

Eating out at hawker centres, food courts & kopitiam 3 times a day costs about S\$17: IPS study

Cheaper prata in the West and cheaper drinks in the North.

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A study conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), found that the average cost of eating out for three meals is S\$16.89, if one visits hawker centres, food courts and kopitiam.

IPS surveyed 829 food establishments -- 92 hawker centres, 101 food courts, and 636 kopitiam -- across 26 residential neighbourhoods in Singapore.

Compare and contrast

This was done across two different periods, Sep. 2022 to Nov. 2022 and Jan. 2023 to Feb. 2023.

The second round of data collection "served as both data verification and to examine the effects -- if any -- of the increase of the

Goods and Services Tax (GST) on food prices, given that GST rose by 1 percentage point to 8 per cent since 1 January 2023," according to the study.

A total of 18 food items were included, consisting of both drinks and mains.

These include commonly purchased items such as Kopi O, iced Milo, breakfast set (kaya toast, two soft-boiled eggs, and a coffee or tea), chicken chop, fishball noodles, and economic rice (two vegetables and one meat).

The neighbourhoods included those from the Central, East, North-East and West areas, such as Bishan, Bedok, Sembawang, Ang Mo Kio and Clementi.

The cheapest drink available was Kopi O (S\$1.09) on average, while the most expensive was iced Milo (S\$1.81) on average.

One plain and one egg prata is the cheapest food item at S\$2.97 on average while chicken chop was the most expensive at S\$7.58 on average.

When comparing the difference between food establishments, hawker centres were the cheapest, followed by kopitiam (coffee shops) with food courts being the most expensive.

Variations in meal costs

Dinner was generally the most expensive meal at S\$6.20 on average, with lunch coming in a close second at S\$6.01, and breakfast being the cheapest at S\$4.81.

With the average cost of eating out three meals at S\$16.89, the total monthly cost (30 days) averages out to S\$506.70.

The cheapest breakfast combination is the breakfast set, at S\$3.25 on average while the most expensive meal for breakfast is Kopi with wanton noodles with an average price of S\$5.32.

Lunch's cheapest combinations come up to S\$4.41, consisting of Kopi O and economic rice, while iced Milo and chicken chop add up to be the most expensive at S\$9.58.

Dinner offers similar average prices, with S\$4.43 being the cheapest combination of Kopi O and economic rice, and the same most expensive combo of an iced Milo and chicken chop at S\$9.58.

Meal costs differed by location

When comparing all regions, the cheapest breakfast costs S\$2, which was breakfast sets found in Bukit Panjang, Jurong West and Toa Payoh, as well as Kopi O and nasi lemak in Toa Payoh.

Toa Payoh (Kopi O and nasi lemak), along with Sembawang (iced canned drink with vegetarian bee hoon) has the cheapest lunch combinations.

The cheapest dinner can be found at Jurong East (Kopi O with fishball noodles), costing S\$2.80.

The most expensive breakfast goes to Bishan, with Kopi and wanton noodles at S\$9.50, while the most expensive lunch and dinner could be found in Queenstown (iced Milo with chicken briyani) and Tampines (iced Milo with chicken briyani or chicken chop) at S\$14.90.

Limitations

IPS acknowledged the areas where their study came up short.

It mentioned limitations of data, such as having to exclude stalls that were closed during their visits due to lack of manpower and resources, even if the stalls sold some of the food items used in testing.

Food prices were also mostly based off of menu prices, which IPS pointed out could lead to occasional price differences, especially if menu was not regularly updated.

Additionally, the prices of food were taken at face value, meaning that the differences in quantity and quality were not accounted for.

Due to the first round of data collection occurring over a period of two months, there were instances where certain stalls and even entire food establishments went through significant renovations, transfers of ownerships and closures, leading to a lack of common measures from the data collected.

Costs expected to rise

When IPS returned in 2023 to compare the prices, they found out that many of the hawkers have said that have yet to increase the prices, but are not opposed to the idea.

IPS concluded that the cost of eating out in Singapore will "likely to continue to rise relative to individuals and household incomes in the future."