



79% of people would increase dwell time if table service was available outside

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As the busy summer months approach, a new survey has found what guest wants when eating or drinking outside. Perhaps the greatest incentive for operators keen to develop their outdoor eating experience is the news that 79% of respondents would increase their dwell time if table service was available outside, according to the finding by HospitalityGem. However this service must be efficient, as 48% of people said that slow or poor service most puts them off from eating outside.

Lunch is the most popular meal for al fresco dining, with the majority of customers stating they would choose to eat two courses. In terms of facilities, 39% would expect a pub to offer a children's play area as part of its outdoor experience, while nearly a third (32%) would like music played through speakers. This is a desire particularly prevalent in those aged 18-35, as they are three times more likely to want music from speakers than those aged 36+ (39.8% compared to 13.09%).

And comfort is key too, with heating, shelter from the wind and garden umbrellas all expected as basic facilities for a pub with outside eating. Operators should also consider separate eating areas for smokers and non-smokers, with respondents to HospitalityGEM's survey commenting: "I really hate how smokers think they own the outdoor area – it's the main reason I don't eat outdoors!" and "Smokers are the biggest issue with eating outside."

Finally, it's worth exploring the technological options available to assist with an outdoor dining experience, as 37% of customers said they would be more inclined to dine al fresco if they could communicate with serving staff via an app on their phone. This figure increases to 45% amongst men, and 53% for the 18-25 age group.

Steven Pike, MD of HospitalityGEM, said: "The summer season is hugely important for any pub operator and there are real opportunities to maximise sales by getting the al fresco dining experience right. It's easy to neglect this area but operators may find opportunities in focussing similar attention on its appearance and facilities as they do on the inside of a site.

"Rather than stretch your team across both areas, and neglect customers as a consequence, make sure you have enough staff on to cover outside as well as inside. This will ensure that all guests feel valued and give team members the opportunity to create a memorable experience that will lead to positive word-of-mouth and repeat visits."