



*Travel like a Foodie*

The Experiences of a  
Socially Awkward Foodie  
Travelling Europe

ALEX  
SUNRAY



# Travel like a foodie

The experiences of a socially awkward foodie travelling around Europe

**Alex Sumray**

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Smashwords Edition

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*For 'insert name'*  
*You are really special to me*

*With thanks to Gaby*  
*You're good at being a sister*

Thank you also to God\*,  
tastebuds were one of your finest inventions  
\*Or Darwin, whoever you believe in

# Prologue

So, shall we start.

Actually, before we do, I just wish to point something out quickly. This book wasn't written just so you could pass some time on the toilet or skim read with the telly on in the background. No, this is a serious read, only to be partaken whilst wearing reading glasses pushed down to the bridge of your nose (whether you need them or not) and sitting in a hardback chair with your full, undivided attention. Right, are we clear? Good, *now* we can start.

Before I start my culinary tale, I think it would probably be best to give a little background about myself; not (just) because I'm very possibly a little self-obsessed, but more to help put this book into some sort of context.



So; at the time of writing I'm a twenty year old student who spends their student loan on a well planned weekly food shop and enjoys nothing more than a neatly organized spice drawer (see below) - conforming to all the student stereotype then.

I spend my spare time looking up the best restaurants, scouring menus and planning what I shall cook for the week. I also write a small, food based blog, imaginatively titled, 'Alex's food'. Here I bare my foodie soul, reviewing restaurants I've been to and discuss the latest grain that I've become excited about... I'm cracking to go for a pint with.\*

\* Saying that I'm not much of a drinker, so it will have to be a tap water for me. I also like to get my eight hours of shut eye, so will probably make my excuses around 23:30.

So I know the question on the nation's lips; 'if you love food so much Alex, why didn't you become a chef?' Well, Britain/World, let me tell you and we can all get on with our lives again.

I gave it a go, albeit a small, slightly pathetic go. On my blog, I posted about my Catering College experience, which really tells the story of a boy with too much of a sensitive disposition to make it in the harsh world that is catering.

Anyone who has read this on my blog, feel free to scroll through this section... Mum, that means you!

# My Catering College experience

My love of food and cooking made me take the plunge to walk away from academia and into the heat of the kitchen and my word, it was hot!

I attended Westminster Catering College, which has a reputation of being one of the best of its kind in the world.

On my very first day I was late; the train was packed and I thought I would wait just a few minutes for the next one, so I could get a seat. I thought this was fair enough; it was hideously early in the morning, and I a spindly sort of character with scoliosis; what and I'm expected to stand! I sprinted from the station, but to no avail, the classroom door already shut. I knocked on the door of the classroom as timidly as it is humanly possible to knock on a door. I received, how should I put it, a rather stern telling off (I'm keeping this family friendly!) The chef was an intimidating Scottish man (not Ramsey), he told me 'I would never be late again' – he was right!

After a week of mainly boring work on food theory; 'if you touch raw meat, you will die', that sort of thing, we were finally in the kitchen.

Roast chicken, fish and chips, soups, among other things were practiced in this first rotation. This was the most enjoyable experience I had at college, but even here I wasn't overly happy. I know it was early days, but I wanted to jazz it up a bit with my own personal flair and not stick so rigidly to the cookbook.

I learnt certain tips however; don't use a high edged baking tray when roasting chicken and to lay the bird on a mirepoix of vegetables – carrots, celery, leeks and onions; makes for a cracking roast. I also picked up some fancy cheffing terminology, like mirepoix!

Remember the big, scary Scottish man I was telling you about, well it was time to enter his kitchen. Endless intimidation tactics and tellings off were his main teaching methods. This rotation seemed to last for an absolute age, with I dreading each and every day, and when your alarm is set for 05:30am, the snooze button becomes a tempting mistress.

I remember one particular occasion on which I was sent out of the kitchen. The corridor was a scary place, with chefs eyeing you up and down, leaving you with the sense that you are under constant surveillance, terrified in case you drop your military like stance, or let one's hands resort to the safety of one's pockets. I was called back in, where too afraid to ask what I had missed, set about cutting the tortillas we were making. But oh know, Lord above, they were meant to go in the fridge before being cut. Chef then asked if I had mental problems (on more than one occasion) and ordered me out of his kitchen once again. Bearing in my mind that my crime was cutting a tortilla before refrigeration, I felt this was a tad harsh.

Now, I wouldn't have minded (as much) if we were making something the least bit exciting or challenging, but the whole of this rotation centered around making sandwiches and salads! Saying that, I couldn't cut a tortilla without error, so who I am I to comment!

But for about a fortnight we chopped onions and cut open baguettes. I started to think that I could not go on much longer (that sounds quite dramatic on paper).

When we were finally finished the sandwich making rotation and we entered a real kitchen, one where

we would be making and serving food for the college's cafe, I decided to stay a while longer. I thought away from a certain someone and with a more creative, exciting, challenging experience ahead, things would improve.

While I was happier there, the pressure one feels in the kitchen is something that I really didn't enjoy. I always felt just ten seconds away from a stern telling off and dreaded having to ask for any sort of help. It wasn't for me. As I say, sensitive disposition.

I was taking more and more sick days and at times claimed I was feeling rather unwell when I did go in. After-all, we had been taught that we can't cook other people's food when ill, so going home was the only option (at least I listened to the theory!). After a, let's be honest here, pathetic two months at catering college, I decided enough was enough, handed in my notice and walked through the exit doors with a wide grin on my face.

Fortunately, my school let me back in to belatedly start my A-levels in November. I can report that those two months at catering college were by far more stressful, intense and difficult than a year and a half studying and completing my A-levels. That's not meant to imply a level of arrogance, but more to state the intensity that was catering college.

I understand the need to start with the basics, but to be so strict and intimidating to first year students, I feel is not only unnecessary, but also unproductive and stifling. There are different ways to gain respect. All that a certain someone gained from me with his manner was a less productive chef, too scared to try anything on his own back or ask any questions; particularly questions in relation to tortilla preparation. To this day, Mexican remains my least favourite cuisine.

I don't mean to be dramatic (again), but my experience at catering college has left certain mental scars. For one, every time I hear a Scottish accent, I honestly get a bit nervous, I'm now firmly a Jamie Oliver man over that Ramsey fella. Also, I have had to change my alarm from the one I used to use to wake me up for college every morning, as when I hear it, I start to feel all anxious – I definitely wasn't cut out to be a chef!

I wouldn't advise against catering college, but expect extremely early mornings, the scariest of people and it must be something that you know will be an all consuming experience. I knew these things before going in (though I did expect a more encouraging atmosphere), but in practice, I clearly couldn't hack it.

Most of all, if you love cooking and you are prepared for a long slog to pass as a qualified chef then go for it. I clearly wasn't right for it, but love cooking at home now, where I can be more creative and stress free, and most importantly away from anybody even remotely Scottish!

# The trip

Right, onto the trip. My attempts of professional cooking then had been well and truly quelled, but my foodie instincts were and are still burning, with me realizing I'm more accustomed to eating food, than cooking it. So when summer came around, I decided to eat food, a lot of food, in a lot of different places!

This book will be a smorgasbord of tips, reviews and pictures of European foodery. There are as many restaurant reviews as you could ever want in one book (about ten... trust me, you wouldn't want anymore than that, enough's enough!). There will be tips to help you on your way to the perfect European trip, that is if you're looking to shun culture and the arts, in order to divulge in total food ecstasy. You will also see pictures via my admittedly unqualified hand, taken on my slightly unprofessional equipment (a well known handheld device named after a fruit, you catch my drift. Actually if I say the name, I may get free stuff, free APPLE stuff...). Note: please do not send me apples, only Apples!

This 'enthusiasm' for good grub led me to thinking of going further afield from London town, my usual stomping/eating ground. For me travel is food and I don't mean travel is food for the soul or any of that philosophical mumbo jumbo, I mean the reason I decided to travel was simply because I wanted to eat food. I didn't buy guidebooks for the thirteen cities I travelled to, or scour the internet for the cultural highlights, the amazing architectural achievements or the trendy art scenes. Any research I did undertake was purely food related.

So food is why I went to Europe in the summer of 2014 and is why I'm already dreaming of trips to Japan and India, heck take me to Kyrgyzstan if the foods good (I mean this in every possible respect to any Kyrgyzstanians reading or to the Kyrgyz people as Wikipedia tells me is correct). I should say that I've tried not to make a habit of using Wikipedia as a research tool for this book; that is reserved solely for my university work!

As hinted at in the sub-title of this book, I'm a bit of an introvert. I'm scared of big groups, I fear public speaking or what I like to call speaking and generally keep myself to myself. My routined nights at university usually consist of a mug of herbal tea, a few biscuits and a square or two (two if I'm feeling particularly wild) of dark chocolate. I'll then watch a film, play my guitar and i'll often end the end night by crying salty tears into my cup of chai at the loneliness of it all, I joke...

Anyway, so, when I decided to do a bit of traveling, it never really entered into the equation that I would want company, I mean my own company's good enough right guys, guys! But, I didn't want to wake up and have to compromise with my traveling partner the day's plans, especially when it came to where, when, what and how much we would eat.

Even with my acute social anxieties, traveling by oneself I had no choice but to interact with fellow travelers. I met a fair few people on my travels, all of whom were on a budget of sorts; I even took a small notepad with me containing the phrase for tap water for each country I was visiting! However, food seemed to be the fall guy in everyone's budget but my own. For example, one fellow traveler I met in Brussels, returned back at the hostel distraught at failing to find a pot noodle, settled instead on one of those subway things.

Let's get this out the way now, I am a bit of a food snob. If I lived on Pot Noodle for the duration of my

five week trip, from the money I 'saved', I could afford another Interail ticket and do the whole thing again. Even with this being the case, I wouldn't want this, not because I didn't enjoy my trip, but because for me FOOD IS TRAVEL (this is a literary device known as 'repetition'; I know this because I am a real author, not just a twenty year old boy who is perfecting the practice of productive procrastination\* from his university work!) \*And alliteration as it turns out!

If you haven't found my disregard for European culture and awful snobbery off putting, you're in for a right treat. If you have, you've brought the book now, so I win either way, back of the net!

## **My itinerary**

Paris - Three nights

Bruges, Ghent/Gent (still not sure of correct spelling), Brussels - two nights in each

Frankfurt - One night (to make travel from Brussels to Berlin a little more palatable - hey get it, palatable, food - you can expect more food based puns throughout)

Berlin - Four nights

Prague - Three nights

Vienna - Three nights

Munich - Three nights

Venice - Three nights

Bologna - Two nights

Modena - Two nights

Florence - Three nights

Rome - Four nights

## **Favourite places**

1) Modena

2) Rome

3) Berlin

4) Prague

5) Bruges

## **Best place(s) for food**

1) Bologna & Modena

2) Berlin

3) Prague

4) Vienna

5) Venice



# Paris

France, the home of the most Michelin starred restaurants in the world. I felt like I was making some sort of pilgrimage, a kind of foodie Mecca. And no, I don't mean dinner night at the bingo!

I was expecting to stumble across many a brasserie and bistro (whatever the difference is); maybe share a beer with a French peasant, him/her letting me dip my baguette into their beef bourguignon (unfortunately, not a euphemism). This to my disappointment did not happen. In fact all the stereotypes I had going in to France; peasants, good bread, moody, rude people, were unfounded. In fact, I found quite the opposite to be true in all these pre-conceived, slightly xenophobic notions, (must watch less Top Gear).

Firstly, it turns out that the traditional French peasant I pictured were more a fixture of nineteenth century France. The bread, based on my experience failed to live up to its big reputation. Furthermore, I found the Parisians to be up there with the friendliest locals I encountered on my trip; helpful, friendly, and the garlic breath bearable and by the end of my stay, mutual! I genuinely found them to be very accommodating.

Anyway, back to the food. I was perhaps the most disappointed with the food scene I found in Paris than in any other place I visited. For starters (pun so intended), I found that if you want to eat really well in Paris, you have to pay top dollar (Euro) for it. The main tourist sites were surrounded by fairly low quality yet high priced eateries. I generally found it hard and time consuming to discover places I wished to eat in. I should mention however, that I found the service to be of the highest quality than anywhere else I visited.

Despite finding it difficult to be impressed by the restaurant scene in Paris, there were still a few places worthy of a review in this (future award winning) book.

## **Chez Papa - Paris**

*153 Rue Montmartre, 75002 Paris, France*

If like me, you find yourself lost and alone, with the night shade closing in around you on your very first day in Paris and you too are lucky enough to see Chez Papa, expect to find decent, traditional French grub within. I had a confit duck, rich in garlic and salt, which fell effortlessly off the bone, served simply with parsley potatoes. It was perhaps the perfect meal to kick off my trip. No fuss, simply well cooked, flavourful food. My memory may be a little biased towards this place however; as I say, I was lost and alone on the first day of my travels and serving me was a very charming French lady. So while the food was good, it's not particularly where my fond memories lie of the meal.

Food: 7/10

Service: 10/10!

## **Villa Spicy**

*8 Avenue Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 75008 Paris, France*

As hinted at in the introduction to Paris, I was disappointed not to be constantly tripping over bistros and small, independent cafes serving homemade gourmet treats. I was becoming slightly irritable, with

my feet not yet accustomed to this month of nomadic adventure and my belly rumbling, furious at me for not abiding by its usual feeding time. In the infancy of my trip, with my budget lying there, beautiful in its untouched state, my economic awareness (polite way of saying stinginess) not yet developed, I headed into Villa Spicy. This despite it clearly being beyond what a student traveler should be spending on dinner. The table of business people meeting next to me confirmed this.

For my starter, I went for satay prawns with dragon fruit. I was sold at satay prawns and neglected my dislike for the more exotic fruits. Unfortunately, this neglect haunted my enjoyment of the prawns. The dish itself though lacked direction and didn't really come together to form a dish that felt it belonged as one.

Caramelized veal and pureed broad bean was my main course. The impression I got from my starter was that here is a restaurant that thinks it's better than it is. Offering quite unusual dishes, at a fairly exhausted price, but failing to execute how it wishes it could. The main however, soon shut me up! A huge slab of deeply lacquered, caramel coloured fillet of veal, with a smear of green broad bean by its side. The old cliché that such simplicity must be matched with perfection could have been applied to this dish. Executing perfection they did. The veal delivering smoky, sweet, meaty goodness, with the broad bean just there to bring it all together. I must have looked terribly out of place as I scavenged the bones for any remaining morsels of meat.

Must go rating:

8/10



## **Au revoir Paris**

So this calls time on the fist leg of my trip. An enjoyable leg, but perhaps overall, a little disappointing. In terms of food, I sampled a few tasty pastries and ate one or two impressive dishes, but all in all Paris didn't do much for me food wise.

'But how did you enjoy the city as a whole Alex?' Well, thanks for asking and I shall humour you with a response. I would go back certainly. The Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe being my favourite landmarks (how obvious I know). But they really are both quite something, both genuinely amazing landmarks that are worthy of the mass of people that flock to see them every year.

However, I wasn't quite swept off my feet by a romantic, love in the air type atmosphere that I was hoping for. Perhaps visiting in the height of tourist season is the reason for this. But as cliché'd as it

sounds, I think next time I would like to go back with someone special on my arm. So ladies, the offer is there. Anyone, hellooo?!

# Belgium

I feel I couldn't truly appreciate the gastronomic treats that Belgium had to offer. I'm not too keen on waffles, I feel that chips (frites) are amongst the most overrated of all the foods and I am one of those bores who calculates their sugar intake, meaning I didn't overly indulge on their famous chocolates.

I did enjoy Belgium yes, but I feel as though I liked the idea of Belgium (particularly Bruges) more than I actually did. I was in some way victim to a Flemish variety of Paris syndrome. Let's take Bruges then, I expected a place where I could mill around and just wander. Stumble across something old, sit by a canal, letting the hours drift away. I wanted to swan in and out of narrow lanes, plucking chocolates from free sample trays (I make exception to my sugar counting when free stuff enters the equation). However, this image was shattered when hoards upon hoards of tourists had the cheek to come and clutter up the place. I made my way out of the main tourist area to find solace in my thoughts. I came across a canal, a bench and no one else! In that brief moment I had found the Bruges of my hopes and expectations. Ah, blissful peace. An all too short while later, a maintenance van came and stamped all over my dreams (literally, I was just drifting off). With a wry smile, I arose from my slumber and went to join the crowds!

I found myself in some lovely little eateries whilst in Belgium, two of which you can now read about, lucky you.

## Prestige

*Vlamingstraat 12, 8000 Brugge, Belgium*

I was after a good breakfast in Bruges and stumbled across Prestige. Perfect poached eggs atop sautéed mushrooms, a cup of tea, toast, cake, fruit skewer, three types of jam, lovely service, plush, comfortable, regal interior. If I was one for Snapchat, I would have captioned the picture below, 'Life's good' or 'greedy bugger'; either one would have been applicable. Overall, a really lovely place, just gorgeous.

Must go rating:

8.5/10



*Greedy bugger!*

## **Bocconi, Brussels**

*Rue de l'Amigo 1, 1000 Ville de Bruxelles, Belgium*

Now, I don't want to slag off or dismiss an entire city on the evidence of a two night stay, but I'm going to. Brussels didn't do it for me. The parts I saw I found to be a little grotty and just generally unwelcoming. I was excited to be staying on the doorstep of the (supposedly) beautiful Grand Place, then disappointed to find it covered in scaffolding.

To cheer myself up, I chose the only way I know how to and treated myself to a nice meal, any excuse! I circled this particular restaurant, Bocconi, a few times, but initially dismissed the idea of eating there due to the hefty prices and the fact it looked a bit posh. However, the seed had been planted and as I was traveling alone, I had no one to talk me out of it, so by the third circle of the restaurant, I entered (oh the joys of solo travel!) The restaurant was half empty (or full, depending on your disposition), but the receptionist still went to go and ask whether there was enough room... for this table of one. Perhaps a baby faced teen, adorned with scruffy jeans and slightly worn trainers are not their usual clientele. Fortunately, the receptionist came back and I was granted a seat... as I say, the restaurant was half empty. No full! I'm a positive person really, I meant full!

My sister once asked me 'If you had to choose one food to live on for the rest of your life, what would you plump for?' Thinking pragmatically and looking for a foodstuff that would sustain me, my original answer was porridge. After learning that there were no such stipulations (she looking at me with disgust for saying porridge\*), I quickly changed my answer to bread and butter. I love the stuff. The bread basket on offer at Bocconi is what I imagined when I revised my answer to my sister's question; the single best bread basket I had on my trip; yes beating the bread offered at Osteria Francescana and yes, I kept such a list!

\*She went for chocolate.



I went for bread crusted lamb (just what I needed, more bread), with fondant potato and some sort of jus for my actual meal. The lamb itself was beautifully tender, never have I had to chew so little when eating a piece of meat (no offence mum). The fondant potato lacked a little cooking however and it needed cooking with another few chunks of butter for James Martin to even consider going near it. The food was presented very well, but portions were minuscule, so much so, and I didn't want to, but I 'had' to order dessert to compensate.



For dessert, I couldn't see pass the Tiramisu. Mainly because it was titled 'Bocconi's Tiramisu', implying to me that it was some what of a speciality dish. What was served was a pretty standard Tiramisu, lacking the real coffee/alcohol punch that I like. However, its accompaniment, a coffee sorbet, was gorgeous and certainly delivered the coffee hit as promised. At nine euros however, it annoyed me a little. The tiramisu could have been found in any (decent) Italian restaurant and did not justify its price in any way, shape or form; ok maybe in the form of a delicious coffee sorbet, but in no way or shape!



It sounds as though I didn't enjoy the meal, I certainly did and would recommend it if you're ever in Brussels (though, contradictorily, I recommend that you never go to Brussels, ever!), but one has to be critical when paying, what I feel was over the odds. If eating at McDonald's, I wouldn't be complaining that the chips were over seasoned or if I found a chicken foot in my big mac! Also, never go to McDonalds.

Must go rating:

7.5/10 - Mainly for the bread and the fact it was as good as any landmark I saw in Brussels. The restaurant being almost opposite the Manneken Pis. I'd go as far as saying to not even stop to glance at it and instead head straight into Bocconi.

### **Tot ziens/Au revoir Belgium**

Barring a few highs, Belgium didn't cover itself in glory when it came to its cuisine. Frites and mayonnaise unfortunately not just a sick, horrible rumour, but an all too real occurrence in Belgium, something the locals readily lap up. I imagined it was a combination some Flemish student came up with one day when hungover, rather than a national dish. I mean, to be fair, I'm not a huge fan of chips anyway, but to serve them with mayonnaise is just... wrong! The chocolate though, from what I tried, was rather good. See, I like their chocolate, I'm not just a Belgium food racist! It's just that I don't like chips, or mayonnaise, or waffles. Actually come to think of it, I'm not too fond of mussels either, which in Belgium they serve with, yep you guessed it, frites! Unbelievable.

But enough of the food and to the country itself. It is perhaps because 'In Bruges' is one of my favourite films, one i've seen multiple times, but there was a slightly dark, ever so spooky, gothic atmosphere one feels in Belgium, particularly in Bruges.

Walking home late one night, if it wasn't for a pair of Northern Irish boys I had met earlier accompanying me back to the hostel, not only would I have gotten lost, but I probably would have been too scared to move. Making our way through small lanes, ducking under gargoyles, there is something definitely eery in the air.

It wasn't all tranquil and canals however as I was expecting. Leaving Ghent/Gent train station for the first time, I was greeted by the loud, unmistakable and quite hideous noise of electro dance music. Yes, an electro dance music festival... in Belgium, I didn't sign up for this! Youths walking around shirtless, bumping their heads to and fro' to the senseless racket that is modern music. Each to their own and all that, but come on, that sort of 'music' is objectively rubbish!

# Germany

Before going to Berlin or Munich, my imaginings of what German cuisine consisted of was simply sausage with some beer on the side and, well, that's pretty much it. Some sources (again possibly spurious, though I promise Wikipedia was not used in this instance), claim that 800 million currywursts are guzzled in Germany every year. If in each portion of currywurst, two sausages are used, on top of all the other sausages eaten there (your Gelbwurst, Blutwursts and Leberwursts of this world), we're looking at billions of sausages consumed every year in Germany. Though I feared that my original preconceptions of German cuisine were based on ever so slightly stereotypical ideas, at least, it seems, it was grounded in maths (sort of).

Anyway, this mathematically PROVEN idea of what German food is, didn't much appeal to me. Relieved then was I, when besides the currywurst vans (of which there were many), to find Vietnamese, Japanese and Korean restaurants aplenty; good old globalism.

Over the course of two days, I went on a Lunch-Dinner-Lunch Vietnamese marathon \*. Ingredients were of high quality, food very fresh and flavours adequately Vietnames-y (yes, that is the technical term). Apparently a large influx of Vietnamese people arrived in Germany as refugees during the Vietnam war, who knew!?

\*with tea and breakfast in between at the appropriate times of course.

Integrated within the high quantity of Asian restaurants and currywurst vans were some glorious little bakeries, where I'd often find myself in for breakfast; again, I didn't much fancy the traditional breakfast sausage; the Bavarian weisswurst; a smooth, grayish-white sausage.

Berlin was one city where I actually did a good amount of sightseeing. If you're interested in the holocaust as I am, Berlin is the place to be! Ok, I'm aware that sounds a little weird and maybe a touch out of place in this easy reading food book, but I am a history student, so I'm sort of academically and not least, financially obligated to have some sort of interest in at least one or two periods of history. If like me you're a food and holocaust enthusiast (yes, this is what's written on my business card), I'll now give a quick run through of all the best landmarks and museums I visited;

The Topography of Terror

The Jewish Museum

A short trip out of central Berlin to visit Dachau is certainly worth it

Memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe

I can't quite recall all holocaust based sites I visited, but the above are definitely worth going to.

I was in Germany for the final of the world cup and thought I'd give one of the massive beer halls a go to watch it; this seemed to me like the most German way possible to spend a night. The initial entry was quite a sight; not a sight for sore eyes I hasten to add, with the attendance being mainly middle aged, tipsy German men in their masses. After a few minutes soaking up the quite surreal atmosphere, the reality of a room packed to the rafters, full of people drinking and shouting was actually a little uncomfortable for me. After all, I'm a petite fellow with a nervous disposition, my social anxiety finding the crowd and noise hard to bear! Again, ladies, please form an orderly queue. I lasted till



halftime before swiftly exiting and making a rapid journey back to my hostel for the rest of the game, with Germany of course going on to win.

Anyway, watching the final of the World cup in the winners country... what an experience, one to tell the grandkids!

Despite actually being a bit of a tourist whilst in Germany, boy did I eat! Here come the reviews.

### **Monsieur Vuong - Berlin**

*Alte Schönhauser Straße 46, 10119 Berlin, Germany*

On the street of my hostel, (Alte Schönhauser Strase) there was a plethora of Vietnamese restaurants and Monsieur Vuong was the best I tried of these. Very fresh and fragrant flavours (how's that for alliteration). Healthy too, which was most welcome, considering I breakfasted most of my four mornings in Berlin at Zeit fur Brot, on the same street, with their taste bud pleasing, coronary artery constricting cinnamon rolls.

Must go rating:

7/10



### **Tonkin - Munich**

*Lindwurmstrasse 65 | 80337, 80337 Munich, Bavaria, Germany*

A self-penned Vietnamese Tapas bar, where for once my over ordering was not just my own greediness at work. You see, I think they failed to grasp the idea of small dishes, so when the food arrived and it looked more like I had two main courses, alongside a couple of sides I, for one was quite happy by this excess, because as I say, greedy, but simultaneously a little daunted by the intense eating session to follow. The food was solidly good, without wowing. When I was later given a free portion of crispy sushi due to a fairly long wait for my meal, I was rendered completely and utterly defeated. However, with the restaurant offering 50% off sushi and 20% off the Vietnamese 'Tapas', the bill was the most pleasing aspect of the meal.

Must go rating:

6.5/10 - unless the offers still apply, in which case go hungry

### **Yam Yam, Berlin**

*Alte Schönhauser Straße 6, 10119 Berlin, Germany*

I'll let the pictures do the talking.

In case the pictures do not get your heart racing as they do mine, it was Yam Yam (and if you don't get that very clever play on words, I mean Yum Yum).

Must go rating:

8/10



## **Auf wiedersehen Germany**

Germany was rather grand. From the food, to the landmarks, it was all bloomin' good. Oh, and when I say the food, I mean in the sense that you are able to avoid German cuisine very comfortably!

Plus, the people spoke better English than me... which to be honest, I didn't much appreciate! I joke, and actually if it wasn't for some lovely German people and their wonderful grasp of the English language, I wouldn't have been able to find my hostel in Frankfurt. After an hour or so of searching, going down each and every road I could see but to no avail, I finally plucked up the courage to ask someone for help.

Anyway, it turned out that I hadn't gone down each and every road, I missed but one, Kaiserstrasse, the road of my hostel, the bastard!

# Vienna, Austria

As I try and remember what I did in Vienna, all that comes to mind is not being able to find a schnitzel befitting Viennese reputation, eating many a torte and because I'm so cultured (clearly) attending a concert of Vivaldi's Four Seasons. Oh and of course, Vienna the home of the best brunch ever. Saying that, there is little competition in this field, with me usually conforming to the standard breakfast, lunch, dinner pattern. Go on, read about it now, treat yourself.

## **Best brunch ever; Meierei im Stadtpark**

*Am Heumarkt 2A, 1030 Wien, Austria*

I spent a large/ridiculous amount of time each day finding places I wanted to eat in, this for breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner; no wonder I can't remember much of Vienna itself! If there was one occasion in which all of this planning paid off, it was my brunch at Meierei im Stadtpark, in Vienna. Meierei is the sister restaurant of the famous Steirereck restaurant, currently ranked number fifteen in the world (according to the San Pellegrino awards). Having checked Steirereck's menu yet again, just to make sure I couldn't afford it, I stumbled across Meierei and like a small child discovering an easter egg on an easter egg hunt, I couldn't wait to eat my findings.

The brunch sounded ridiculously good and for a student backpacker, I admit, stupidly expensive. At €30, for a breakfast meal, I knew it would be a big dent in my daily budget; but then I thought the Schonbrunn palace isn't going anywhere soon; with the admission cost, it was either a visit to the palace or brunch. When I'm next in Vienna I'll be sure to give it a visit... unless I find another fancy place for brunch that is. Well I'll definitely look it up on google images. If there is a fancy café inside the palace, that may well change things!

Having placed my order, an afternoon tea style tiered stand was placed in front of me, containing all five dishes, yes five, yes five dishes... for brunch!

The first dish I plumped for was the poached egg with sprout salad & spiced bean crème. Not that I've ever tasted soil, but the dish was earthy, in a good way. It tasted healthy, again, in a good way; not like a kale smoothie flavoured with a dash of cod liver oil. I'll give them the benefit of the doubt that the poached egg wasn't meant to be runny (as it wasn't), because everything else, from flavours to textures, were all perfectly judged. One of those dishes where I could go all Masterchef and use the word 'mouthfeel', which I think means it all combined nicely in my mouth and it felt nice...



Next was muesli with dried, marinated and fresh fruit. Now I'm not much of a fruit fan; when I feel I should eat it, I tend to drown my fruit in granola and honey to the point that I'm probably doing more harm than good. Considering this, I was quite amazed by how tasty this was, the freshest of fruit, the best of muesli, simple bliss. It was exactly what it said on the tin/menu, but delivered in the form of something far superior than could have been expected.



The third dish was the star. When I saw 'carrot yoghurt with marinated fennel' on the menu, it intrigued, but didn't particularly tickle my tastebuds. But my word was the dish something. A slight hint of caramel, delectably creamy was the yoghurt. A simple sprinkling of chopped nuts added texture. I would say what has changed about me most from this trip, is my feelings towards almost all yoghurt adverts (the obvious coming of age experience). You know the ones, where yoghurt, yes, fermented milk is enough to send Nicole Scherzinger into a yoghurt induced fit of pleasure (a yoghurtgasm, if you will). Before, I would tut loudly at its sheer ridiculousness; now, an enlightened man however, cultured in the art that is yoghurt, these adverts make my mind wander and I now instead dream hazy thoughts of that carrot yoghurt at Meierei. I'd like to point out however, I've never, repeat never had a yoghurtgasm! Let's just clear that up now!



Other dishes like marinated smoked salmon and a citrus crème failed to quite match the heights of my yoghurt ecstasy. But then again, I haven't eaten much to match such a food high since.

Must go rating:

9/10 - The place to go if you like eating breakfast, in parks, in Austria and if you like yoghurt as much as Nicole Scherzinger, and I, now do.

## **Auf wiedersehen Vienna**

Er, yep auf wiedersehen Vienna!

No, I'll try and expand a little. Actually despite not remembering much of Vienna itself, some of the architecture I do recall (...when looking at photos) was beautiful, their pastries and baking could be quite glorious at times and their brunches, of course, are definitely the best in Europe!

# Prague, Czech Republic

Prague was interesting and definitely a place to go to meet fellow travelers; that is if you aren't paralyzed with social anxiety or have the directional sense of a fly trying to find an open window. Let me explain... I traveled on the train from Munich to Prague with a group of boys and girls having met in the cabin. Oh we got on a storm! Being young people as we all were, we of course exchanged numbers and Facebook details and arranged a night out on a famous (apparently) bar crawl in Prague. Now, voluntary social interaction, let alone 'going out on the lash' would normally be something I avoid like bananas (I don't like bananas), but I was into the last weeks of my trip and despite all the travel forums assuring me i'd meet loads of great people, I was starting to crave a bit of interaction. Not only this, but one of the girls had caught my eye, perhaps tonight, I would get lucky.

We went our separate ways to do a bit of sightseeing during the day, but as the hours past, I found myself disengaged from the gothic architecture of Prague, my mind conjuring up conversation starters for the big night ahead and enhancing otherwise fairly dull anecdotes to see me through my night of actual, real life socializing. With the darkness closing in around me, the heavens opened, the full fury of Prague's clouds lashing down their watery contents on to the cobbled streets, and I, below. Cold, lost and alone, I took refuge in a little vegan restaurant on a secluded street. The meal fairly palatable, but vegan cuisine is not really known for its comforting, soul hugging dishes; the one time I could have actually done with a bloomin' goulash!

The time I had eaten enough Vegan food to suitably sate me, find my way back to the hostel and change into some dry, clean clothes (well come on, there were hopefully girls to potentially impress), I was running late. We were due to meet at the Astronomical clock on Old town square, a famous attraction I couldn't help but find in a jiffy. The specific pub crawl group I was to be looking for were to be adorned in yellow t-shirts. As rainbow clad groups of drunken youths congregated in the square, with t-shirts ranging from red to blue to green to Indigo all around me, I began to wonder how many blinking pub crawls were taking place! Would a nice meal, a glass of wine perhaps, before retiring for an early night (alone!) not be preferable? As the square emptied, it dawned on me that I may have missed the yellow t-shirts; having known I was in a rush, perhaps I should have forgone dessert for just this one night! I would not be crawling around pubs tonight. And so with one cruel swipe from the hand of misfortune/disorganization, my one true love, gone (I think I hear Hollywood knocking).

Knowing myself as I do however, if I did meet up with whom I had planned to, I'm sure the night would have played out less Cinderella and more Alan Partridge (you know, his disgust when his lady friend decides to experiment with chocolate in the bedroom - I'm afraid you'll have to look it up if you're confused, I am all analogied out!). My night would more likely have ended with me berating myself for reeling off anecdotes that tail off with no real ending or alternatively for not talking or simply behaving like a normal. Well I'd be damned if I were to join another group of unruly youths, I couldn't talk to more strangers, not on the same day, that's far too taxing on my anxious little disposition. Having exhausted my social charisma (and boy, what charisma) for that day then, I thought it best to head on home, an early night, glorious! I think I treated myself to a mug of tea and a couple of biscuits courtesy of the hostel, before retiring for my perfect eight hours of sleep, my kind of night baby!

Anyway back to Prague. I spent a good portion of my time there exploring its Jewish heritage of which is vast and great. The rest of the time I sat on a bench somewhere and listened to music, cocooned in the bubble of social protection that are my headphones!

Oh, I also visited the Torture museum! A great place for introverts like me. The building was empty, leaving just me to wander around the bizarre exhibits. It was quite a relaxing, peaceful environment actually, away from the masses of people that is Prague during summer time, I closed my eyes, exhaling a relieved sigh (a sigh of relief if you like), blessed peace. The screams of the fake witches being burnt at the stake soon put an end to that.

So, to the food of Prague. Pretty good it was too, pretty, pretty good.

## **Mistral cafe**

*Valentinská 11, 110 00 Praha 1, Czech Republic*

I really felt I had stumbled across a treasure upon entry of Mistral cafe. The place was filled with locals, with a menu of dishes I couldn't choose between. It's strange though, I ate here twice and was a little disappointed both times. My first meal consisted of a mushroom ragout with thyme served with a potato cake. Unfortunately, seasoning and depth of flavor was just a little lacking. Also the proportions of mushroom to potato were heavily in favour of potato, which wasn't quite well made enough to satisfy on its own.



*See what I mean, how much potato cake can one boy eat!*

However, there was potential here and with plenty left on the menu to plump for, I went back a second time.

Annoyingly, but rather inevitably and in keeping with my trip, I mis-organized my day and so when I had ran out of things to do in the morning, it was time only for breakfast, not for lunch as I had planned. I plumped for the Austrian breakfast. Basically sausages, eggs and bread. The sausages of poor quality and the eggs reminiscent of the scrambled eggs that had been left standing on a buffet. The bread and butter however was delightful and is probably why I still hold Mistral cafe in decent regard. Or more likely me not wanting to fully admit I was wrong with this one.

Must go rating:

Ummm, 8, no 6, no 7. Ok, go, just don't order the Austrian breakfast or the mushroom ragout!

## **Casserole - restaurant review**

*Karlova 147/44, 110 00 Praha, Czech Republic*



Despite readying myself with a couple of choice Czech phrases, I was greeted by the restaurant's hostess with a friendly 'hello' (I must have that tourist look; I don't know if it was the backpack and trainers or the slight cockney twang to my accent).

To my giddy delight, I was quickly served an amouse bouche; a duck pate, wrapped in bacon on a bed of caramelized onion. It was not the best dish for a nice Jewish boy to eat, but realizing that translating the rules of Kashrut (kosher eating) into Czech would stretch beyond my limited grasp of the language, I graciously ate it. All I'll say is, if that's what they're serving in Jewish hell... sign me up! It was delicious. The pate was rich in Madeira and meatiness, counteracted by the sweet onion and salty bacon, all my taste buds were satisfied!

The menu was once again full of things I wanted to eat. I plumped for beef cheek in red wine, served with celeriac puree. The beef was really beautiful, it fell under the weight of my fork, just as Cristiano Ronaldo dives to the floor upon the most minimal of contact, (basically it was soft and tender, thus required no effort to come away - I find it's easier to just explain my similes than work on ones that may actually make more sense). The sauce was rich in red wine and quality, deeply flavoured beef stock. The celeriac puree was the creamiest, silkiest puree, celeriac or otherwise I've ever had... and boy have I had me some purees in my time.



Before I went on my trip, I visited the Taste of London festival, where I also sampled beef cheek. I have to say, the cheek at casserole was superior to the cheek at the festival ... ooh beef... (For those from a certain generation and thus not up to date with 21st century slang, us kids use the word beef when someone has been dissed).

For dessert I went for the (apparently) traditional Trhanec pancake, which tasted exactly like a pancake (now, that's what you call a simile). It was served with caramelized apples and rum. Unfortunately, the apples needed more caramelization and the rum needed more rum! This from someone who doesn't drink.

Must go rating:

7.5/10

A lovely little restaurant near the main square with friendly staff, set in an interesting environment. Food was most satisfying, without being amazing. Oh, I also had my second best bread basket here.



## **Na shledanou Prague**

Prague had it all really. Some really interesting food, fabulous architecture, amazing history and despite the main tourist sites being extremely crowded, there were beautiful places one could wander on the outskirts of the city where you could escape the mayhem.

However, I just wish to point out a shop I saw. The reason for this is because it was called 'Goebel', which near the Jewish quarter of the city, I found a little insensitive!



# Italy

I figured I could roll all my thoughts on my findings of Italian cuisine into one bumper section, partly because I'm finding it hard to mentally separate Rome to Venice, or Modena to Bologna in terms of food. This might be further evidence of my disorganized methods or sieve-esque memory, but perhaps it's quite telling of what I found to be the Italian food scene, in the five places I visited there; all were quite similar.

Of course I know there to be great regional diversity in Italy, regional cuisine that are of great pride to its citizens. But from my own experiences and from places I was able to find and eat in, this holds true. I just thought I should point that out! Any mafia out there reading, I mean you no disrespect and I'd like to say I thought you all came across really well in that Godfather trilogy thing. Also, the food of Sicily is my favourite...

I structured my whole two weeks in Italy, around a visit to what was the world's third best restaurant, the three Michelin starred Osteria Francescana (more on this later). So out went Cinque Terre and Milan, and in came Bologna and Modena.

Not to state the obvious, but Italy is certainly the place to go if you want to eat Italian food... just Italian food. You couldn't move for pizza joints! I did once stumble across a tiny, ever so slightly dingy looking Sri Lankan restaurant, with restaurant being used in its most stretched form. I didn't eat there.

But as I say, if you go to Italy for Italian food, you will not be disappointed. I found the pizzas to be wholly satisfying, even in places that I chose to eat in for purely money saving purposes; pizzas are a pleasingly cheap dining option; four euros or so was the going rate.

I was a little naive with my Italian portion size awareness. I often forgot that pasta is usually served as a starter. This caught me out a few times, particularly in the infancy of my Italian leg. This is probably why I went through such a huge quantity of tiramisus in an attempt to silence my stomachs yearning for fulfillment... though of course that wasn't the sole reason.

I will now post the pictures of all the tiramisus I ate on my travels below, it shocked me; both the sheer number I ate and also that I haven't since died of a tiramisu induced heart attack. Bear in mind, the below collection is missing a few tiramisus, as I only started documenting the number I was eating when I realized it was getting slightly out of hand!

Exciting insight: the two best tiramisus were eaten in Rome. Perhaps surprisingly, Ghent was home to the third best tiramisu I consumed.









Ridiculous really, but oh so delicious.

Quite interesting how many different variations I was served. Well interesting to me anyway, after-all I'll probably end up doing my dissertation on 'the history of tiramisu', which I will ensure involves a lot of practical research!

As explained in the introduction, the motivation behind this trip was to eat, this meaning I had to make certain concessions, saving time and money on things that could impede on my food indulgences. If the entrance to see Michelangelo's David was too high, I would graciously decline the admission, saving my money for an extra course at dinner\*. This all to ensure I could give you the reader as much detail on the European food scene as possible. A true act of altruism in many ways, you're welcome!

\*To my fellow uncultured types reading this, there's a replica of the David statue nearby the real one, which was impressive enough... if you like that sort of thing. As well as this, the location was perfect,

with free Wifi on offer. This particularly handy as I had yet to find my eating place for that night, cheers Dave! Always rated that Michelangelo fella, he'll get somewhere one day!

Anyway, reviews time.

## **Drogheria Della Rossa, Bologna**

*Via Cartoleria, 10, 40124 Bologna, Italy*

My old man had booked to meet me during my travels in Bologna, for what above all was a long culinary weekend. Second to this, was a chance to see me; I'm not silly dad, but I completely understand! My dad was given the name of this restaurant via one of his Italian work colleagues and the meal I had here sticks out above many others from my trip.

The first thing you notice when entering is that the restaurant is a converted chemist. The second thing is how there is no menu, but instead a long speech from the waiter and if your memory isn't up to it, you'll just have to have the last thing the waiter says (I speak from experience!) Then you'll notice how the sommelier doesn't seem to be doing very much sommeliering at all. In fact, he doesn't seem to be doing anything, at all and just stands there with a glass of wine in hand ... all night. In fairness, I say he didn't do anything all night, he did top his own glass up with professional efficiency... all night.

This all added to what was a wonderfully unique atmosphere; a relaxed, Italian family dining room feel. A free glass of Prosecco and appetizer later, we were sold. It isn't just the food that lingers long in the memory at Drogheria Della Rossa, but that old word ambience, whatever that means, but it had a lovely one!

Saying this, I have fond memories of the desserts. Mine an almond semifredo. My dad's a plate of mascarpone, apricots and dark chocolate drops. If I had to choose one moment I was really pleased that my dad came to meet me, it was when he let me finish off his pudding that night (I jest of course)... when he insisted on paying the bill at Osteria Francescana just pips it! My dad's dish was a bit of a revelation for me, perhaps the simplest dish in its preparation I consumed during my five weeks in Europe and yet due to the freshness and quality of the ingredients, also one of the tastiest. I mean I don't even like apricots! But these were apricots on steroids compared to the inferior variety I've had back home, which ironically probably do actually contain steroids (ooh food politics!).

Our meal lasted three hours, an hour per course (the education system hasn't failed me!) Occasional glances towards the sommelier and you'll see him still getting drunk of his own wine suggestions. He took the "oh wait, let me try it first to see if its good enough" to a whole new level.

I mustn't forget about the owner. If an alien came down to earth and he wanted to know what a stereotypical Italian Grandpa was like (you never know, it's not an out of this world suggestion...), the owner of Drogheria Della Rossa would be the man to show them. He spent the night going table to table, making customers laugh, treating diners as his own family. He even cradled a baby until it stopped crying! He was like a modern day, slightly balding, Italian Jesus.

Must go rating:

8/10 - A very solid meal, made special by the restaurant's atmosphere and staff.

## **Ristorante Ciacco**

*Via S. Simone, 1/c, 40126 Bologna, Italy*

Bearing in mind that I was only in Bologna for two nights, two of the restaurants I felt I had to review were meals I had from here. That's a 100% record for Bologna! Well played my son.

For my second meal in Bologna, a starter of squid, pea puree and tomatoes was solid. The tomatoes deserve a special mention. They were so sweet, cooked to a point where they just held their shape, but were soft and gooey on the inside and so when eaten, were like a posh and far superior ketchup. The squid was possibly a smidgen overcooked, but I'm nit picking. 7.5/10



My main of Pacheri Verginni (a wide tubular pasta) with currants and salt olives offered a masterclass in how to prepare and cook pasta. I've eaten a lot of pasta in my time (not least in my first year at University) and this blew everything else out the (pasta) water. The accompaniments were very simple and rightfully so; like a good piece of steak or the freshest fillet of tuna, quality pasta is a divine ingredient in it's own right and can be left to its own devices, with very little interference needed to produce a taste sensation. 9/10



I was given a tiny panacotta pre-dessert on the house, which was delightful. Though I always think I could be served jelly\* and I would still enthuse, due to the excitement that is receiving a pre-dessert.

\* I don't like jelly. Not even when I was a child. I've never eaten a trifle.





Whilst in Italy, dessert time invariably meant tiramisu time; saying that, I had my fair share of tiramisu's during the non-Italy legs of my trip as well. Despite an interesting and delicious sounding dessert menu, tiramisu has a hold over my heart like no other dish. Thus with little real debate I chose to continue dwindling Italy's supply of the great dessert. If there is ever a tiramisu shortage I will feel personally responsible and also extremely emotional. Ristorante Ciacco certainly put their own stamp on the classic dessert. A chocolate mousse, covered by a thin layer of coffee mousse, this topped by an airy, whipped cream. Not the sort of whipped cream that can be found in canisters, that a young couple may have a little fun with; no this was grown up, carefully exacted whipped cream. Coffee permeated throughout the dish with quite a punch considering the delicacy of the mousse it came from. Despite veering from tradition, Restaurant Ciacco did a fine job with their reinvention of my favourite dessert.  
8/10



All in all, a quite gorgeous meal.

Must go rating:

8.5/10

### **Ristorante Fiaschetteria Toscana**

*Salizada S.Giovanni Grisostomo, Cannaregio, 5719, 30121 Venezia, Italy*

Never have I enjoyed food so much purely for precision of cooking and expert seasoning than I did when dining at Ristorante Fiaschetteria.

I had a big plate of calamari for me starters. They having a perfectly crispy exterior with a succulent, chew-less interior. It was seasoned as if salted by a master chippy in Brighton (this is a good thing, generally) and it was just plain delicious.



I ordered a side of sautéed vegetables, again executed to perfection. Just crisp enough and seasoned superbly. Vegetables of the highest quality, fresh and surprisingly tasty; showcasing the majesty of just what vegetables can be in the right hands. It made me briefly consider vegetarianism for a while... then I went back in for some more calamari.



It was an old fashioned restaurant in many ways, with emphasis on smart, punctual service and simple, precise, traditional food. I shared the restaurant with a couple so English they were a personification of the restaurant itself... except in not being Italian, hear me out. Ristorante Fiaschetta was clearly a usual stomping ground for the couple, asking around for certain waiters and the like. They provided a bit of humour to the night, what with the man ordering for his wife, 'my wife will have', alongside quotes including, 'say my name and you'll get a table there'. It was like watching my very own sitcom, a bit like 'Alan Partridge in Italy'. Though unfortunately, I can't guarantee a visit to this restaurant will provide you with the same Partridge-esque experience. However, mention the man's name and you will get a table.



Dessert of Pistachio tart was as good as it looks. Although, I'm aware my photos probably don't quite do justice to much of the food I've described so far. Ok, fine, it tasted better than it looks in this photo, but in real life it was as good as it looked. I hope that is clear now...!

Must go rating:

8/10

## **Il Ciottolo - Verona**

*Corso Cavour, 39, 37121 Verona VR, Italy*

Fabulous pasta served simply with a beautiful ragú. Coupled with friendly service and decent value. What more can I say!

And no, I don't just write that because I'm now starting to run out of ways to describe food differently, thank you very much!

Must go rating:

7/10

## **Emilia Cremeria - Modena**

*Piazza Mazzini Giuseppe, 17, 41121 Modena MO, Italy*

Emilia Cremeria; home to the best looking gelato you'll (I'll) ever see. A granita I had the day before was decent enough, but the gelato is where it's at. I even broke one of my life rules, one that had previously been upheld more than any other; always a tub never a cone! Unfortunately Emilia's Cremeria didn't see me coming and I very almost turned down the chance of the best looking food I'd seen in about a day (this being the day after Osteria Francescana). I've now slightly modified my zero ice-cream cone policy to allow for cone buying in such special circumstances like this. Truly amazing ice cream. It also provided me with the best picture I've ever taken.



*Isn't it beautiful!*

Must go rating:

9.5/10

## **Ristorante 7 Archi**

*Via Marchesana, 6, 40124 Bologna, Italy*

The best food I ate in Italy was when restaurants stuck to simplicity, using fresh, quality ingredients. Ristorante 7 Archi certainly did this. Rather embarrassingly I can't recall what I actually ate here, only that it was tasty. Some would say I should have left this out, but I have a word count to reach, so I thought it best just to keep it in. Despite my failing memory, I am sure this restaurant still holds as a good recommendation if you are ever in Bologna. So, just to reiterate, yes I would recommend this restaurant, yes, I most certainly would!

Must go rating:

8/10

Having just said all of this about Italian food being best when at its simplest... It is actually at its best at Osteria Franciscana, review of which is on the next page ; now that's what you call a segway!

# Osteria Francescana

*Via Stella, 22, 41121 Modena MO, Italy*

Approaching my final week of travel, Osteria Francescana was set to be the crescendo of the trip. Having re-arranged my whole visit to Italy, not to mention keeping a tight check on my student loan during my first year of university (not as to avoid going into overdraft so much, but to pay for this one meal), I was expectant. Nervously excited; nervous because I feared expectations would not be met, excited because, well that's obvious; three Michelin stars and at the time of dining, the third best restaurant in the world (according to the San Pellegrino awards), now number two in the world. I like to think me dining there was a key reason as to why the restaurant moved up that one place to number two in the world!

Having browsed the a la carte and various tasting menus, we ultimately plumped for the one with the most courses (in for a penny and all that), the twelve course sensations menu it was then.

## **Dish 1:** **Fish and chips**

But guess what, this wasn't fish and chips as you know it (to my disappointment). A 3D disc of the crispest batter going, inside of which a mixture of anchovies presided, topped with a quenelle of carpione (some sort of fish) ice cream. The three mouthfuls that followed contained all the vinegar, salt and crunch that you'll find with a good old fashioned meal at a chippy, (a good chippy mind!). Of course, the end product was a far more refined, not to mention less greasy version of our much beloved British counterpart. Solid start.

7/10



## **Dish 2** **Bread, butter, anchovies**

This dish shared quite a lot with the first course, but with this course being a more luxurious step up. A crisp shell, a vinegar hit and of course the use of anchovies were their similarities. These first two dishes then were like identical twins who had been separated at birth, sharing the same genetic make-up, but differing in their upbringing. Where dish 1, Fish and Chips (let's call it Pat) was brought up in a modest household, with luxuries at an essence, Bread, Butter, anchovies, dish 2, (Alex, purely for the

gender neutrality of the name, I'm not (just) egotistical), was fostered by a couple of successful entrepreneurs, who had a holiday home in Australia and experienced a far more opulent childhood. Alex then was a far more rich, creamy, luxurious version than Julian. This not to criticize Julian too much, but he simply couldn't live up to the success of his brother Alex!

Having broken into the shell, the interior turned into the best fish soup ever and was a wonderfully indulgent course. Why don't all food critics use these analogies more!? You don't have to answer that!

8/10



### **Dish 3**

#### **East meets west**

A dish striking for its restraint, though perhaps not quite memorable for it. A broth and toasted lentils lay respectively either side of a ravioli type pasta. I'm struggling to recall what this tasted like if I'm honest. I remember enjoying it, but for a three star restaurant, in Italy, I wasn't overly amazed by the quality of the pasta or its accompaniments. One to think about rather than indulge in perhaps.

6/10



#### **Dish 4** **Eel swimming up the Po river**

One thing that struck me at Osteria Francescana was the confidence that the menu showed in their cooking. The elaborate title of the dish was translated/personified on the plate as a fillet of eel either side of a different sauce. So simple, yet all was perfect and wonderful. One sauce, a tart apple, the other, a richer, creamier polenta (I believe). The eel itself was lacquered with something or other giving it an amazing caramel like quality, which was topped with a burnt onion powder, the slight bitterness of which offsetting both the tartness of apple and sweetness of the ‘something or other’ lacquer. My dad and I were blown away by the delicious gloriousness of this dish.

10/10



## **Dish 5**

### **Caesar salad**

As a small cabbage, seemingly raw and untouched was served to us, we were suitably amused. The waiters went on to explain how there were something like twenty elements all contained within the untouched looking cabbage. The elements of which were classic Caesar salad fare; bacon, parmesan, chlorophyll extract, ok maybe not. Despite what the waiters told us, I struggled to find all that was meant to be within, within; quite a few mouthfuls were just raw cabbage, which even for someone on a raw vegan diet would find hard to rave over. It was my least favourite of the twelve.

5/10



## **Dish 6**

### **Red mullet**

Another piece of art. A real striking lip stick red broth surrounded the fillet of red mullet. The skin was designed and flavoured with olive and something else tasty (it's times like this where I feel a little guilty charging for this book). Another dish I'm struggling to recall in enough depth to describe to you the dishes' beauty (another one of those moments). I do recall enjoying it however and marveling at it's beauty! Such an elaborate and beautiful tasting menu is a foodie's dream but also an amateur food critic's nightmare! I have clearly failed on the jobs post eating and for that I apologize, please give me another chance, please, let me go back to Osteria and try again!

7/10





**Dish 7**  
**Five ages of parmesan in five different textures**

Wow, wow, wow. One main ingredient, yet every element giving a differing taste, texture and temperature, all of which complemented each other superbly and amalgamated into the most gorgeous bite. Genius.

9.5/10



**Dish 8**  
**Frogs in the pond**

A most interesting and complex dish. Many a flavour combination, with each mouthful challenging the palate. So interesting and complex that once again I'm not able to describe the intricacies of the dish

sufficiently. Breaded frogs legs were paired with hazelnuts, cherry and if I remember correctly, coffee. Like dish three, here was a dish to admire and think about, but perhaps not the most indulgent or fulfilling taste bud wise for it. Still, pretty darn good.

7.5/10



## **Dish 9** **Veal presented like Jackson Pollock**

Sweet Lord Jesus. To any Christians reading, let me reassure you, I am not using Christ's name in vein, this dish was heavenly. The most delectably tender fillet of veal, complemented by an array of differing sauces and purees. Each puree offering a wonderful contrast and combination to the next. From memory the purees were an apple, cherry and a richer celeriac like puree. Silence only broken by the occasional 'mmm' or 'wow' or 'bloody hell this is good', so entranced were we by the culinary masterclass that was unfolding on our palate's.

10/10



## **Dish 10**

## **Foie gras feast**

Another classic Franciscana dish and one that holds a special place in my memory, not just for its playfulness and taste, but it was at the time of serving of this dish that I met Massimo Bottura. As he made his way around the room, my heart began thumping like that of a teenage boy about to ask his long term crush out on a date, (perhaps a little misleading this analogy, though there's no denying that Massimo is a good looking fella!). Anyway, what a thoroughly lovely chap Mr. Bottura is. He explained to us how the dish was a slight play at the French; with a French ingredient, the Foie Gras, encased in Italian hazelnuts with a centre of aged balsamic vinegar (Italian of course). We made the very English comment that being English there's nothing better than getting one over the French, even in this the most bizarre and pompous of ways.

The dish itself brought a smile to our faces; the judges from BBC's Great British Menu would have said 'oh what fun'. If you like foie gras, hazelnuts and balsamic vinegar you'll like this dish! The combination just worked. The vinegar offsetting the richness of the Foie Gras, the slight bitterness of hazelnut offsetting the vinegar, the crunch of the hazelnuts offsetting the creaminess of the Foie Gras.

8.5/10



## **Dish 11**

### **Pea, tomato dessert**

This was a tasting menu with some serious thought behind it. There was a gradual shift from savoury to sweet throughout, with this dish the pinnacle of such. Ingredients of course usually more appreciated for what they bring to savoury courses, yet treated in such a way as to bring out their natural sweetness in this gorgeously light and fresh dessert.

8/10



## **Dish 12**

## Oops, I dropped the lemon tart

As the name suggests, you are served a perfectly broken lemon tart on a quite amazing textured plate (which was a little hard to eat off, but cool nonetheless). Attention to detail of this amazing restaurant was plain to see in this dish. I say plain to see, but it was the addition of tiny specks on the plate which added whole new dimensions to the dish. Tiny cubes of salted and pickled things (capers and apples), amongst drops of chili and basil (maybe), that added an ingenious contrast to the lemon.

8.5/10



So, there we go. There were a few dud courses and when I say dud, I mean not quite what I would consider three star worthy, which isn't exactly a great criticism. It's like saying to Cristiano Ronaldo that he isn't quite as good as Lionel Messi, or George Clooney is quite as handsome as, umm, I don't know... Massimo Bottura. Come on, he's a good looking boy is Massimo!

I couldn't possibly comment if it deserves it's number two ranking, by accounts of not having tried any of its 'competition', though I'm not really sure if you can quantify things in such a way anyway. But hey, man loves a list. And that's man as in mankind, that wasn't some highly specific sexist slur, suggesting women don't like lists as much as men.

Osteria Francescana though most definitely worthy of a place on every foodie's wish-list (well every male foodie's wish list) it most certainly should be.

And petit fours to finish it all off.

Overall food score: 95/120

Must go rating: 9/10



I'm sure such high ratings will mean as much to Massimo as his three Michelin stars. Mass, feel free to post the scores on your website, I'm sure it will help business.

### **Arrivederci Italy**

Ah Italy, you gorgeous, fascinating, tiramisu producing beauty.

Italy had fabulous produce, the best ice-cream/gelato, oh and did I mention, a whole lotta tiramisu.

In the Colosseum and alike, Rome has some of the most well known landmarks there are. Yet turning the corner and seeing the Colosseum for the first time in the flesh, it still takes you aback. Rome really did live up to its reputation in terms of its history and architecture.

Plus, I reckon I may have established my very own world record whilst there; yes, I Alex Sumray holds the world record for the first and only person ever to have watched a clip of Alan Partridge whilst in a cathedral (or if not all cathedrals, then this particular Roman cathedral, which still, I'm proud to own such a title). Let me explain; visiting yet another cathedral, this time in Rome, one of the statues on

display, I felt was very partridge-esque in its stance, so just to check I got my iPod out and found the episode. Anyway, have a look for yourself, but I personally think the resemblance is uncanny.

P.S I hope my actions are not disrespectful to any Catholics reading this!



See, uncanny! I can't even tell what one's the statue, what one is Alan Partridge.

So that's the reviews bit done, now for something completely different. Well not completely, still food related, but I saw a chance at a Python reference and I took it and who can blame me.

# **My top tips to avoiding touristy, rip off places that ravage the culinary landscape of many cities (too dramatic?)**

## **1) Don't talk to strange men wearing bow ties**

As well as being a brilliant life lesson, this tip will also help you steer clear of rubbish restaurants: avoid strange men wearing bow ties. Ok, more specifically the men (and yes they are always men before I'm labelled the sexist food critic, what with this and my controversial comments about lists just before), whose job it is to stand outside their restaurant and sell it to you. How? Well the hard sell. I would measure them akin to the Sirens of Greek mythology; they look and sound like the real deal, but like the Sirens, the bow-tied men are sinister and deceitful.

This tip comes with a two for one deal; avoid main squares. The bow-tied men, bad food and main square are intrinsically linked. It's like walking in Manhattan; it's all very nice, until you take a wrong turn. There will always be a street full of these bow-tied men and once you go in, its very hard to get out. Usually you eat somewhere you don't want to just to shut them up.

## **2) Lost in Translation**

Now I was very grateful for restaurants for providing English menus as often as they did, however, I would warn against certain restaurants that offer translated menus. When a restaurant offers menus in English to Spanish to Japanese to Swahili (well maybe not, but I think I've made the point), you can't help but feel the restaurant is trying to appeal to the masses! When restaurants do this, the food on offer is usually generic concoctions, trying to cater to foreign tastebuds. On a tangent to this, I must recommend the App 'World Lens'. You place your phone, ITouch, iPad and so on above some text and, in what must be magic, the text translates the words into English, or the language of your choice\*. Use it on road signs when lost, but it was menus that I used this most on. It was particularly useful in Germany, when I didn't know what was going on (more than) half the time!

\*To anyone from World Lens reading, just to reiterate, I am open to sponsors.

## **3) Not just a pretty picture**

On a similar vein, avoid restaurants that place pictures on their menus. They are either stock images found on the web and not what can be expected of the restaurants own food. On the other side of things, the pictures will usually be of pretty awful looking food, in which case, you don't need me to tell you to avoid such places. The aim of these pictures is to attract the tourists; you know the sort, 'Hey look they serve spaghetti bolognese, we must try that while we're in Italy'. These picture using restaurants then will usually serve food that they believe us tourists consider to be the regional cuisine. Note - this rule does not usually apply to Asian restaurants...

## **4) Jack of all trades, master of none**

Avoid restaurants that offer ridiculously extensive menus. Jack of all trades, master of none. Say no more.

## **5) WiFi can wait!**

I realize the offer of free WiFi may seem attractive. The temptation to log in to Facebook to upload a

selfie of you at the Eiffel tower or the ever hilarious manipulation of proportion, making it seem as if you are the cause of the Leaning Tower of Pisa's lean. However, if a restaurant has to openly advertise WiFi to entice their customers, one must wonder if they are not confident enough in their food alone. If the restaurant offers WiFi, grand, but only if you stumble across it yourself; scrolling through your phone to try and look busy and important perhaps. There's nothing wrong with trying to lure customers in, there's too much competition to sit idle if the customers aren't flocking in, but if the reputation of the food is nothing to shout about or enough to bring you in then this is usually a hint.

Of course these observations are solely my own findings from what I could discern from my time in each of the cities I visited and realize they are not blanket rules. However, the best and the worst meals of my trip were in accordance to these rules. You were warned!



# Ultimate week of eating

What would you do if you knew for certainty that you only had one day, (or one week for the purpose of this feature) left to live? It's a question we've probably all pondered, whether that be in a contemplative, pensive sort of way, at an interview or for those of you who have been on death row.

Well, I'm going to answer this age old question with my perfect, hypothetical, gastronomically focused week. However, at the end of the week death isn't what awaits, just a life that has already peaked and thus will be forever in decline...enjoy!

In keeping with the theme of the book, this week will be based on complete, unadulterated food experience. Also, the food in question will remain solely consumed within European borders, again just for continuity and also to make this week even a slight logistical possibility.

I suppose I'd have to take my family with as that seems to be what everyone says to these sorts of question. 'Oh I'd just like to have a quiet day in, spending time with the family'. Ye right! I joke, I joke...

Warning: Please do not actually follow this itinerary, I do not want to be responsible for anyone's bankruptcy. If this warning isn't taken, have a sandwich for a couple of your lunches to even the cost out, that should do it! Also, if you do follow, it would only be right and polite to take the itinerary's creator with you, come on have some respect. I'll be happy to get the drinks in, well to a cap of two beverages ahead, per day.

## **Day one**

### **London**

I can't comment on the rest of Europe, as frankly I don't know, but London offers some fabulous little lunch deals if you look around for them. Hedone, The Clove Club, Galvin at Windows and The Square are just the tip of the iceberg, though they do represent some of the best quality and value to be found. So take your pick and start your way on this glorious food adventure.

Again, we're spoilt for choice if you're looking for afternoon tea in London; if you're after that touristy experience it would have to be The Ritz. Claridge's and The Dorchester are also institutions, famous for their afternoon teas. For an alternative try The Athenaeum or the Goring Hotel.

And for dinner, The Ledbury:

With the great food scene we have in London, the Ledbury is second only to Dinner By Heston Blumenthal as the highest rated restaurant in England, coming in at number twenty in the San Pellegrino top 50 restaurant awards. It also happens to be where I have had the best food and service ... in England.

## **Day 2**

### **Fly to Spain**

First class. Why not!?

I didn't visit Spain on my trip this time, but if I wanted a week of ultimate European food pleasure, Spain would have to feature. It boasts the highest number of restaurants in the top ten in the world, taking up two of these most coveted spots.

I have to be a little practical in this list in terms of logistics, otherwise it just gets silly and over the top... because of this, it is with regret that I leave out the best restaurant in the world in El cellar de can Roca. I have gone for collective and accumulative pleasure, rather than a single dose of unadulterated foodgasm-ness (one of Shakespeare's words I believe).

This still leaves us with lunch at Arzak and dinner at Mugaritz. Both restaurants legendary, Mugaritz currently ranked number six, Arzak of course a long running institution, currently number seventeen. The fact that they both lie in the San Sebastian region seals my decision. You could finish lunch at Arzak and take a nice leisurely walk for your dinner booking at Mugaritz. Don't worry, this isn't compromising on the quality of food, with five Michelin stars between them.

If there are any multi millionaires out there reading this; well one, would you fund this trip for me please. But two, bribe Death for an extra day, either in payment or offer to take him/her as a dinner guest. This extra day will allow El cellar de Can Roca and Azurmendi in Bilbao. Though be prepared for the long drive of around six hours from Girona to Bilbao; I can't imagine Death is the best travel partner! Though saying that he/she will likely have a few interesting anecdotes to tell. I'd probably ask him/her to clear up the whole Elvis situation!

Anyway, both of these two restaurants would probably be my first preferences; but as I say, practicality sometimes trumps all. Who says I don't give out useful consumer advice!

### **Day 3**

#### **Paris**

Afternoon tea at Pierre Herme or Le Patisserie des Reves.

If you're particularly fond of Macaroons Pierre Herme is the Patisserie for you

My other suggestion, the self proclaimed 'pastry shop of dreams', certainly live up to its name.

If you're looking for a more formal tea, in glorious surroundings, Laduree does the trick; though I was a touched disappointed with what I was actually served there.

Dinner in Paris - I'll give three suggestions.

Pierre Gagnaire, L'arpege or Ledoyen. L'arpege sits at number twelve in the world and so I would naturally plump for that, as I still see the San Pellegrino list as a fairly reliable arbiter of quality. I've also seen a picture of their petit four tray, yes tray, a tray of petit fours, petit fours but a tray of them and, ye just go to L'arpege.

### **Day 4**

#### **Bologna and Modena**

Lunch at one of the many produce led shops in Bologna, with hidden restaurants above serving their delicious, fresh produce. t)

One of the most memorable meals I had come in such a place. It was the first meal that my Dad and I shared when he met me. A free glass of Prosecco, followed by platters of cheese and meats covered our table. I mean what more could you wish for; well maybe to dine with some of the beautiful women that live in that part of the world (no offense dad).

If you're looking for something a bit more restauranty and fit for an occasion refer to my list of my top

ten meals; you'll see this region features more so than any other.

Ice cream at Emilia's Cremeria - best looking ice cream ever and best I had whilst I was away and boy did I eat me some Ice cream.

Of course I skip the major cities of Italy, your Romes' and Milans' \* of this world, because no list of an ultimate foodie week in Europe would be complete without Osteria Francescana. You've seen me waxing lyrical about the place, so I won't go on at you again, but it's so good!

\*I apologize if I have misused the apostrophe on this occasion, I have merely plumped for the end of the word apostrophe more in hope than knowledge.

## **Day 5**

### **Vienna**

Brunch at Meierei im Stadt park

The money saving tips keep on coming on this trip; though this is a bit of/complete rehash of an earlier tip. As I said in my review, go here around Brunch and you will be satisfactorily full until dinner. Though you may want to indulge in some of the fine patisserie Vienna has to offer. The original sacher torte perhaps. You may as well, you'll be six foot under in a few days, a bit of torte won't hurt!

Dinner at Steirereck. If you are purely on this fantastical, unrealistic and quite ridiculous trip for the food and the food alone, then after brunch, just sit in the park for the afternoon and then make your way back towards the restaurant, this time going through the Steirereck entrance!

## **Day 6**

### **Cologne + near Ghent/Gent**

Lunch at Vendome.

Hop on a train to Belgium and for dinner, dine at the three Michelin starred Hof Van Cleve.

Day six now and my food inspiration is starting to wane. So i've basically found the two highest rated restaurants as we start to find our way back to London.

## **Day 7**

Make your way into Ghent/Gent and for your Belgium chocolate fix, head to YUZU.

Exciting, unique flavors in a gorgeously minimalist setting with owner and chocolatier as your server.



Catch the Eurostar home and end with dinner at Dinner by Heston.

Right, I'm off to go get myself a lottery ticket. Or, alternatively I may make a quick trip to the crossroads to sell my soul to the devil, not for musical genius, but for a ticket for this trip!\* Na, I'll just go to an off license.

\*N.B. Please have a look at the story of blues legend Robert Johnson. He famously sold his soul to the devil; this, as the story goes is how he picked up his magical guitar powers so quickly. Thought I should just clear that up as that sentence above may sound a little strange if you hadn't heard this before!

As we start to round of the trip, it is time for another list. Though this time it's more than that, because if there is one thing man likes more than lists, it's a countdown.

### **My top 10 dinners on my travels**

10) Il ciottolo, Verona

9) Yam Yam, Berlin

Since I've been home, I've been craving Korean food, mainly due to my meal at Yam Yam. Maybe i'll go to Korea for my next trip... or just pop back to Berlin.

8) Ristorante 7 archi, Bologna

7) Villa Spicy - Paris

Purely for that amazing caramelized Veal Tenderloin

6) Restarante Fiasheterria Toscana - Venice

5) Bocconi - Brussels

4) Casserole - Prague

3) Drogheria della rossa - bologna

Perhaps not the third best meal I had in terms of food, but everything else was most memorable.

2) Ristorante Ciacco - Bologna

And in a shock result

Number 1 goes to ... Osteria Francescana, Modena

# London

And so we arrive back in London. Departing from my train, I take my first step back on British soil, with rain hurling down on me, jellied eels in hand and a cockney swagger back in my walk, I smile wide, ah Britannia, how I've missed you.

My first taste of food writing was via my blog 'Alex'sfood', much of the material of which I gathered from eating my way around London. Here I would post restaurant reviews, write recipes and at times rant on food related topics. One rant of course including my aversion to ice cream cones, which I do stand by despite my regression in Modena, of which I am ashamed.

Having grown up in London and the fact that England is of course part of Europe (any UKIP supporters can stop reading now), it seems apt then to talk a bit about the London food scene.

Having traveled for around five weeks and visited fourteen different European cities, I found no food scene that even rivaled that of which we have here in London. Obviously this is a little unfair considering I've lived in London for all of my twenty years and the longest I spent in one single city this summer was just four nights. But I stick by my original comment!

What I love about the London food scene is its diversity. Also, interesting is how certain areas will specialize in different cuisines. If you want a good Turkish meal, East London is a good place to start, say Green lanes. If you are after Michelin starred food, Mayfair is a fine option. If it's Indian you're craving, try Brick lane (actually stay clear), but you catch my drift.

You can find Austrian, Burmese, Afghani, South African (not Nandos!), Korean, Sri Lankan, Ethiopian and Mongolian restaurants, with the list of cuisines going on and on, all without leaving London. It's quite remarkable and fantastic come to think of it. In fact, I could have saved myself some money and just ate my way around London; I've had better French food here than I did in France itself, for example.

The slight downside to this is that it is hard to be overly impressed when eating local cuisine on one's travels. But you can't have your cake and eat it too (though I do try!)

So to round of this London section, here are reviews of two of the better eating experiences I've had in LDN.

## **The Ledbury review**

*127 Ledbury Rd, London W11 2AQ*

Note: Please excuse my particularly shoddy camera-ship in this review. This meal was a few years ago and it has taken me much time and many a photographed meal to get to the level I am now. "And that's saying something!". Hey, there's no need for that, I've got feelings you know!

We didn't so much opt, as we were forced to have the tasting menu, having changed their policy, meaning that Friday and Saturday nights that is all they would be serving; this only came to light after we booked – in for a penny (easy for me to say when I'm not paying!)

Even before the amuse bouche, we were brought some canapés – the amuse before the bouche if you like. A small oat cake topped with foie gras and with a spot of blood orange mousse. Having previously

not enjoyed my first encounter with foie gras, and of course very much against the process behind it, this was pure delight, (all my morals seemed to escape me in an instant). Almost sweet enough to be a dessert and then savoury notes from the foie gras pulled it back, lovely stuff.



The amuse bouche itself was a courgette soup with lobster and shellfish custard. Pleasant as it was, I felt it was a bit lacking in seasoning and the depth of flavour you expect from a soup at a two Michelin starred restaurant, wasn't quite there. I'd take my Booba's\* chicken soup any day; perhaps less refined yes, but it's hard to beat. \*Jewish word for Grandma.



Ceviche of scallop with frozen horseradish and seaweed oil followed and for me, was a touch disappointing. I felt the oil gave a slight bitter tone to the dish and the horseradish was not to my particular palate. The scallops themselves were nice enough, though couldn't quite rectify the damage done by the horseradish, the bastard! After two fairly average courses, I was slightly concerned the meal would not live up to my high expectations ... (that's the hook, you can't help but read on to see the fate of the rest of the meal now....imagine the music from Jaws!)



Next, Flame grilled mackerel with cucumber, a dish I hear Brett Graham considers a bit of a Ledbury signature dish. I consider mackerel a fine ingredient and here it was left to speak for itself, and boy, what a lovely voice it had. The pockets of cucumber giving a refreshing pop in between bites from the the chargrilled skin of the fish. A very well crafted dish, good stuff.

I know my photos aren't to a high standard at the best of times (except that quite amazing one of the ice cream in Modena, I think we can all agree on), but I'm embarrassed to even insert the photo from this particular course. So basically, it looked like a fillet of mackerel with some cucumber and a swipe of some sort of sauce! It was served on a similar plate to the next dish. And no, you can't have a refund!

We were then served white asparagus with morels, truffle and duck ham. While I felt the asparagus had an ever so slightly bitter aftertaste, the combination of all the ingredients amalgamated into a fresh, healthy tasting combination\*. The star of the plate was the duck ham lifting the dish to grand heights. I have to say, I do feel a little bad talking about ham after just discussing my Booba's chicken soup, that's as sacrilegious as it gets.

\*Healthy tasting is a positive description in this case!



Ok, so now going back to the last dish; look at the plate, but instead of white asparagus imagine a fillet



of mackerel and with the mushrooms, instead picture cucumber. See, who needs photos with such gripping description.

Sea bream with toasted quinoa and broccoli stem was next. Perfectly cooked fish worked wonderfully well with the broccoli and the nutty quinoa added the texture to complete a simple, yet tremendously effective dish. The broccoli stem itself coming as a bit of an education to me, showing the heights vegetable offal can reach.



I interrupt this food report, to bring you some very important news, regarding the Ledbury's lavatories. Over the course of a ten course meal, spanning three and a half hours, I felt like I knew the Ledbury's toilets like the back of my hand (which I know fairly well). They were nice enough, without being spectacular, though not what I envisage as a two star toilet. To be fair, I don't think toilets are quite as high on a Michelin inspectors agenda as they are mine. Unfortunately, I don't have a photo for this section of the review.

Now, on to the real stuff as my dad put it – MEAT! Quail with parsnip crisps, pear and walnuts. If found this along with the scallops were the biggest disappointment of the meal. It lacked seasoning and I was just left feeling a bit, meh. The parsnips were a touch dry, almost like a packet of vegetable crisps that have been left out for a while. Its saving grace was the pear – the sweetness of which lifted the quail above mediocrity. And when a pear is coming to your rescue, you know you're in trouble!



The last of the savoury courses was beef with a very clever potato thing, celeriac and bone marrow. The beef was beautifully cooked, pink all the way through. with the salt level just right. The potato thing

was perfectly crunchy and an innovative interpretation on using a potato. The celeriac was sweet and joyfully tender. It was simply perfect.



Our pre – dessert was a lemon verbena cream, burnt meringue and something else (forgive me). Fresh, zingy, light and other such words could be used to describe this dish. It was an absolute joy to behold, perhaps the best dessert of my life – and my mum’s lemon Pavlova takes a lot of beating, oh and Gordon Ramsey’s Royal Hospital Road’s famous ‘Assiette de l’abuerGINE’, of course. G-d that sounds really well to do, but I can’t think of another way to phrase it. Actually in English the ‘Assiette de l’aubergine’ apparently translates as ‘plate of aubergine’ which sounds a bit less poncy and certainly less appetizing.



As it was my birthday, along with the main desert of brown sugar tart with stem ginger ice cream, I was also presented with an extra course of pave of chocolate with lovage ice cream; you can send your hate-mail to my address (or if you don’t know it, simply follow me on twitter where you’ll be able to send me all the abuse you like – a follower’s a follower!)



The brown sugar tart was wonderfully silky and the crunchy base was its perfect partner. The ice cream was pure delight, although having been called ginger ice cream, you (I) expected a bigger ginger punch, not that this detracted from the dish. Again, a simple dish, left to speak for itself and what a lovely voice it had (I'm aware I've used this quite ingenious analogy before, but I'm now struggling – it is the ninth course to be fair, cut me some slack, it's really arduous to review a ten course tasting menu...!).



Perhaps ironically, my 'free dessert' was the biggest portion of the night and also one of the best courses too. It was a very rich chocolate, almost too much so, but the accompanying components balanced the dish well. Three of the finest desserts I've had and most definitely my favorite section of the meal.

The service hit the balance between professionalism, friendliness and attentiveness perfectly. Each dish arrived at a time that meant the meal was very well paced. The maitre'd spent a good amount of time talking to us at the end of the meal, in the middle of a busy service. It is touches like this, along with the 'free' dessert and petit fours (the best of which was a blood orange biscuit) that made the evening so special and why the Ledbury is thought of with such high regard.

Some dishes were so good that they were slightly aggravating in their small portions, I think highlighting the pitfalls of tasting menus in general. Fewer, higher quality, bigger dishes for me would be more preferential to their current tasting menu. On the other hand, the variety does add a sense of drama and excitement which enhances the overall experience in its own way. Jeez, that was just about the most spoilt rotten moan ever!

Food – 8.5/10

Service – 10/10

Value – Not really for me to say!

## The New Angel restaurant review

Now on a student budget, the frequency of visiting fine food establishments has slowed to a snails pace (presumably a snail not too fussed with how its grass is prepared). However, with John Burton Race back in London and his new restaurant, 'The New Angel', offering 50% off, my foodie instincts kicked in and I had to book.

Having been seated by a clearly accomplished waiting team, the menu and breads followed quickly. I went for an onion and potato bread, followed by a soda bread. The onion variety was a little charred on top, giving it a slightly bitter and unwelcome aftertaste, though the sweetness of the onion was very pleasing. The soda bread was beautifully soft and trumped the onion and potato.

After ordering, an amuse bouche was quickly served; a mushroom soup with a parmesan tuille. In terms of amuse bouche of mushroom soups that I've had in the past, this was probably the finest (surprising amount of competition there). Really deep, rich and pure mushroom flavour. The tuille I felt was a little stale and I had to revert to the uncivilized, yet welcome practice of dunking to soften it.



For starters, I decided to shun the advice of the maitre'd (because I'm hard like that) of going for the salmon, instead opting for the scallops, served with onion bhaji and pickled vegetables. Beautifully cooked and presented, if perhaps a little small. I felt however that there could have been a little more of a curry hit in the curry elements and a bit more pickle in the pickled elements. Still, a pretty solid starter. Let's go for a 7/10.



Choosing a main was nigh on torture (albeit being nothing like torture). I would have happily eaten all of the mains offered (aren't I a saint) and had to place my trust in my sister to choose for me, as I was that pathetically indecisive. Her verdict being the pigeon with savoy cabbage, a truffle and madeira sauce, with a mushroom and foie gras tart.

The smell emanating from the dish was just lovely. The pigeon was succulent and perfectly pink. The skin wasn't crispy, instead melted away to gamey deliciousness. The sauce was deep in flavour of

madeira and truffle, balanced perfectly. While rich, it was harmonious with the dish. Savoy cabbage was a nice accompaniment; can't really say much more about that! But the best thing about the dish and in fact the whole night (barring the company of my sister of course ... she paid!) was the mushroom and foie gras tart. Delectably smooth foie gras, working perfectly in the crisp tart shell, with the earthy mushrooms finishing off a wonderful taste sensation. It was a most enjoyable dish. To parallel the theme of indecisiveness here, I can't decide between 8 or 8.5/10.



Dessert was aesthetically stunning; a strawberry and lemon mille feuille, with raspberry sorbet and italian meringue. I almost felt bad taking my first spoonful (well, not quite)... then I tasted it. Ooh, just lovely. Fresh, light, indulgent; all words that I look for in any dessert!

It was a tad hard to eat, with the mille-feuille taking a little persuasion to break free and I felt there could have been a touch more zing in the lemon element, but I'm nit picking. The italian meringue was of the highest quality, putting my own attempts to shame. The real pleasure of this dessert was the number of different combinations, making each spoonful interesting. From the texture of the crisp mille-feuille with the varying creams and meringues around the plate. Also, the flavours of raspberry and the marshmallowsesque of the meringue was beautifully judged. 8/10



Coming in at under thirty quid a head, including a glass of wine, ordered out of a fear of looking cheap by my sister, represents very good value for money. I feel if I were paying full price (£55), perhaps an extra amuse bouche and or a pre – dessert, would have sweetened the deal (pun intended).

Not that I have any power, influence or even credibility, but I'd give it a Michelin on this evidence! Good work John.

## **Food for thought**

Some one (or two) liner food observations coming up now. A few, I'm aware are quite personal to me,

and the others may not actually make much sense. But I wanted the pun 'food for thought' in this book one way or another, so I had to find some content to justify it... enjoy!

What's the deal with cucumber!? It taste like slightly off water. Am I right guys!

The worst thing in food is undercooked quinoa; it feels like you've cracked a tooth.

Closely followed by overcooked quinoa. If I ever get in charge, under my authoritarian regime, I would punish heavily those who cook their quinoa or any grain incorrectly.

Why did Noah save the spiders! Definitely missed a trick there. Not food related no, but felt I had to get it off my chest. Darn you Noah!

What happened to an apple a day keeps the doctor away; now we need at least five portions of fruit and veg a day, plus a couple of goji berries.

Cake batter = mmm

Bread dough = not mmm

What does Luke, as in Luke warm, actually mean? What is Luke? Who is Luke!?

What came first, the chicken or the egg?... Well, if I had to plump for one, I'd go for the egg. This 'plumping' method I'm sure what scientists are using to work this age old question out.

One of the strangest things in life is that white chocolate isn't actually chocolate! A fact that has made me really consider most of my childhood.

Why do restaurants train their waiting team to ask diners questions when they are mid-chew?!

Is there a more love hate activity than washing up as you go along when cooking...? Think about it!

Am I only the one who feels that mayonnaise is the most pointless of all the condiments?! Ooh controversial, that's cucumber, now mayonnaise slammed. No foodstuff is safe!

Maybe natural salt isn't the problem, but rather the chemicals added to it? Hmmm?

Why do people always insist on finishing the marmite analogy; yes you're like marmite, we know what you are trying to get at. I'm like marmite... I go well with toast. See, no need to say you 'either love me or hate me'. Anyway, anyone who has ever said that without irony, are usually the worst sort of people. P.S. I don't mind marmite, my feelings towards it aren't strong enough to either love or hate it. In fact I think the saying should be changed to; 'I'm like marmite, ye I'm alright I suppose'.

You would have thought we would have evolved by now so that cakes lower blood pressure and goji berries increase risk of cancer. Bad system.

Does anyone actually like goji berries!? I mean would anyone eat them if they weren't so apparently healthy for us. They taste like Death. Or rather the rotting corpse of Death.

P.S. I'm surprised as anyone at how much the fictional character of Death has appeared in this easy going, food and travel book.

Come on, 'fess up, how many of you have faked a birthday when eating out? Shameless, all of you, just to get a bit of free cake. For the record, I have never done this...

How gutting is it when instead of receiving an extra dessert when dining on your ACTUAL birthday, the restaurant merely sticks a candle in it! Unless it's an edible candle, hand crafted in white chocolate, I'm not interested.

The most difficult thing about being a self-confessed foody/foodie is the ambiguity of its spelling...

Ah man, have you met that mushroom, he's such a fun guy. (I take full responsibility for such a funny play on words, they are my play on words, that I just made up a minute ago).

Wouldn't 'The Shining' have been such a different film, if after all that, the boy was just asking for some red plums. The little fella was just hungry all that time, all he wanted was some bloody plums, then look what happens. I think a lesson we can all learn from, eat more fruit perhaps! I'm sure this is what Stephen King had in mind when he penned the novel. Red plums, red plums... . I was advised by my sister to take this particular observation out, but I'm convinced it makes sense. I think we know who was right...

Anyway, I think this feature may have run its course now.

You're nearly there, only a few more pages left!

For the eagle memoried of you (doesn't work I'm aware) you'll remember me saying about my best bread basket list; well here it is (with added London restaurants):

- 1) Bocconi, Brussels
- 2) Casserole, Prague
- 3) The manor, London (review in Prologue, ooh a prologue, how fancy and professional)
- 4) Osteria Francscana, Modena
- 5) Mistral Cafe, Prague

Arriving home, enriched by all the culture, landmarks and art that a five week journey through Paris to Rome would be sure to conjure up... or at least this is what my parents were expecting. When the family gathered round for the holiday photos, all two hundred of them, half were of cathedrals, the other half of food! So in this spirt I'll now upload all the loose photos that have yet to feature in the book so far. Don't worry, this will remain mainly food focussed and will definitely contain no cathedrals this time! After my five week trip, I've seen enough cathedrals to last a lifetime, you've seen one, you've seen them all.

# Photo reel



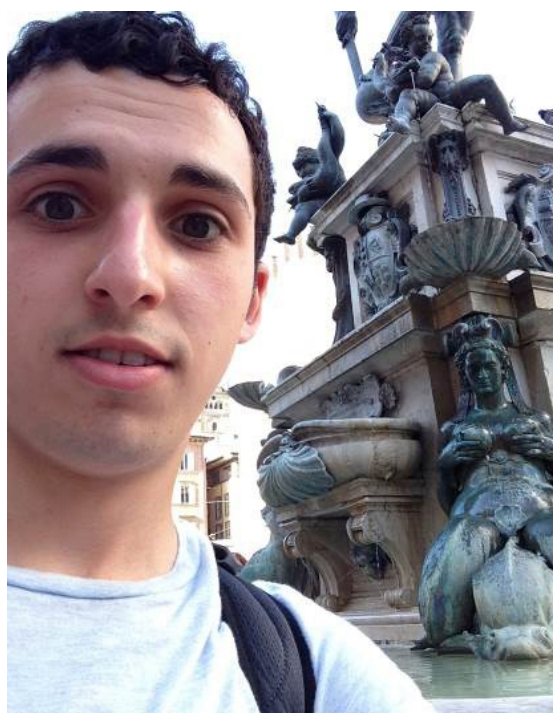






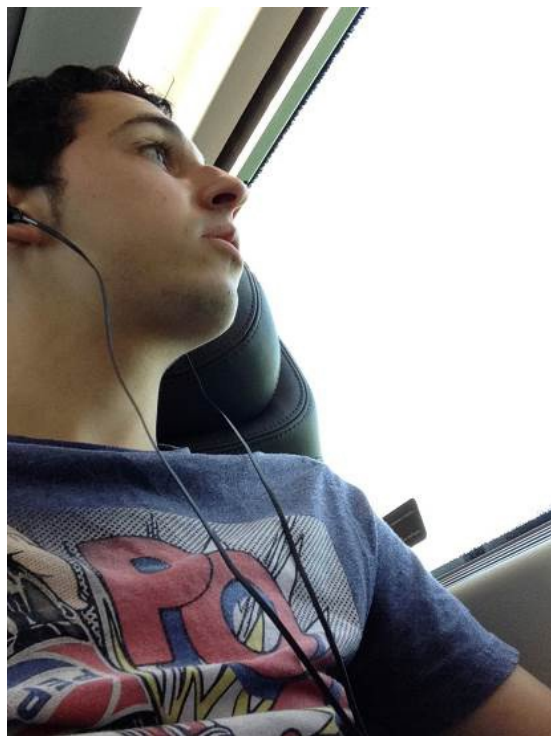












Perhaps an apt photo to end this delicious photo reel on. Not because this is a particularly flattering shot of me, let's face it, the 'up the nostril selfie' is never going to take off. But more in how I can construe some sort of symbolism from it.

Right, so the photo shows me, on my own, listening to music, looking wistfully out of a train window.



With the heavy focus on food and eating throughout my trip, the rest of the time was really just this; me sat on a train, thinking things through in my head, with Led Zeppelin ringing in my ears. This really was my trip. So, when I came home and my parents were asking my opinion on different landmarks, the real 'must sees' of Europe, my response was invariably 'N/A'.

This the reality of my trip then, the real itinerary looking less like a list of cities and more; eat, eat, eat, train, eat, cathedral, eat, train.

But actually it was more than this. It was a chance to address some of my long running social anxiety issues. Issues that I've been dealing with throughout my young adult life and perhaps even earlier; my mum has told me I used to hide my face away whenever we had guests.

No greater example of this came when delivering the brother and sister speech at my older brother's bar mitzvah, when I was just a wee boy of nine. With it all going well, my nervous laughter gradually turned to crying. The situation too overwhelming for my anxious little soul. I once again took to hiding my face away, my sister's arm a shield against the nerves and embarrassment I felt looking in to that crowd.

The problem is, as one gets older it becomes less acceptable and certainly less cute to just hide your face whenever you feel a little anxious; heck, if this was my method of dealing with it, I'd carry a balaclava around with me at all times!

This trip then, while it was partaken on my own and thus seemingly still cocooned in safe isolation, the independence that came with this meant I would have to engage in some of the more practical, at times scary elements of being an older person. I needed this exposure therapy though to help me move past my anxieties. The trip then was a great, much needed learning curve and a much needed kick up the bottom.

You see, I was becoming more and more conscious of the fact that I wasn't really living, merely surviving. Trying to get through the day with as little damage taken to my anxious soul, anxiety that has only grown since inhabiting in that little nine year old boy crying into his sisters arm. Trying to avoid situations that could cause me embarrassment or to feel awkward. Trying to find new excuses to avoid social interaction where I could.

Social anxiety then was starting to control my life, I was the dog, social anxiety was the leash and it had it tight around my neck. It was slowly paralyzing me and I felt I needed to take action before it became untreatable.

Despite wanting to travel alone and despite it sounding paradoxical, solo travel then has helped greatly with my anxiety problems. The simple and small things like checking into a hostel or indeed going in to all of these different restaurants by myself have helped me with what should be simple interaction. I am slowly getting to a point where the action of walking in to a restaurant or phoning up a takeaway will no longer require me to plan out what I'm going to say or having to psyche myself up to be able to get through it. I hope one day I'll be able to just do, not think so bloody much!

Best of all, the horrible ball of nervous tension that used to form in the pit of my stomach, or the heavy heart palpitations or the fluttering voice are symptoms that do not trouble me as often as they once did whenever I was in a slightly unknown situation. It's liberating.

If I think back to the best times of my trip, it was when I was with other people. Socializing, engaging, conversing. When my dad met me for a gorgeous long weekend in Modena. Or when I spent four nights

with a friend who happened to be in Rome for the summer. Talking with those lovely Northern Irish lads in Bruges or that South Korean couple I met in Frankfurt.

I loved some of the time spent of my own of course. Coming across a fabulous Klezmer band (Klezmer the Yiddish for 'musician') in Paris underground, listening to them for as long as I wanted; which actually, after a couple of songs, Klezmer does become slightly repetitive! Sitting in endless parks, music on, just letting the world happen around me and of course the eating arrangements being solely in my custody.

I was close to making a pun on custard there, but I'm bigger and better than.

So next time, I shall travel with other people then? Well, no, probably not. Solo travel still really appeals to me, but now in being less scared of the world and more open minded to new experiences and new people, I will hopefully be able to seek out company when I want it! Unless of course I find a willing female partner to accompany me, that may well make me reconsider my stance!

# Prologue - The Manor

The eagle-eyed amongst you may have spotted the editor has the same surname as me... yes, my editor also happens to double up as my sister; she's cheap, I'll give her that. Throughout my school years, Gaby has been nice/easily persuaded enough to look over and edit pieces of my work; from year nine Spanish work to A-Level English coursework (I hope no-one from Ofsted or Edexcel are reading). I often get slightly carried away with my writing style and can sometimes fail to make sense to those people out there who aren't me. Indeed, she had to take out a slightly strange analogy involving a burlesque dancer when I was talking about yoghurt earlier on in the book. I still stand by that it made perfect sense.

Usually Gaby receives nothing more than good old (no-money exchanging hands) appreciation, but due to the more exhausted length of this publication and the fact I was charging for the book, I felt it only right to pay for her services. In keeping with the theme of the book, I felt the appropriate payment was to take her out for a nice meal. This, again, a purely altruistic move on my side, the fact that I would be her dining partner barely even factored into the equation.

So, after extensive restaurant research, I settled on The Manor, in Clapham. A fairly new restaurant at the time and one which had been earning some rave reviews. Again, the fact that being a new restaurant the prices were slightly lower than normal was mere coincidence.

Anyway, to the meal.

The bread served immediately upon seating set a very high and exciting precedent for the meal. The bread, fresh out of the oven sourdough, with cloud like butter, whipped with chicken skin was a joy to behold. Bread and butter such as this sets the benchmark for the meal to come and boy did it raise the bar high.

Snacks soon followed; more bread, this time potato filled, served with aubergine. As well as this, we went for cod cheeks, which while very pleasant, couldn't quite match the satisfying goodness that is bread and dip.

I can't remember seeing a menu before where I wanted it all, when I was closest to proclaiming, 'I'll have one of everything'\*'. This came at a price (literally); my inability to rein my foodie instincts in, meant when the bill arrived I was paying more than I had budgeted for (sound familiar?). \* 'and make it snappy!'

Like the whole meal, a visit to the toilet was a memorable experience. I can only describe it by comparing it to a mental asylum during play time or art hour. A small note from the restaurant claims they ran out of budget and left a few paint canisters for diners to 'decorate'. The cynic in me (and it grows larger year by year) leads me to think that the management were attempting something cooky and unique, rather than just budgetary miscalculation. Either way, I think it slightly missed the mark. It was a little disturbing... the dripping red drops of paint particularly. I like to take my time in the loo, it's where I have many of my best ideas and is the place I ponder life's big questions. This bathroom did not create an environment where I felt comfortable wondering whether there is an afterlife or not or debating what the meaning of life is, and this, for me, is a shame.

Anyway, back to the food, none of which missed the mark. A starter of Cauliflower, medjool dates, cacao and kaffir lime read like a bit of a car crash on the menu, but intrigued me nonetheless. And so

like those people who take pictures of car crashes, I went for it. I found my self battling with the unusual combination at first, with the dish leaning dangerously close to dessert like sweetness. However, after the initial eyebrow raising mouthfuls, apprehension was replaced with admiration. The cauliflowers slight bitterness the perfect partner for its sweet counterparts. By the end, I was totally enamored with the dish.

Mackerel and partridge followed, both executed expertly. The partridge particularly, served with fermented grains, parsnip and malt granola was just down right tasty.

Unless this book takes off more than expected (tell your friends), I will now struggle to even break even after this meal. Not because The Manor didn't offer good value for money, the contrary is true, but quite simply I have big eyes and thus ordered above the expected and needed threshold. This to the extent that the maitre'd complimented us when he served us our desserts, all three of them.

The desserts all offered something different, like a bride on her wedding day, there was something indulgent, something unusual, something refreshing, something (not) blue. Artichoke and quince, much like the cauliflower earlier, took me a little while to fully appreciate, though come round I did. An apple parfait always goes down a treat and was suitably freshening. Dramatically, the dessert chef, Kira Ghidoni, ex of Fera at Claridge's, went all Heston Blumenthal on us and deep froze a few leaves of sorrel using liquid nitrogen. I take the blame for being one of those foodies who has to snap all they consume and the frozen sorrel went all floppy on us; though it seemed more of a gimmick above anything else to me anyway. This was not to the downfall of the dish however. The frozen chocolate fondant was gloriously indulgent and I appreciated its more recognizable format as one of three desserts.

Ultimately, if the meal hadn't been one of such excitement, flavour and originality, I would have been left feeling a little resentment that my sister is nice is enough to edit this book and thus making me feel that I had to pay her! The cheek!

The Manor is a restaurant in line with what seems to be a new wave of restaurants sweeping the London food scene. What one may call modern British. Healthy(ish), gorgeously presented local produce with a less stuffy atmosphere. A small plate and smaller menu concept is also all the rage, with nordic influences popping up here and there.

This was up there with my most enjoyable and memorable meals I've ever had the pleasure of eating. Not just the flavours of the food, but the originality and inventiveness of its presentation and ingredient combinations. As soon as I left the restaurant door, I was planning my next trip, ready to try everything I couldn't this time.

P.S. I apologize if this review is harder to follow, this being one of the only sections Gaby hasn't looked over.

# Alex Sumray's summary

Thanks to Christian for this brilliant play on words.

At first I wasn't sure how I would fit such a clever play on words into this book, but i've found a way in which it offers me the chance to get something of my chest. A chance to vent at the confusion caused by my surname, Sumray.

So, here goes. Oh, Gaby also hasn't seen this bit and I'm not convinced this would have made the cut if she had... enjoy!

Sumray, such a straightforward and uncomplicated name. If it were a sum it would be, Sum + ray = Sumray. See, simple. But yet it's a name that always causes such aggravation and confusion whenever anyway asks "and, what's your Surname please?",". Following this we usually get, "and how do you pronounce that?", and finally "ok... how do you spell it?"

It has been a barnacle of pain and hardship that all us Sumrays have had stuck on our chests for our entire speaking lives, a great inconvenience we've all had to soldier on through. Yes, the surname Sumray has been the cause of much uncertainty over the years. I've had Soomray, Sunray, Summary, even Samurai. The names Samurai, Alex Samurai. Actually, I believe our family lineage does come from the Polish name 'Szumarai', with my ancestors originating from that part of the world. But come on, we've anglicized it now, no excuses!

Anyway, away from this food unrelated tangent, let me finally sum(ray) up. I think we've all had enough now! This book has been a pleasure to write, though also time-consuming and frustrating at times. Words I hope you wouldn't describe the book as such however!

Perhaps, and I'm not making any excuses here, but perhaps time spent on this book also a little to blame for my second year university results, which were less gooder than I had hoped for. Indeed I almost captioned this book, 'a guide to productive procrastination from university work'. Though I'd need a sub, sub heading, 'and subsequent procrastination from working on this book due to looking at videos on Youtube'.

Anyway, it was all for you, my audience. So if I fail to get a 2:1 or higher come my graduation day and am swallowed up by the competitive world that is the London job market, remember I was writing this book solely for your pleasure; you better have enjoyed it!

Thanks so very much for reading. I really do appreciate it (and your money). If you have made it all the way to the end (and you're not my mum), I salute you.

Yep and that should make the word count, right about, nearly there, now. Well now!

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