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French restaurants feel the crunch

By David Chazan, 28 April 2009
BBC News, Paris

Many of the best restaurants in France are being forced to tighten their belts and lower prices as recession eats into their profits.

More tourists and office workers can now be seen munching sandwiches and ready-prepared salads in streets and parks, rather than forking out for a sit-down meal.

One Paris restaurant now offers a two-course set lunch for less than five euros (£4.50) in a brave attempt to hold on to its customers. "We offer this 'anti-crisis' menu every Tuesday and we don't make any money out of it," says the owner, Laurent Krill. "But it brings people in, and some of them come back on other days."

Several Michelin-starred restaurants have slashed their lunchtime prices by up to a third.

Other cheaper restaurants have simplified their menus and lowered prices. Many of those that rely on tourists say they are now struggling to stay in business.

The owner of one restaurant in a prime Paris location off the Boulevard Saint-Germain says he used to receive tour groups nearly every day but now he is lucky to get one a week. "I'm hoping things will pick up in May when the peak season starts," he said, surveying rows of empty tables. "But who knows if they'll have as much money in their pockets?"

Many restaurants with a local clientele still seem to be doing well. But more than 6,000 restaurants are reported to have closed in France last year - and that was before the economic crunch really started to bite.

Sandwich outlets, on the other hand, seem to be doing a roaring trade, much to the chagrin of the restaurateurs.

On the banks of the Seine I came across three Parisians enjoying a picnic. They had brought a folding table and chairs, an ice bucket and silver cutlery to enjoy an economical lunch and a bottle of wine.

"I still go to restaurants but I tend to choose cheaper ones," one of them told me. "It's a question of money."

The French government has persuaded the European Union to allow it to chop value-added tax on restaurant meals from 19.6% to 5.5% but the cut will only come in next year, and some restaurateurs fear that will be too late.

1. Read the text and present it
2. With the help of the links below, explain the strategies some French chefs have invented to curb the crisis

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/4284514/Top-French-chefs-turning-to-fast-food-because-of-financial-crisis.html>

http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/content/sep2008/gb20080924_089894.htm