

# British food no longer "that bad"

LONDON - Feeding 10 500 athletes and millions of fans during the Olympics may be a mammoth task but London 2012 is hoping to seize the opportunity to also improve the reputation of British cuisine.

Fish and chips, pie and mash or a full English breakfast are hardly top of the list for an athlete looking to make it to the finish line, let alone win a medal.

However, the London Games organisers are not planning to turn their backs on the national cuisine. Indeed, they are convinced there is something in the British recipe book to please even the fussiest of eaters.

Diverse international cuisine is part of the landscape of modern London. The six host London boroughs are home to communities from 195 of the 204 countries taking part in the Olympics, which start on Friday.

Therefore, alongside porridge and jacket potatoes, roast pork, South Asian curries, Chinese noodles, Italian pasta and pizzas, not forgetting salads, are all on the menu for spectators and athletes alike.

"British food is getting better and better all the time," said Jan Matthews, head of catering for the London Games organisers. "We have food from every corner of the British Isles.

"We went out to make sure it was really a celebration of British food," she told BBC radio.

The majority of the ingredients will come from Britain, in line with the Games' sustainability commitments. "We have gone to great lengths to find top quality, tasty food that celebrates the best of Britain," said London 2012 chief executive Paul Deighton.

Organisers believe they will serve more than 14-million meals during the Games in 40 different locations, in what they claim is "the largest peacetime catering operation in the world".

Some 1,2-million of the meals will be eaten by the 10 500 competitors, coaches and officials living in the Olympic Village, where the rooms come without a kitchen.

The village's giant main dining hall, with its long tables and green plastic chairs, is the size of a football pitch and can accommodate up to 5 000 people.

There are different zones, including Best of Britain; Europe, the Americas and Mediterranean; Asian, and Afro-Caribbean, serving up specialities around the clock.

Halal, kosher, low-salt or allergen-free foods are also available. The athletes are set to consume more than 330 tons of fruit and vegetables, 232 tons of potatoes, 100 tons of meat, 21 tons of cheese, 19 tons of eggs, 75 000 litres of milk and 25000 loaves of bread.

Some athletes are happy with the range on offer, like the US hurdler Kerron Clement, a 2008 Beijing Games gold medalist in the 4x400 metres relay.

"Eating at the Olympic Village. Love the variety of food choices. African, Caribbean, halal cuisine, Indian and Asian and of course McDonald's," he wrote on his Twitter account.

As an official sponsor, the US fast food chain has four temporary restaurants on the Olympic Park in Stratford, east London, including one in the Athletes' Village.

McDonald's estimates it will serve 50 000 Big Macs and 180 000 portions of fries at the Games, the majority at its huge outlet in the Olympic Stadium.

Visitors to the Olympic Park will have some 800 food stands to choose from, offering more than 150 different dishes.

It is not only Britain that will be promoting its cuisine during the Games, the national hospitality houses set up by competing countries will be showcasing their own specialities.

The Casa Italia has the renowned chef Massimo Bottura in place, while Brazil has brought over Roberta Sudbrack, whose had the job of translating the nutritionists' specifications into dishes for its athletes at their training base in Crystal Palace, south London.

Meanwhile, Rene Redzepi, whose Noma establishment in Copenhagen has been voted the best in the world by Restaurant magazine for three years running, will open a special Olympic branch at Claridge's hotel for the Games.

Source: *AFP* via I-NET Bridge

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