

CULTURE COURSE

# The Michelin Guide

10 Chapters

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Generated with Claude

THE MICHELIN GUIDE

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# The Michelin Guide

Course 1 · Chapter 1 · What Is the Michelin Guide? Scope & Sources

*A red book published by a tyre company has become the most famous judge of restaurants in the world, and a chef can describe a Michelin star as a career, a fortune or a burden. This first chapter explains what the guide is, what its stars and other symbols are said to mean, the company behind it, the vocabulary needed to follow the story, why the course treats the guide as culture and not only as a list of restaurants, and where to find reliable sources. Names, dates and figures are from general knowledge and flagged "check". The course does not recommend restaurants or list current stars, which change every year.*

## The Guide in Outline

### The red guide

The Michelin Guide (*Guide Michelin*, known for its red cover) lists restaurants and hotels, with short descriptions and symbols. The first edition appeared in France in 1900, and the guide now covers many countries and cities, each with its own annual edition (check).

### The stars

The guide awards up to three stars to restaurants. The guide's own descriptions are, in summary: one star for "a very good restaurant in its category", two for "excellent cooking, worth a detour", and three for "exceptional cuisine, worth a special journey" (check the current wording). Only a small number of restaurants in the world hold three.

### The company

Michelin is a tyre manufacturer founded in 1889 in Clermont-Ferrand, in central France, by the brothers André and Édouard Michelin (check). The guide began as a marketing project to encourage motorists to drive and so wear out tyres (Chapter 2). The company's mascot, the Michelin Man, or Bibendum, appeared in 1898 (check).

**An unusual institution**

The Michelin Guide is odd as a national institution: it is run by a private firm that does not make restaurants or food, it started as an advertisement, it keeps its inspectors secret, and it has no legal authority. Yet a star can change a restaurant's bookings and a chef's life, and governments, tourist boards and chefs treat it as a national asset. That is why this course treats it as part of French culture, with its own history, myths and language.

## The Symbols and Awards

| Symbol or award (check each) | Meaning |
|---|---|
| Stars (one to three) | The main award for the quality of the cooking, not the decor, service or price. The guide has said that a star does not rate the whole experience (Chapter 3). |
| Bib Gourmand | A symbol showing a face of the Michelin Man licking his lips, for good food at moderate prices. The award began in the 1990s (check). |
| The Michelin Plate | A listing for restaurants that the inspectors found good enough to be included but which have no star or Bib. |
| Green Star | A newer award for restaurants with sustainable practices, introduced in 2020 (check). |
| Keys | A recent award for hotels, introduced in 2024 (check). |
| Knives and forks, and red and black print | Older symbols showing the comfort of a restaurant, which the guide has used for many decades (check the current practice). |
| The Green Guide | A separate series of tourist guides that rate sights by the same idea of "worth a journey", "worth a detour" and "interesting" (check). |

## The Language of the Guide

| Term (check each) | Meaning |
|---|---|
| *Étoile* | A star. A restaurant with one is a *table étoilée*, "a starred table". |
| *Inspecteur* | An inspector, an employee of the guide who visits restaurants anonymously. |

| Term (check each) | Meaning |
|---|---|
| *Carte* and *menu* | The *carte* is the full list of dishes. A *menu* in French is a fixed-price meal, not the whole list as in English. |
| *Terroir* | The idea that food and wine carry the character of the land and place they come from. |
| *Bistrot* and *brasserie* | A bistro is a small, informal restaurant; a brasserie is a large café-restaurant serving a wide menu, often all day. |
| *Auberge* | An inn, often a country restaurant with rooms. |
| *Brigade* | The organised team of a professional kitchen, with the head chef (*chef de cuisine*) at the top. |
| *Sommelier* | The wine waiter, who advises on wine. |
| *Gastronomique* | Relating to fine dining and its traditions. |

## Why a Culture Course?

- **It is a way into French history.** The guide grew with the car, the road network and the rise of tourism in the 20th century (Chapter 2).
- **It is a way into French food and regions.** Its stars map the country's cooking, from Lyon to Paris to the Alps (Chapters 4 and 7).
- **It is a mirror of business and power.** A private firm judges restaurants and chefs, and the ways it does so are debated (Chapters 3, 5 and 8).
- **It has produced myths.** "The stars measure the best" and "inspectors are always anonymous" are claims to test (Chapter 10).

## Scope of the Course

| Part (check) | Chapters | Topics |
|---|---|---|
| Beginnings | 2, 3 | Tyres, roads and the first guide; the stars and the inspectors |
| The chefs | 4, 5 | The three-star tradition; the cost of a star |
| The wider guide | 6, 7 | The guide abroad; bistros, Bibs and the everyday |
| The institution | 8, 9 | Business and controversy; women, diversity and change |
| Method | 10 | Testing the legend |

The course is about the guide as a culture and a story. It is not a list of restaurants, a booking guide or a cookery course. It keeps awards and dates to those needed for the story (all flagged "check"), and it deals with the pressures on chefs factually and respectfully.

## Myths to Test

| Common claim | The question a careful reader asks (check each) |
|---|---|
| The stars show the best restaurants in the world. | Best by what measure, and judged by whom? (Chapters 3 and 10) |
| Michelin inspectors are always anonymous. | What is the evidence, and what do chefs and inspectors say? (Chapter 3) |
| France is the home of the world's best food. | Who says it, and what do the guide's own maps show? (Chapters 4, 6 and 7) |
| Three stars make a fortune. | What do the accounts of chefs and restaurants show? (Chapter 5) |
| The guide is a neutral judge. | What are the company's interests? (Chapter 8) |
| The guide began when a workshop table was propped up by tyres. | What is the origin story, and how well is it sourced? (Chapter 2) |

## Sources to Use

- **The guides themselves.** Early editions have been digitised, including by the French national library's Gallica site (check what is online), and they show how the guide's content and symbols changed.
- **The company.** Michelin has a museum in Clermont-Ferrand and publishes its own account of its history (check), which tells the story from the company's point of view.
- **The press.** Newspapers, food magazines and rival guides such as Gault & Millau report on the awards and the arguments.
- **Chefs' memoirs and interviews.** Vivid and useful, but interested accounts that need other sources beside them.
- **Books and academic work.** Food historians and sociologists have written on the guide and the restaurant world (check which are in print).
- **Literature and film.** Restaurants and food appear in many works covered by *French Literature* and *French Film & Television*.

**A British comparison**

Michelin has a long history in Britain. The company opened a British tyre business in the early 20th century and a factory in Dundee, which closed in 2020 (check). A British edition of the guide was first published in 1911 (check). The British equivalent of the French habit of trusting a guide is the *Good Food Guide*, begun in 1951 by the writer Raymond Postgate (check), and Scotland has its own starred restaurants, in Edinburgh and elsewhere (Chapter 6). The idea of the tyre firm as a travel guide has a close British parallel in the Automobile Association's guides and rosettes (check).

**Check the details**

The awards, symbols and star numbers change every year, and the guide's own wording has been revised over time. The dates and figures here are from memory and should be checked against the guide, the company and a reliable reference. Stories about the guide's early days and about famous chefs are often retold in a polished form, so check the dates and names of any anecdote before you rely on it.

## Exercises

**EXERCISE 1**

**Explain the guide's symbols to a friend who has never used it, saying what each one rewards and what a star does not tell you.**

→ Solution

**EXERCISE 2**

**Describe an imaginary meal at a French country inn in two paragraphs, using at least six terms from the vocabulary table.**

→ Solution

**EXERCISE 3**

Pick two claims from the "Myths to Test" table and say what evidence you would look for and where you would find it.

→ Solution

## Quick Reference

- **Guide:** a red guide published by the tyre company Michelin since 1900 (check)
- **Awards:** one to three stars, Bib Gourmand, Plate, Green Star, Keys
- **Words:** étoile, inspecteur, carte, menu, terroir, bistrot, brasserie, brigade
- **Method:** describe the story, check the figures, test the claims

# The Michelin Guide

Course 1 · Chapter 2 · Origins: Tyres, Roads and the Red Guide

*The Michelin Guide began as an advertisement. At the turn of the 20th century a tyre company in central France wanted more people to drive, and it published a free booklet to help them. This chapter follows that story from the Michelin brothers' rubber business to the first guide of 1900, the legend of the table, the arrival of the stars in the 1920s and 1930s, and the guide's war years. Names, dates and figures are from general knowledge and flagged "check".*

## The Company

### Clermont-Ferrand

In 1889 two brothers, André and Édouard Michelin, took over a small rubber-goods firm in Clermont-Ferrand, in the Auvergne, which they renamed after themselves (check). André was the businessman and Édouard the engineer and artist. The firm made rubber parts and soon turned to tyres.

### The detachable tyre

Pneumatic (air-filled) tyres had been developed in the 1880s, with the Scottish-born inventor John Boyd Dunlop prominent in the story (check). Michelin patented a detachable tyre for bicycles in 1891, and its use by the winner of the long Paris–Brest–Paris race that year made its name (check). In 1895 the brothers fitted pneumatic tyres to a car, the *Éclair*, in the Paris–Bordeaux–Paris race (check).

### The market problem

The firm's customers were few, since in 1900 there were only a few thousand cars in France (check), and cars were expensive. If more people drove more, they would wear out more tyres. The company's answer was to make driving easier and more attractive.

**Marketing as publishing**

Michelin was not the only French business to use publishing to create a market. In *The Tour de France* 2, the sports paper *L'Auto* launched a bicycle race to sell newspapers; Michelin published a guidebook to sell tyres. In both cases a commercial interest created a national institution that outlasted its original purpose. Both stories should be read with that in mind: the founders' motives were commercial, and the cultural importance came later.

## The First Guide, 1900

- **The booklet.** The first *Guide Michelin* appeared in 1900, the year of the Paris Exposition Universelle, and was given away free. A print run of around 35,000 copies is often quoted (check).
- **The contents.** It was a practical manual for motorists: how to change and repair a tyre, maps of towns, lists of garages, petrol stations and mechanics, and hotels. Restaurants were a small part (check).
- **The slogan.** André Michelin's preface is quoted as saying that the guide "appears with the century and will last as long as it" (check). It is a fine line, and a good one to check against a copy of the original.
- **The editions.** The company added more editions for other countries in the following years, including a Belgian edition in the 1900s and a British Isles edition in 1911 (check).
- **The maps and signs.** From 1910 Michelin also published road maps, and the company put up road signs and kilometre markers in the countryside, a form of public service and advertising together (check).

## The Table Story

| Point (check each) | Detail |
|---|---|
| The story | André Michelin is said to have gone into a tyre dealer's workshop and found a pile of free guides propping up a workbench. He concluded that "a man only respects what he pays for" and decided to charge for the guide. |
| What followed | From 1920 the guide was sold, at a price of seven francs, and it began to include a list of restaurants in Paris (check). |

| Point (check each) | Detail |
|---|---|
| The doubt | The story is widely repeated, including by the company, but it is hard to trace to a contemporary source, and some historians think that it is a convenient tale (check). Rising costs, a bigger guide and the postwar economy are other reasons for charging. |
| The lesson | It is an example of a good story that is probably true in its outline and unproven in its detail, a case to test with the six questions in Chapter 10. |

## Restaurants and Stars

- **Growing food.** As tourism increased in the 1920s, the guide gave more space to restaurants. In 1923 the company began to cover regional restaurants as well as Paris ones (check). Inspectors were sent to check them.
- **The first star.** A star for good restaurants appeared in 1926 (check).
- **Two and three stars.** In 1931 the guide introduced the three-level system of one, two and three stars, with descriptions that link the stars to travel: "worth a stop", "worth a detour" and "worth a special journey" (check). The idea ties the quality of the cooking to the driver's journey and so to the use of tyres.
- **The Green Guides.** In 1926 Michelin published the first of its regional tourist guides, the Green Guides, which gave stars to sights and landscapes (check). The same idea was used for monuments.

## The War and After

The Occupation in 1940 to 1944 disrupted the guide, and its publication stopped or was reduced for some of those years (check). Michelin maps were used by the Allied armies in 1944 (check), and the guide returned in 1945. The company was criticised after the war for its dealings under the Occupation, which are a subject of historical research, and it should be described only from the record (check). In the 1950s, with cheap cars and the spread of paid holidays, which began in 1936 (check), the guide's audience grew.

> **A British comparison**

Britain has its own claim in the story of the tyre. The pneumatic tyre was developed by the Scottish veterinary surgeon John Boyd Dunlop, who patented a version in 1888 (check), and Dunlop's company was a main rival to Michelin. Michelin opened a British tyre business before the First World War, built a factory in Dundee and published a British guide from 1911 (check). British motorists had their own guides: the Automobile Association was founded in 1905 and began its handbooks soon after, and the Shell guides began in the 1930s, with the poet John Betjeman among their authors (check).

**Check the details**

The founding story of the guide is told many times, often by Michelin itself. Check the dates of the first guide and of the stars, the print run and the preface wording against the digitised originals and an independent history. Treat the table story as a legend until you find a contemporary source. The company's wartime record should be taken from historians and archives.

## Exercises

**EXERCISE 1**

**Draw up a timeline from 1889 to 1945 with at least eight entries, and mark the ones you would want to check.**

→ Solution

**EXERCISE 2**

**Test the table story as a source: what supports it, who told it and when, what are the alternative explanations, and what would you want to see?**

→ Solution

**EXERCISE 3**

**Compare the Michelin Guide and the Tour de France as marketing projects that became national institutions: what did each company want, and what did each become?**

→ Solution

## Quick Reference

- **The company:** founded in Clermont-Ferrand in 1889 by André and Édouard Michelin (check)
- **The guide:** first free edition in 1900; paid from 1920; stars from 1926 and 1931 (check)
- **The idea:** make driving easier, so people drive more and wear out more tyres
- **The legend:** the table propped by guides, probably a story

# The Michelin Guide

Course 1 · Chapter 3 · The Stars and the Inspectors

*A star is a judgement made by people the public cannot name, using a method that the guide describes only in general terms. This chapter sets out what the guide says its stars measure, how it says its inspectors work, what is known and what is not, how the secrecy has been questioned, and how other ways of rating restaurants compare. It describes the system as the guide presents it, flags where independent evidence is thin, and does not rate any restaurant. Names, dates and figures are from general knowledge and flagged "check".*

## What a Star Is Said to Measure

### The five criteria

The guide has said that the inspectors judge five things on the plate: the quality of the ingredients, the mastery of cooking technique and flavour, the harmony of flavours, the personality of the chef as expressed in the cuisine, and consistency over time and across the menu (check the current wording).

### What is left out

The guide says that stars are not awarded for the decor, the service, the comfort or the price. Those are shown separately by the knives-and-forks symbols and by the text (Chapter 1). A star therefore rates one aspect of a restaurant.

### The restaurant, not the chef

A star belongs in principle to the restaurant and its kitchen, not to a person. When a chef leaves, the restaurant may keep or lose its star, depending on what the next visit finds (check). Chefs speak of "their" stars all the same.

### A judgement with no published scoring

The guide does not publish marks, scoring sheets or the reasons for a decision. Where a rival such as Gault & Millau gives a mark out of 20 (Chapter 4), Michelin gives a symbol

and a few lines. This makes the stars easy to understand and hard to challenge. Everything below about how the inspectors work comes from Michelin's own statements, from interviews with people who have worked or dealt with it, and from a small number of books (check).

## How Inspection Is Said to Work

- **Employees.** The inspectors are salaried staff of Michelin, many with a background in hotel and restaurant management, who work full-time on the guide. The company has not published an exact number, and figures of around a hundred worldwide are sometimes given (check).
- **Anonymity.** Inspectors are said to book under other names, to pay their bills in full and to dine without announcing who they are. The guide presents this as essential to a fair judgement, since the restaurant cannot prepare a special meal.
- **Repeat visits.** A restaurant is said to be visited several times, by more than one inspector, before it is awarded or loses a star, to test consistency (check).
- **Revealing themselves.** The guide has said that an inspector may identify themself after a meal to ask to see the kitchen or to ask questions, so strict anonymity does not apply to every visit (check).
- **The decision.** Awards are decided by discussion among inspectors and editors, and a third star is said to need agreement at a senior level of the guide (check).
- **The announcement.** The new edition is announced once a year at a ceremony or press event, and restaurants often learn their results only then or shortly before (check).

## What Is Known and What Is Not

| Question (check each) | State of the evidence |
|---|---|
| How many restaurants do inspectors visit? | Not published. The guide covers a large number of places each year, and the number of visits per restaurant is not known. |
| Are inspectors always anonymous? | Claimed by the guide, with the exception noted above. Chefs and staff say that they can often recognise inspectors, and the claim is hard to test (Exercise 2). |
| Do inspectors pay their bills? | Stated by the guide. It cannot be checked from outside. |

| Question (check each) | State of the evidence |
|---|---|
| Why was a restaurant promoted or demoted? | Not published. The restaurant can ask, but the guide does not give detailed reasons in public. |
| Can a restaurant appeal? | There is no formal public appeal, though restaurants can ask for a review of a decision (check). |
| Is the process consistent across countries? | The guide says it applies the same criteria everywhere. Independent tests of this are rare and disputed (Chapter 6). |

A former French inspector published a memoir in 2004 criticising how the guide worked and was dismissed, and Michelin disputed his claims (check). It is one of the few insider accounts, and should be read, like the company's statements, as an interested account.

## Rival Ways of Rating

| System (check each) | Method |
|---|---|
| Michelin | Anonymous salaried inspectors; stars and symbols; secret process. |
| Gault & Millau | French guide founded in 1969; marks out of 20 and chef's hats (*toques*); named critics with a more open and opinionated style (check). |
| The Good Food Guide (UK) | Based on reports from readers, checked by inspectors, in the British guide begun in 1951 (check). |
| Online review sites | Open to everyone; large numbers of opinions; hard to verify and open to manipulation. |
| Critics' columns | A named writer's view, in a newspaper or magazine; personal and open to challenge. |

Researchers have studied how chefs respond to ratings and how French cooking changed under the influence of critics and guides. A well-known academic article of 2003 on *nouvelle cuisine* as a movement among French chefs is an example (check). It shows that the guide's influence is a topic for serious research as well as for gossip.

> **A British comparison**
>
> The British guide most often compared with Michelin is the *Good Food Guide*, which relies on readers' reports, and the AA gives rosettes through its own inspectors (check). In the 1950s the Hungarian-born writer Egon Ronay published a British guide with inspectors,

whose aim was to challenge the poor standard of British restaurants (check). In Scotland, the newspapers' restaurant critics and the guides have followed Edinburgh's rise as a restaurant city. Edinburgh's first Michelin stars date from the 2000s, a late arrival compared with Lyon or Paris (check).

**Check the details**

The guide's statements about its inspectors are a company's account of itself. The number of inspectors, the number of visits and the decision process are not independently verified, and former employees' accounts are contested. Check any claim here against the guide's current pages and independent journalism, and say whose account you are using.

## Exercises

**EXERCISE 1**

**List the five criteria, give an example of what each could mean on a plate, and say two things a diner might care about that the criteria leave out.**

→ Solution

**EXERCISE 2**

**Test the claim "Michelin inspectors are always anonymous" with the six questions.**

→ Solution

**EXERCISE 3**

**Compare inspector-based and reader-based rating systems in a short table (strengths, weaknesses, who can check them) and say which you would trust for which purpose.**

→ Solution

## Quick Reference

- **Criteria:** ingredients, technique and flavour, harmony, the chef's personality, consistency (check)
- **Method:** salaried, anonymous inspectors; repeat visits; a collective decision
- **Limits:** no published scores or reasons; claims cannot be checked from outside
- **Rivals:** Gault & Millau, the Good Food Guide, online reviews

# The Michelin Guide

Course 1 · Chapter 4 · The Three-Star Tradition

*The guide's top award has always been tied to a small number of chefs and families whose names became a national legend. This chapter follows the three-star tradition from the women cooks of Lyon in the 1930s, through the chef Fernand Point and his pupils, to Paul Bocuse and the Troisgros family, and then to the revolt of nouvelle cuisine, the rival guide Gault & Millau and the idea that French cooking has a classical canon. It is a story of people and places, told from published sources and flagged where it is a legend. Names, dates and figures are from general knowledge and flagged "check". No current restaurant is recommended.*

## Lyon and the Mères

### The mères lyonnaises

The *mères* ("mothers") of Lyon were women cooks who began in the kitchens of rich households and then opened their own restaurants in the early 20th century, serving robust local food. The best known were Mère Fillioux and Mère Brazier (check). Their cooking was bourgeois home cooking raised to a professional standard.

### Eugénie Brazier

Born in 1895 into a farming family, she trained with Mère Fillioux and opened her own restaurant in Lyon in 1921 (check). In 1933 she held three stars at each of her two restaurants, one in the city and one in the hills outside, and so a total of six, an unmatched achievement (check). Paul Bocuse was among her apprentices.

### The capital of gastronomy

The writer Curnonsky, who was known as the "prince of gastronomes", is said to have called Lyon the world capital of gastronomy in the 1930s (check). The label has been used by the city ever since, and the guide's stars for its restaurants have supported it.

**Women at the top, then forgotten**

The Lyon *mères* were the first great women of the starred kitchen. Over the following decades the top ranks of the guide were mostly filled by men, and the history of the profession was written round male names (Chapter 9). The story of Brazier's six stars is a reminder that this was not always so.

## Fernand Point and His Pupils

- **La Pyramide.** Fernand Point (1897 to 1955) ran La Pyramide in Vienne, south of Lyon. It won three stars in the 1930s, and Point became a model for later chefs, known for his insistence on fresh ingredients and the quality of his butter (check).
- **The school.** Many of the great chefs of the next generation trained or worked with him, including Paul Bocuse, Jean and Pierre Troisgros, Alain Chapel and Louis Outhier (check).
- **The claim.** He is often called the "father of modern French cuisine", a label that comes from the pupils and the press and needs a qualification: it is a claim about influence, not an official title (Chapter 10).
- **Escoffier before him.** The great figure of the earlier generation was Auguste Escoffier (1846 to 1935), who worked in London with the hotelier César Ritz at the Savoy and the Carlton and wrote *Le Guide culinaire* (1903), a codification of classical cooking that shaped professional kitchens (check).

## Bocuse and the Troisgros

| Chef (check each) | Note |
|---|---|
| Paul Bocuse (1926 to 2018) | Ran the family inn at Collonges-au-Mont-d'Or near Lyon. It earned its third star in 1965 and held it for 55 years, until 2020, after the chef's death (check). He was the first chef to become an international celebrity, and founded the Bocuse d'Or cooking competition in 1987 (check). |
| The Troisgros family | Brothers Jean and Pierre Troisgros ran a restaurant at the station hotel in Roanne. It won three stars in 1968 and has kept them ever since, passing through the family to the next generations (check). Their dish of salmon with sorrel, from the early 1960s, became a symbol of the new, lighter cooking. |
| Alain Chapel | A pupil of Point and a leading chef in Mionnay, north of Lyon, until his death in 1990 (check). |

| Chef (check each) | Note |
|---|---|
| Michel Guérard | Created "cuisine minceur", a lighter style of cooking, in the 1970s (check). |
| Joël Robuchon (1945 to 2018) | Won three stars in Paris in the 1980s and is often credited with the largest number of Michelin stars held by one chef, over thirty (check). |

The loss of Bocuse's third star in 2020 caused a national debate, because the chef had died two years earlier and the restaurant had been a symbol of the tradition. The guide said that its decision reflected the quality it found, and the family and many chefs criticised the timing (check). It shows how a star can be treated as a piece of national heritage as well as a rating (Chapter 5).

## Nouvelle Cuisine and Gault & Millau

- **The guide.** Henri Gault and Christian Millau, two Paris journalists, launched their guide in 1969. It gave marks out of 20, used a lively critical style and named chefs as people (check).
- **The label.** In the early 1970s they promoted a new style they called *nouvelle cuisine*, with lighter sauces, shorter cooking times, fresh seasonal ingredients and smaller portions. A list of "ten commandments" of the new cooking appeared in 1973 (check).
- **The chefs.** Bocuse, the Troisgros, Guérard, Chapel and others were the movement's leading names. Researchers have studied it as an example of a group of chefs changing their style and their identity together (Chapter 3).
- **The reaction.** Michelin was seen as more cautious and as favouring classical cooking. Later critics said that the new cuisine was sometimes tiny portions at high prices, and the label lost meaning (check).
- **The legacy.** The lighter, fresher approach became the norm in fine dining, and Gault & Millau stayed a rival voice.

### A British comparison

The Roux brothers, Albert and Michel, opened Le Gavroche in London in 1967 and it became in 1982 the first restaurant in Britain to win three Michelin stars (check). Albert Roux later ran a restaurant at Skibo Castle in the Highlands (check), and a generation of British and Scottish chefs trained in the Roux kitchens. Escoffier's career at the Savoy and the Carlton shows a French chef shaping London dining long before. For an Edinburgh

reader, the contrast is with traditional Scottish dishes such as Cullen skink or cranachan, which are rooted in place as French dishes are in *terroir* (check).

**Check the details**

The history of the great chefs is full of legends told by their pupils and by the press. Check the dates of awards, the number of stars held and the "firsts" against the guide and independent histories. Titles such as "father of modern French cuisine" and "chef of the century" are claims, not facts. The chefs discussed are named from public records only.

## Exercises

**EXERCISE 1**

**Write a short profile of Eugénie Brazier or Fernand Point that separates the documented facts from the stories told about them.**

→ Solution

**EXERCISE 2**

**Test the claim "Lyon is the world capital of gastronomy" with the six questions.**

→ Solution

**EXERCISE 3**

**Compare classical cooking and nouvelle cuisine in a short table (sauces, cooking, portions, ingredients, who promoted it) and say what the quarrel was really about.**

→ Solution

### Quick Reference

- **Lyon:** the mères, Eugénie Brazier's six stars in 1933 (check)
- **Chefs:** Fernand Point, Paul Bocuse, the Troisgros, Chapel, Guérard, Robuchon, Escoffier before them
- **Movement:** nouvelle cuisine, promoted by Gault & Millau from 1969 (check)
- **British link:** the Roux brothers and Le Gavroche, Escoffier in London

*A star brings customers and fame, and it brings costs: of staff, ingredients, premises and nerves. This chapter looks at the economics of a starred kitchen, at chefs who gave their stars back or went to law over them, and at the debate about the pressure the ratings put on chefs, including the deaths of two well-known chefs. That last part is a serious subject. It is handled briefly, from the public record, and without speculation about causes that nobody can know. Names, dates and figures are from general knowledge and flagged "check".*

## The Economics of a Starred Kitchen

### The costs

A starred restaurant usually has a high ratio of staff to diners, expensive ingredients, careful service, a good wine cellar and well-furnished rooms. Many chefs say that the three-star level cannot be profitable from the dining room alone (check). Rent and wages in a large city add to the burden.

### The benefits

A star raises bookings and prices, and attracts press, tourists and investors. Chefs' accounts and some studies suggest that gaining a first star can raise a restaurant's sales substantially, though figures vary and are hard to verify (check). A star can also bring consultancy, books, television, licensing and branded products.

### The strategy

Many leading chefs responded by spreading their name: a flagship restaurant for prestige, and bistros, hotels, shops and licensed products for income. Alain Ducasse and Joël Robuchon built international groups on this model (check).

**A star is not a fortune**

The claim that three stars make a fortune (Chapter 1) is therefore at best half true. They create a valuable name, but they can also create a financial treadmill: to keep the star the

kitchen must keep spending, and a drop in standards or in the economy can be costly. Published accounts are rare, and the best evidence comes from chefs, accountants and journalists, whose views differ.

## Handing Back the Stars

| Case (check each) | What happened |
|---|---|
| Alain Senderens, 2005 | The Paris chef, one of the pioneers of nouvelle cuisine (Chapter 4), announced that he was giving up the three stars of his restaurant Lucas Carton. He reopened it as a less formal restaurant under his own name, saying that the cost of three-star service was too high (check). |
| Marco Pierre White, 1999 | The British chef, who had won three stars in 1995, announced that he was giving up his stars and ending his career as a chef in the kitchen, saying that he was tired of being judged by people he did not respect (check). |
| Sébastien Bras, 2017 | The chef of Le Suquet in Laguiole, who held three stars, asked the guide to remove his restaurant from the next edition, saying that he wanted to cook without the pressure of keeping the stars (check). The guide agreed, and the restaurant was listed again later with fewer stars (check). |
| Marc Veyrat, 2019 and after | A well-known Alpine chef lost a star at one restaurant and took the guide to court, arguing that the decision was wrong. The courts decided in the guide's favour (check). |

The cases differ: Senderens and Bras chose to leave, White left the kitchen, and Veyrat challenged a downgrade. Together they show that a star is not only a prize but a commitment, and that chefs can decide the commitment is too heavy or the judgement unfair. They also show a limit of the system: the guide is a private judgement, and the courts have so far treated it as such.

## Pressure and Two Deaths

- **Bernard Loiseau.** The chef of La Côte d'Or in Saulieu, in Burgundy, held three stars from 1991. He died in February 2003, weeks after a fall in his marks in a rival guide and press reports that he might lose a star (check). The press widely linked his death to the pressure of ratings and to the debts of the business. Michelin said that it had no plan to remove his

stars, and the restaurant kept them until 2016 (check). The causes of a death like this are never simple, and no single cause can be named from outside.

- **Benoît Violier.** The Swiss-based chef of the restaurant de l'Hôtel de Ville in Crissier died in January 2016, shortly after his restaurant was named first in a list of the world's best (check). The cause was reported as suicide, and no more needs to be said.
- **The debate.** After these deaths, chefs, journalists and doctors discussed the pressure of the star system, the long hours and the culture of the professional kitchen (Chapter 9). Some argue that the stars add to an already stressful job; others note that stress is common in the restaurant trade and that blaming a rating guide simplifies the story (check).
- **The guide's position.** Michelin has said that it feels a responsibility to the chefs it rates, and that the stars are meant for diners and are not an instrument of pressure (check).

**If this subject affects you**

If you or someone you know is struggling, support is available. In the UK, the Samaritans can be called free on 116 123, and in France the national number for suicide prevention is 3114 (check the current numbers). In an emergency call the local emergency number.

## Other Costs

- **The staff.** The brigade system is hierarchical and demanding, with long hours, and has been criticised for harsh treatment of junior cooks (Chapter 9).
- **The price to diners.** Tasting menus at three-star level cost many times the price of an ordinary meal, which shapes who can eat there (Chapter 9).
- **Conformity.** Some chefs and critics say that the pursuit of stars encourages restaurants to follow a recognisable style, with similar service, ingredients and decor, in order to meet what they think the inspectors want (check).
- **Waste and supply.** Perfect ingredients and consistency can mean waste and long supply chains, a point raised in the Green Star discussion (Chapter 8).

**A British comparison**

The most famous British example is Marco Pierre White, who in 1995 became the youngest chef to win three stars in Britain and handed them back in 1999 (check). One of his pupils, Gordon Ramsay, was born in Johnstone in Renfrewshire, Scotland, and went on

to win three stars at his own restaurant in London in 2001 (check). Ramsay's later career in television is an example of the way a star can be turned into a brand. In Edinburgh, a Michelin star has meant the same mixture of publicity and pressure for local chefs, but I have not named any current restaurant here.

**Check the details**

This chapter covers disputed and sensitive matters. Dates, ratings and the reasons chefs gave for their decisions are taken from press reports and the chefs' own statements, and should be checked against the original sources. Do not attribute a death to a single cause. The legal cases should be described only from the court's decisions.

## Exercises

**EXERCISE 1**

List the costs and the benefits of a Michelin star to a restaurant owner, and say which are easier to measure and which are not.

→ Solution

**EXERCISE 2**

Choose one chef who handed back or lost stars and write a balanced account that separates the documented facts, the chef's stated reasons and other people's interpretations.

→ Solution

**EXERCISE 3**

Explain why the statement "Michelin stars drive chefs to despair" is hard to test and how a careful writer should handle it.

→ Solution

## Quick Reference

- **Economics:** high costs, a valuable name, diversification into bistros and brands
- **Cases:** Senderens 2005, White 1999, Bras 2017, Veyrat's lawsuit (check)
- **Method:** keep to documented facts; do not name a single cause for a death
- **Help:** Samaritans 116 123 (UK); 3114 (France) (check)

# The Michelin Guide

Course 1 · Chapter 6 · Beyond France

*The guide began as a French motorist's handbook, but today most of its editions cover other countries. This chapter follows its spread: the early foreign editions, the return to Britain in the 1970s, the big moves to the United States and Asia from 2005, and the question each new country asks, which is whether a French-born system can judge another country's food fairly. Dates and figures are from general knowledge and flagged "check". No current restaurant is recommended and no current star list is given.*

## The Early Spread

### Neighbours first

The guide followed the tyre company's markets. Editions for Belgium and for neighbouring countries appeared in the early 20th century, and a Spanish and Portuguese edition came later (check). Like the French guide of 1900 (Chapter 2), these were aimed at motorists.

### A British guide, then a gap

A guide for the British Isles was published around 1911, and the company had a factory in Stoke-on-Trent from 1927 (check). The postwar and modern series began later, with a Great Britain and Ireland guide in 1974 (check).

### Europe-wide guides

An Italian guide was published in 1956 and a "Main Cities of Europe" guide in 1981 (check). By the later 20th century Michelin covered most of western Europe with a standard method (Chapter 3).

**The same method, a different table**

The company's selling point abroad was a uniform scale: a star in Lyon was meant to mean the same as a star in Milan. That is also the main criticism, since a system that began by

judging classical French restaurants has to decide what excellence means in a different cuisine (check).

## The Big Moves: New York, Tokyo, Hong Kong

| Edition (check each) | Note |
|---|---|
| New York City, 2005 | The first American guide, followed by San Francisco and other cities. It was seen as a test of whether the guide could succeed outside Europe, and French-style restaurants were prominent in the first lists. |
| Tokyo, 2007 (published for 2008) | The first Asian guide. Tokyo was soon reported to have more starred restaurants than any other city, which surprised many in France and prompted discussion of the guide's standards (check). |
| Hong Kong and Macau, 2008 | The guide's first Chinese edition. Later editions covered mainland cities, Singapore, Bangkok and other places in Asia (check). |
| Later guides | Many countries and regions have been added, often supported by tourist boards or other partners (Chapter 8). |

Each launch tends to follow a pattern: a press event, a list of stars, praise from some local chefs and complaints from others about the inspectors' knowledge of the local cuisine. In Asia, inclusion of inexpensive street-food and noodle stalls, among them hawker stalls in Singapore, drew wide attention (check). That shows the guide adapting, because it rates the food rather than the setting, at least in principle (Chapter 7).

## Questions Each Country Asks

- **Local or foreign inspectors?** The guide says its inspectors are trained by the company and work in teams, and in many places the teams include locals, but critics sometimes ask whether outsiders understand a cuisine (check).
- **Which cuisines are favoured?** Studies and press discussion have asked whether French techniques and formal service are rewarded more than other styles, and whether that has narrowed fine dining worldwide (Chapter 5, Chapter 8).
- **Is it commercial?** A new guide brings visitors and publicity, and in some places a local tourist body has helped to fund it. Critics ask whether that influences what is listed (Chapter 8).

- **Who else rates?** Local guides, newspapers, online reviews and lists such as the "World's 50 Best" compete with the red guide, and often disagree with it (check).

## Britain and Scotland

- **Early British stars.** The Roux brothers' Le Gavroche gained Britain's first three stars in 1982 (Chapter 4, check). Through the 1980s and 1990s the number of British starred restaurants grew, and chefs trained in the Roux kitchens opened their own.
- **Scotland.** Scottish restaurants have been in the Great Britain and Ireland guide for decades. Edinburgh's first starred restaurant in the modern period is usually dated to around 2001, and a chef at a hotel in Perthshire held two stars for many years until his death in 2019 (check). Beyond those points I have not listed particular restaurants, because star lists change each year.
- **The Scottish food story.** Produce such as langoustines, beef, game, salmon and soft fruit is often cited when Scottish cooking is praised, though one should treat claims of national "greatness" with the same caution as claims about Lyon (Chapter 4).
- **The rivals.** The Good Food Guide (British, started in 1951) and newspaper critics offered other views, and still do (check).

**A British comparison**

For an Edinburgh reader the guide is not foreign: Michelin had a British factory by 1927 and a British guide before the First World War (check). What the 1974 relaunch changed was the idea that British restaurants could be judged by a standard once thought to belong to France. A good exercise is to compare how a local paper, the Good Food Guide and the red guide describe the same kind of restaurant, and see which words each uses.

**Check the details**

Years of foreign editions are easy to confuse, because a guide is often announced in one year and dated for the next. Check each against the guide's own announcement. Counts such as "more stars than Paris" depend on the year and on the edition and should not be quoted without a date.

## Exercises

**EXERCISE 1**

Draw a timeline of the guide's spread, from the first foreign edition to the Asian editions, marking which dates need checking.

→ Solution

**EXERCISE 2**

Choose a cuisine you know and list three difficulties a French-trained inspector might have in judging it, and one way the guide could address each.

→ Solution

**EXERCISE 3**

Compare the Michelin guide with one other British guide or critic on the same question: what are they each trying to tell the reader?

→ Solution

### Quick Reference

- **Early:** neighbours, a British guide c.1911, Italy 1956, Great Britain and Ireland 1974 (check)
- **Big moves:** New York 2005, Tokyo 2007, Hong Kong and Macau 2008 (check)
- **Questions:** local knowledge, cuisine bias, commercial partners, rival guides
- **Scotland:** in the guide for decades; do not rely on star lists, which change yearly

# The Michelin Guide

Course 1 · Chapter 7 · Bistros, Bibs and the Everyday

*The stars get the headlines, but most of the guide's pages describe ordinary places: bistros, brasseries and inns where a meal costs a fraction of a three-star dinner. This chapter looks at the guide's lower categories, the Bib Gourmand and the Plate, at the kinds of everyday French eating place, at the "bistronomy" movement that blurred the line between the two worlds, and at the idea of terroir and the UNESCO listing of the French gastronomic meal. Dates and details are from general knowledge and flagged "check". No restaurant is recommended and no prices are quoted.*

## The Guide's Lower Rungs

### The Bib Gourmand

Named after Bibendum, the Michelin Man, it marks restaurants that offer good food at a moderate price. The name was adopted in the 1990s, though the guide had marked good-value meals earlier (check). The price limit varies by country and is set by the guide.

### The Plate

A plate and cutlery symbol, used for restaurants with "good cooking" that have no star or Bib. It became a regular category in the 2010s (check). It tells readers that a place has been inspected and passed.

### The older symbols

Crossed forks and spoons grade comfort, from one to five, and a separate set of signs describes hotels and gardens (Chapter 3). These rate the setting, not the food.

**The guide is mostly not about stars**

Only a small share of the restaurants in a typical edition have stars (check). That makes the claim "Michelin is all about stars" (Chapter 1) a distortion. For many readers, the Bib and the Plate are more useful than the stars, and some chefs prize a Bib as much as a star.

## Where the French Eat Every Day

| Type (check each) | What it is |
|---|---|
| Bistro | A small, informal restaurant serving simple dishes at moderate prices. The origin of the word is disputed, and the story that it comes from a Russian word for "quickly" is probably a legend (check). |
| Brasserie | A larger restaurant, often serving beer and a set menu of classics such as choucroute or oysters, open at long hours. The word means "brewery" (check). |
| Bouchon | A traditional Lyon eating place serving local dishes such as sausages, tripe and pork, in a casual setting (check). Some carry an association label for authenticity. |
| Auberge | An inn, often in the countryside, serving regional cooking. Several famous restaurants began as inns (Chapter 4). |
| Café | A place for coffee, drinks and light meals, central to French daily life. |

These types are not rigid; a bistro may be as good as a restaurant with a star, and the guide's categories are based on the food and not on the name. They matter because, for most French people, going out to eat means these places, not the grand dining rooms.

## Bistronomy and Terroir

- **Bistronomy.** The word joins "bistro" and "gastronomy" and describes a style of cooking from the 1990s, in which trained chefs left expensive dining rooms to open small restaurants with creative food at lower prices. Yves Camdeborde's La Régalade in Paris, opened in 1992, is often cited as an early example (check).
- **Why it mattered.** It showed that high-quality cooking did not need formal service and a large staff (Chapter 5). The guide followed by giving Bib Gourmands and sometimes stars to informal places.
- **Terroir.** The word means more than "soil". It joins land, climate, local tradition and the people who work it, and it underpins the French system of protected names for wine and cheese, the AOC (check). In a menu it signals local ingredients and regional dishes.
- **A caution.** *Terroir* can be a real quality and a marketing word. A claim that food tastes of its place should be tested like other claims (Chapter 10).

## The UNESCO Listing

- **What was listed.** In 2010 UNESCO added "the gastronomic meal of the French" to its list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (check).
- **What it covers.** It is not a list of restaurants or of dishes. It recognises a social custom: a meal for celebrations, with a set order of courses, the choice of good products, the pairing of food and wine and the pleasure of sharing the table (check).
- **The link to the guide.** The red guide did not create this custom, but it recorded and promoted a culture of eating out. The two give different pictures of French food: the guide ranks restaurants, while the UNESCO text describes a way of eating at home and together.
- **Criticism.** Some writers have asked whether such a listing freezes a changing tradition, or serves the tourist industry (check).

### A British comparison

The British equivalent of the bistro is the pub, and the "gastropub", which began in London in the early 1990s, is a close parallel to bistronomy: trained cooks serving serious food in an informal room (check). The Michelin guide has given Bib Gourmands and stars to pubs in Britain (check). For an Edinburgh reader, the Scottish counterpart of *terroir* is the idea of provenance behind Scotch beef, Scotch lamb and Scottish salmon, which have protected names under a similar system (check). A dish like Cullen skink belongs to a place in the same way as a bouchon dish does to Lyon.

### Check the details

Category names, symbols and price limits change from edition to edition and from country to country, so check the current guide for the definitions. The origin stories of words such as "bistro" are often legends. The UNESCO text should be read in the original rather than relied on in summaries.

## Exercises

**EXERCISE 1**

Explain the difference between a star, a Bib Gourmand and a Plate, and say which gives the reader the most practical information.

→ Solution

**EXERCISE 2**

Write a short comparison of French bistronomy and the British gastropub, covering origin, aim, price and what each shows about fine dining.

→ Solution

**EXERCISE 3**

Test the statement "this dish tastes of its terroir" with a few questions: what evidence would show it, and what might it hide?

→ Solution

## Quick Reference

- **Categories:** stars, Bib Gourmand (good value), Plate (inspected and good), comfort symbols
- **Eating places:** bistro, brasserie, bouchon, auberge, café
- **Bistronomy:** trained chefs, informal rooms, lower prices, from the 1990s (check)
- **UNESCO 2010:** the gastronomic meal of the French, a custom and not a restaurant list (check)

# The Michelin Guide

Course 1 · Chapter 8 · Business, Brand and Controversy

*The red guide is a product of a company that sells tyres. This chapter asks how the guide earns its place in that business, how it has widened its range with the Green Star and the Keys, what is known about tourist boards paying for local editions, what a former inspector wrote in 2004, and how online reviews have changed its position. The aim is to separate what is documented from what is alleged. Names, dates and figures are from general knowledge and flagged "check". Allegations are described as allegations.*

## Why a Tyre Company Publishes a Guide

### The original idea

In 1900 the guide was meant to encourage motoring, and so tyre wear (Chapter 2). A tale says that the brothers realised people would value it only if it was not given away free (Chapter 1, check).

### Today's role

The guide is now best understood as a brand-builder and a publishing and travel business. It gives the company a famous name linked to quality, and it now sells through books, an app and a website, along with hotel and travel services (check).

### What is not public

The company does not publish the guide's accounts, the number of inspectors or the cost of the inspections in detail, so claims about its profit or loss are mostly estimates (check).

**A conflict of interest?**

The company that owns the guide earns money from tyres, not from restaurants. That is an argument for independence, since it does not depend on restaurants' fees. Against it, the guide exists to serve the brand, and the brand may profit from the guide's growth into

new markets and new products. Both statements are true and neither shows bias on its own.

## New Awards: Green Star and Keys

| Award (check each) | What it is |
|---|---|
| Green Star | Introduced in 2020 for restaurants judged to be leaders in sustainable practice, such as sourcing, reducing waste and using local produce. It is separate from the star scale, so a restaurant with no stars can hold one. |
| Michelin Keys | Introduced for hotels in 2024, on a scale of one to three keys, to give hotels a rating of the same kind as the restaurant stars (check). |
| Other labels | Special prizes for service, sommeliers and young chefs have been added in recent years (check). |

These additions respond to criticism that the stars reward waste and luxury (Chapter 5), and they extend the brand to hotels and travel. Both of these facts can be true together. Critics ask how a sustainability award can be inspected fairly, since the criteria are less easy to measure than a plate of food, and whether it can be separated from marketing.

## Money, Partners and Allegations

- **Tourist boards.** In several countries and regions, press reports have said that a tourist body or government agency paid the company to produce a local guide (check). The company has said that it takes such funding but that it does not influence which restaurants are chosen or how they are rated (check).
- **The question to ask.** A payment for producing a guide is not the same as a payment for a rating, but critics say that it gives the funder a reason to want a good result. The evidence is a matter for the reports and the documents, and I have not tried to settle it.
- **A former inspector.** In 2004 a former inspector, Pascal Rémy, published a book, *L'Inspecteur se met à table*, claiming that the guide had too few inspectors and that some restaurants were rarely visited. He was dismissed by the company, which disputed his account (check). The book is a source to read critically: it is a single insider's claim, and the company's reply is part of the record.

- **The guide's defence.** The company says that its inspectors are anonymous, pay their bills and visit more than once, and that the stars are decided collectively (Chapter 3).
- **Legal cases.** Where chefs have taken the guide to court, as in Chapter 5, the courts have so far treated the ratings as opinion (check).

## The Online Challenge

- **Reviews by the crowd.** Websites and apps with millions of diners' reviews give ratings for far more restaurants than the guide can visit, and update them daily (check).
- **The guide's reply.** It moved online, with a website and app that include its selections, booking links and some editorial pieces (check).
- **Different strengths.** The guide offers a small number of professional, anonymous judgements; the sites offer many opinions with errors and manipulation. Studies of fake reviews on public platforms show a real problem (check).
- **The influence of social media.** A photogenic dish can matter as much as a rating, which may change what chefs aim for (Chapter 5).

### A British comparison

The Good Food Guide, newspaper critics and review websites all compete in Britain. A useful exercise for an Edinburgh reader is to look at one restaurant's coverage in the red guide, a newspaper review and the crowd reviews, and ask who has the best chance of being right and what each might gain from their verdict. Scotland's national tourist body, VisitScotland, runs its own quality schemes for visitor attractions and accommodation, which gives another comparison with the Keys (check).

### Check the details

This chapter touches on allegations about a living company and living people. Keep to documented facts and attributions ("reported", "said", "disputed"). Dates of new awards and the details of the 2004 book should be checked against the guide's announcements and the press of the time. Do not state any payment as fact unless a document says so.

## Exercises

**EXERCISE 1**

List the arguments that the guide's tyre-company ownership makes it more independent, and the arguments that it makes it less so.

→ Solution

**EXERCISE 2**

Take a claim about the guide from a former insider or a critic and show how you would assess it, using the source, the evidence and the guide's reply.

→ Solution

**EXERCISE 3**

Compare the red guide with a crowd-review site: three strengths and three weaknesses of each.

→ Solution

## Quick Reference

- **Ownership:** a tyre company; independence of restaurants, but a brand motive
- **New awards:** Green Star 2020, Keys for hotels 2024 (check)
- **Allegations:** tourist-board funding; a former inspector's 2004 book (disputed)
- **Rivals:** crowd reviews, newspaper critics, other guides

# The Michelin Guide

Course 1 · Chapter 9 · Women, Diversity and Change

*The great names in the guide's history are mostly men, yet Chapter 4 began with a woman who held six stars. This chapter asks why women became rarer at the top, who has broken through, what the culture of the professional kitchen is accused of, and who actually gets to eat in the starred restaurants. It also looks at how the guide and the profession say they are changing. Names, dates and figures are from general knowledge and flagged "check". Only published achievements are discussed, and no allegation against an individual is repeated.*

## From the Mères to the Present

### The starting point

Eugénie Brazier held three stars at each of two restaurants in 1933 (Chapter 4, check). Other women ran leading restaurants in the early and middle 20th century, often as family businesses.

### The long gap

Through the later 20th century the highest ratings went mostly to men. Explanations offered include a male-dominated training system, the hours, the difficulty of raising money and the way the press told the story (check). These are explanations, not proofs.

### Recent breakthroughs

Anne-Sophie Pic, at her family's restaurant in Valence, won three stars in 2007 (check). Dominique Crenn in San Francisco was reported as the first woman in the United States with three stars, in 2018 (check). Clare Smyth, born in Northern Ireland, won three stars for her London restaurant in 2021 (check).

**A small share at the top**

Women have always been a minority among the starred chefs in published counts, and the share at the three-star level is smaller still, though figures vary by country and year

(check). Ask of any such number: which year, which country, and what exactly was counted (head chefs, owners, or all kitchen staff)?

## Kitchen Culture

- **The brigade.** The strict hierarchy of the professional kitchen, devised by Escoffier (Chapter 4), was built for discipline and speed. Many chefs now say that it has also allowed shouting, bullying and long unpaid hours (check).
- **Public debate.** Since the 2010s chefs, journalists and unions in several countries have discussed working conditions, harassment and the pay of junior staff. Some restaurants have changed their hours and rotas as a result (check).
- **The link to the stars.** Some argue that the pursuit of perfection justifies the pressure on staff, while others say that the best kitchens have shown that it is not needed (Chapter 5).
- **What is established.** Surveys of hospitality workers have reported long hours and high stress (check). The detail varies by country, and I have not repeated any allegation about named people, which is a matter for the courts and the press.

## Who Gets to Eat There?

| Factor | Effect |
|---|---|
| Price | A top tasting menu may cost many times an ordinary meal, so the diners are mostly wealthy or celebrating (check). |
| Cuisine | Studies and chefs' comments suggest that French and European fine-dining styles have been rewarded more than others, though the guide's Asian editions have changed the picture (Chapter 6, check). |
| Formality | Dress, etiquette and menus in French can put people off, though many restaurants have relaxed (Chapter 7). |
| Geography | Starred restaurants cluster in big cities and tourist areas. |

The Bib Gourmand and the Plate (Chapter 7) were in part a reply to this problem, since they point to good food at more moderate prices. Critics say that the red guide still speaks mainly to travellers with money.

## Change from Inside

- **The guide.** It has said that it wants a more diverse set of inspectors and cuisines, and it has introduced special prizes for service, sommeliers and young chefs (Chapter 8, check). Whether this changes the results is a question for the data over time.
- **The chefs.** A number of leading chefs have set up training schemes, shorter working weeks and mentoring for women and for people from outside the traditional route (check).
- **The diners.** Online reviews and social media let more people talk about restaurants than the critics of the past (Chapter 8).
- **What to measure.** A careful study would track the share of women and of minority-owned places across years, the pay and hours in the kitchens, and the prices.

**A British comparison**

Britain has its own examples of women who built restaurants and careers: Clare Smyth's three stars for a London restaurant in 2021 were reported as a first for a British woman (check), and British restaurant cooks and writers such as Prue Leith and Delia Smith shaped how ordinary people cook, outside the starred world (check). For an Edinburgh reader, a useful local exercise is to look at the kitchens, pay and training in Scotland's hospitality sector, which employs many people and has its own debates about hours and wages (check).

**Check the details**

Statements such as "the first woman to" are easy to get wrong, because they depend on the country, the date and the level. Check them against the guide's announcements and several sources. This chapter does not repeat accusations about individuals; keep to published and attributed facts.

## Exercises

**EXERCISE 1**

**Write three careful sentences about women in the guide's history, each with a date or a source to check, and none claiming more than the evidence shows.**

→ Solution

**EXERCISE 2**

List four possible explanations for the small share of women at the top, and for each say what evidence would support or weaken it.

→ Solution

**EXERCISE 3**

Design a short study to find out whether the guide is becoming more diverse: what you would count, over what years, and what could go wrong.

→ Solution

## Quick Reference

- **Women:** Brazier 1933; Pic 2007; Crenn 2018; Smyth 2021 (check)
- **Kitchens:** brigade hierarchy, long hours, a public debate on conditions
- **Access:** price, cuisine bias, formality, location
- **Method:** "first woman to" claims need a country, a date and a level

# The Michelin Guide

Course 1 · Chapter 10 · Testing the Legend

*The guide comes wrapped in slogans: "the stars measure the best", "inspectors are always anonymous", "three stars make a fortune". This last chapter pulls the course together: a timeline, a table that tests the six claims from Chapter 1 against what the course found, a six-question method for testing any claim about the guide, and some advice on reading a restaurant guide as a historical source. Dates are from the earlier chapters and flagged "check" where they were.*

## A Timeline of the Red Guide

| Date (check each) | Event | Chapter |
|---|---|---|
| 1889 to 1900 | The Michelin tyre company and the first guide for motorists | 2 |
| 1926 to 1936 | Stars introduced, then the three-level scale and its definitions | 3 |
| 1933 | Eugénie Brazier holds six stars at two restaurants | 4 |
| 1960s to 1970s | Bocuse, the Troisgros and nouvelle cuisine; Gault & Millau from 1969 | 4 |
| 1974 to 1982 | The modern British guide; Le Gavroche's three stars | 4, 6 |
| 2003, 2004 | Loiseau's death; a former inspector's book | 5, 8 |
| 2005 to 2008 | New York, Tokyo, Hong Kong; Senderens hands back stars | 5, 6 |
| 2010 | UNESCO lists the French gastronomic meal | 7 |
| 2017 to 2020 | Bras asks to be removed; Veyrat's case; the Green Star; Bocuse's third star lost | 4, 5, 8 |
| 2024 | Keys for hotels | 8 |

## Myths and Evidence

These are the six claims from Chapter 1, with a verdict based on the sources this course used. A verdict is a judgement, not a proof.

| Claim | What the course found | Verdict |
|---|---|---|
| The stars show the best restaurants in the world. | They reflect one company's method, applied by its inspectors, to the cooking on the plate. Other guides | Overstated |

| Claim | What the course found | Verdict |
|---|---|---|
| | and critics disagree, and the criteria are partly secret (Chapters 3, 6, 8). | |
| Michelin inspectors are always anonymous. | The company says they are, and accounts by former inspectors and chefs broadly agree that they are anonymous at the time of a visit, but the claim cannot be fully checked from outside (Chapters 3, 8). | Largely supported, not provable |
| France is the home of the world's best food. | French cooking has a great influence on professional kitchens, but "best" is a judgement, and the guide's growth in Asia and the Americas shows other traditions (Chapters 4, 6, 7). | An opinion, not a fact |
| Three stars make a fortune. | They create a valuable name, but the costs are high, and many chefs say the dining room alone does not pay (Chapter 5). | Half true |
| The guide is a neutral judge. | It is independent of restaurants' fees, but owned by a company with its own interests, and some local editions have had partners (Chapter 8). | Not fully supported |
| The guide began when a workshop table was propped up by tyres. | A popular story, told in several versions, which depends on the company's own accounts (Chapters 1, 2). | Unproven |

## Testing a Claim: Six Questions

1. **Who says it?** The company, a chef, a critic, a rival, a tourist board?
2. **What is the evidence?** A document, a count, an interview, or only repetition?
3. **What does it mean?** Define the key words: "best", "neutral", "anonymous", "fortune".
4. **Who gains?** Who profits if people believe it?
5. **What does an independent source say?** Court records, accounts, other guides, academic work.
6. **What would change my mind?** State the evidence that would count against the claim.

**Worked example: "A star guarantees a great meal"**

**Who says it?** Mostly diners, the press and restaurants' own advertising; the guide says a star rates the cooking (Chapter 3). **Evidence:** a star is awarded on the basis of several

visits, but a given night can be better or worse, and the guide does not promise a result. **Meaning:** "great" is subjective. **Who gains?** Restaurants, which sell on the star. **Independent sources:** reviews by critics and diners, which sometimes disagree with the guide. **What would change my mind?** A large, fair sample of diners' blind ratings across starred and unstarred places. **Verdict:** a star is a good sign of consistent cooking, not a guarantee.

## A Restaurant Guide as a Source

- **What it records.** Early editions show where motorists went, what they ate and what was available, and so tell us about travel and class as much as about cooking (Chapter 2).
- **What it leaves out.** It lists only a small selection of eating places and rarely mentions the people who work in them, the prices of whole meals at home, or the opinions of ordinary diners.
- **Its voice.** Its short entries and symbols present judgement as fact, so a reader needs to remember that they come from a company, from a method and from a time.
- **Use it with others.** Set it beside rival guides, newspapers, chefs' memoirs, court records and statistics (Chapter 1).

**A British comparison**

Choose an Edinburgh restaurant, and set the red guide's entry beside a newspaper review and the Good Food Guide's entry, if there is one. Then use the six questions: who wrote each, what do they say, and what do they not say? Do the same for a pub meal in the Highlands. The exercise shows how much a guide's voice shapes what we think we know, and it does not depend on any particular restaurant.

**Check the details**

The timeline and tables summarise earlier chapters, and their "check" items still apply. The verdicts are conclusions from the sources used in this course, not proof, and a different set of sources might shift the emphasis. Stars, awards and ownership change often, so check any current detail against the guide itself.

## Exercises

**EXERCISE 1**

Choose two claims from the "Myths and Evidence" table and give a different verdict from the table, with your reasons and the evidence you would want.

→ Solution

**EXERCISE 2**

Apply the six questions to the claim "Michelin ratings make restaurants better" and write a verdict in two sentences.

→ Solution

**EXERCISE 3**

Write a 150-word note on how a historian could use an old edition of the guide as a source, and what they should not conclude from it.

→ Solution

### Quick Reference

- **Six questions:** who says it, evidence, meaning, who gains, independent sources, what would change my mind
- **Verdicts:** overstated, largely supported, an opinion, half true, not fully supported, unproven
- **Source:** a guide records a selection and speaks in a company voice; use it with others
- **Always:** check dates, stars and ownership against the guide itself

**Course complete**

You have finished *The Michelin Guide*: what the guide is, its origins in tyres and roads, the stars and the inspectors, the three-star tradition, the cost of a star, the guide abroad, bistros and Bibs, business and controversy, women and change, and a method for testing the legend. Related courses include *French Film & Television*, *French Literature*, *French Music*, *Jeux Sans Frontières*, *Franco-Belgian Comics: Bande Dessinée*, *The Tour de France*, *Les Bleus: The History of French Football* and *French Fashion & Haute Couture*.