A Self-Proclaimed Food Connoisseur's Guide to London Cheap Eats

Saniya Udeshi

Congratulations, you've gotten into UCL! The hard part is over… or so you think. Welcome to London: where the air is fresh (if you like eau de bus fumes) and a sandwich can cost more than your weekly grocery budget.

To save you the harrowing experience of living on Tesco popcorn and pot noodles, I've put together a guide for cheap eats in London - and it's free.

The Half-Price Hustle at Wasabi & Itsu

Forget happy hour - your new favourite time of day is 'half an hour before closing'. Wasabi and Itsu both slash their (already great) prices by 50% in the final 30 minutes before closing. Warning: the competition is fierce. I've seen friendships end over the last pack of chicken gyoza.

P.S. Couple it with student discounts from Unidays and Student Beans for *basically* free meals.

UCL Cafés are Worth the Wait

Gone are the days of mediocre meals at your school canteens - UCL cafés serve up some delicious and generously-portioned meals. My personal favourite is the Gordon's Café chicken biryani (and this is coming from an Indian girl who takes her masalas more seriously than her dissertation). I also recommend Print Room lunches - warm jacket potatoes, international ready-meals, and every drink you could ever imagine. Not to mention buying on campus means you can justify the expenses as *contributing to the academic ecosystem*.

Incredible Deals on The Fork

Stumbling upon The Fork, a website that constantly offers too-good-to-be-true deals on the downlow, has changed my life. Some of Central London's best eateries pop up here with near-illegal deals. My favourite is a little shack-styled spot just behind Ramsay Hall called Ragam, that often offers 50% off when you make a reservation with The Fork. Chris Martin was right - lights *truly* will guide you home.

Increase your iCloud Storage and Download for Dinner

Your phone is more than just a doomscrolling device. Too Good To Go will sell you mystery bags of surplus food for pocket change, and chain loyalty apps (such as Leon, Costa, and Slim Chickens) throw free food at you if you play their points game right. Yes, you are trading your data for discounted falafel - but at this point, they probably already know your shoe size and what you dreamed about last night.

Meal Deal Nation

Tesco, Sainsbury's, Boots - the list is endless. For under £4, you get the sacred sandwich/wrap/pasta + drink + snack combo. The trick is to avoid the depressing pasta pots and go for winners like the Gym Kitchen wraps instead. Pair it with an Innocent smoothie and pre-cut fruits, and you can almost convince yourself you're thriving. My proudest moment? Scoring a Tesco meal deal worth £8.90 for £3.60. Forget crypto, **this** is the smartest investment I've ever made.

Deploy the Parent Trap

If all else fails, fall back on the oldest trick in the book: emotional blackmail and parental visits. Drop subtle hints about your 'tight budget' and not-so-subtle ones about upcoming birthdays. They'll swoop in to treat you to a proper restaurant - the kind with actual plates and real cutlery. You might even score dessert. Don't think of it as manipulation - it's more like… strategic communication.

Look, London **will** devour your bank balance faster than you can devour your lunch. But with the right timing, a few apps, and a pinch of shamelessness, you can eat surprisingly well for surprisingly little. And when the day comes that you're flush with cash? You'll still find yourself hovering outside Itsu at 8:29pm - because some habits last for life.