

Where to find cheapest food and drink in Singapore: IPS Makan Index 2.0

Findings from the Makan Index 2.0 revealed that prata is cheapest in West Singapore.

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SINGAPORE — Eating out in Singapore is likely to cost higher relative to individual and household incomes in the future, according to findings from the Makan Index 2.0 report by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS).

And that's even if one were to eat only at hawker centres when dining out, given that prices have also increased significantly over the past six months as tracked by IPS researchers in two periods.

Iced Milo, for instance, experienced the highest relative price increase on average in the drinks category, going up by 6.98 per cent or S\$0.12. Breakfast sets – defined as kaya toast, two soft-boiled eggs and a coffee or tea – experienced the highest relative increase in prices on average in the food category, rising by 6.84 per cent, or S\$0.21.

The Makan Index 2.0 study observed the prices of 18 food and drink items commonly sold in hawker centres, kopitiams (coffeeshops) and food courts from September to November 2022 and January to February 2023. A team of researchers surveyed a total of 829 food establishments — 92 hawker centres, 101 food courts and 636 kopitiams — across 26 residential neighbourhoods in Singapore.

Significant price changes

Researchers found that the prices of 13 out of the 18 items surveyed saw significant changes between late 2022 and early 2023. Besides Iced Milo and breakfast sets, these include items like sliced fish soup and fishball noodles.

Iced milo cost S\$1.72 on average in late 2022 and increased to S\$1.84 by early 2023. Breakfast sets cost on average S\$3.07 in late 2022 and increased to S\$3.28 in early 2023.

Large relative increases were also seen in meals like sliced fish soup with rice. It cost on average of S\$5.57 in late 2022 and increased to S\$5.85 in early 2023, while fishball noodles cost on average S\$3.68 in late 2022 and increased to S\$3.87 in early 2023.

Where to get the cheapest items?

Regional price differences were also found for nine out of the 18 food and drinks surveyed.

The study noted that all drinks and chicken chop were cheapest in the Central region, while the North region had the cheapest breakfast sets and fishball noodles, and prata was cheapest in the West.

The North had the highest average lunch and dinner costs at S\$6.22 and S\$6.40 respectively, while the lowest lunch and dinner was in Central at S\$5.88 and S\$6.05. In all regions, the cheapest possible breakfast is S\$2.00 – found in Toa Payoh (Kopi O and nasi lemak) and Sembawang (iced canned drink with vegetarian bee hoon).

In general, the researchers found, food and drink prices were lowest in hawker centres, followed by kopitiam and then food courts. However, the breakfast set, vegetarian bee hoon set, chicken rice, and economic rice were exceptions.

"Chicken rice and economic rice were cheapest in kopitiam, followed by hawker centres and then food courts," the survey summarised. "Vegetarian bee hoon set was cheapest in hawker centres, followed by food courts and then kopitiam."

What's the price of eating out?

Across all neighbourhoods, the study also found that a meal (with a drink) of breakfast on average cost S\$4.81, lunch cost S\$6.01 and dinner cost S\$6.20. Researchers also showed how food costs can be a significant portion of an individual's monthly expenditure, with an average budget of S\$16.89 needed for having three meals a day at these eateries.

This means that individuals can expect meal costs of around S\$118.23 a week or S\$506.70 for a month of 30 days. If an individual eliminates drinks from their meal, they can still expect to pay around S\$371.70 for a month of 30 days. For a family of four adults, the cost of three meals a day will be an average of S\$67.56.