attenborough, now 96, said: "When I was his age, I remember being given fossils by a grown-up, so I thought I would do the same. He was certainly very interested. He seemed to like it. He is very interested in fossils."

## Old spice: curry recipes from 1747 are up for sale

A cookbook from 1747 that contains the first known English recipes for curry is set to fetch up to £4,000 at auction.

One dish, described as "Currey the India Way", calls for rabbit or fowl and includes onions, peppercorns, rice and roasted coriander seeds, but no ginger, garlic or chillies. A recipe for "pellow" — or pilau — has pickled pork, fowl, cloves, white pepper, onions and rice, topped with hard-boiled eggs.

The book is called *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy* and is said to have been bought in a London china shop 275 years ago. It is part of a set assembled over 40 years by the late collector Caroline Crisford that is expected to sell for about £80,000 tomorrow.

A rare book in the collection, *The*

*French Cook*, was written by Francois Pierre La Varenne, a founding father of French cuisine. The volume, written in 1651, is considered to be one of the most influential cookbooks of its time and was in use until the French Revolution.

Another title, by the physician Dr Daniel Duncan, born in 1649, warns readers about the dangers of tea, coffee and hot chocolate. Called *Wholesome Advice Against the Abuse of Hot Liquors, Particularly of Coffee, Chocolate, Tea, Brandy and Strong-Waters*, the book was written at a time when some physicians considered such drinks exotic and had concerns about their impact on health. It could fetch up to £800.

The collection is being sold online by Forum Auctions.