



CHRISTMAS MONEY SAVERS

Christmas dinners

With careful planning, eating out during the Christmas season can be quietly festive

While there's certainly magic in the air in the run-up to Christmas, this isn't always felt in restaurants. Sharing a room with several office parties, or being faced with special Christmas menus that don't reflect the food normally produced by the kitchen is enough to bring out anyone's inner Scrooge.

If you want to eat out in peace with family or friends during the party season, here are *The Good Food Guide's* tips for bagging a table in a revelry-free zone.

■ When booking, always ask if the restaurant is offering a special Christmas menu. If the answer is yes, look elsewhere – they are almost certainly catering for office parties.

■ Even if the restaurant is not offering a dedicated Christmas menu, to make absolutely certain there won't be a rowdy group booked in, check the restaurant's policy on group bookings.

■ Location is key. Restaurants in town centres are more likely to attract groups. Head out to a country restaurant for a more intimate meal, but still ask the above questions before booking.



Finding somewhere to have an intimate festive meal can be difficult



■ **Consider going for lunch.** Many restaurants offer excellent lunch deals

– with savings of around £5 to £10 a head compared to dinner prices – and big groups are likely to be less lively than at dinner.

■ If it must be dinner, go to the restaurant early, not late, and plan to go somewhere else afterwards.

■ For a very special treat, try booking a top-rated restaurant – they are unlikely to be catering for large groups. It may be expensive, but it will be memorable.

And for those discerning groups looking for somewhere to make their own Christmas celebration really special, try one of these tips:

■ Think about restaurants that offer a private dining room – more and more places are doing this. And nowadays they are sleek, design-led rooms – a far cry from the claustrophobic basement or bland upstairs room of yore.

■ If you are a smallish group, say a dozen or so, then go for the latest hot ticket – the chef's table. Some may be set right in the kitchen in the heart of the action, others look right into the kitchen through a glass panel – but all give you the full attention of the head chef and his brigade. Note, though, that at this time of year it will be hard to get a booking at the chef's table in any restaurant.

A quiet celebration

Suggestions from *The Good Food Guide 2009*

■ **Agaric Ashburton**
30 North St, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7QD, 01364 654478, www.agaricrestaurant.co.uk

■ **Apicius** 23 Stone St, Cranbrook, Kent TN17 3HE, 01580 714666, www.restaurant-apicius.co.uk

■ **Dining Room** 33 St John St, Ashbourne, Derbyshire DE6 1GP, 01335 300666, www.thediningroomashbourne.co.uk

■ **Longridge Restaurant** (chef's table) 104-106 Higher Rd, Longridge, Lancashire PR3 3SY, 01772 784969, www.heathcotes.co.uk

■ **Lords of the Manor** Upper Slaughter, Gloucestershire GL54 2JD, 01451 820243, www.lordsofthemanor.com

■ **Maze** (chef's table) 10-13 Grosvenor Square, London W1K 6JP, 020 7107 0000, www.gordonramsay.com

■ **Ostlers Close**
25 Bonnygate, Cupar, Fife KY15 4BU 01334 655 574 www.ostlersclose.co.uk

■ **Ramsons** 18 Market Place, Ramsbottom, Greater Manchester BL0 9HT, 01706 825070, www.ramsons-restaurant.com

■ **Restaurant Nathan Outlaw** Marina Villa Hotel, Esplanade Fowey, Cornwall PL23 1HY, 01726 833315, www.themarinahotel.co.uk

■ **Sienna** 36 High West Street, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1UP, 01305 250022, www.siennarestaurant.co.uk

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