

# JOHN PORTER

Christmas is fast approaching, which means it's time to start thinking about your festive menus. If you're looking to offer something other than the usual turkey and try a few new ideas, John Porter has some suggestions that could come in handy...

It's time to talk turkey. As well as sprouts, cranberry sauce, mince pies, and all the other festive fare that makes its annual appearance on Christmas menus. If all is going to plan, by now the bookings diary will be filling up nicely as offices, clubs, and groups of friends include a meal at the pub as part of their Christmas campaign.

Increasingly, many pubs now open for more than just the traditional pre-lunch Christmas pint on 25<sup>th</sup> December, with some of the major pub restaurant brands recording their biggest day of the year in terms of money in the till. Of course, that reflects the higher prices charged for Christmas dinner on the day itself, and doesn't factor in how much extra they're paying staff to work.

Whether or not the maths of opening on Christmas Day make sense is a decision each pub has to make for itself. Either way, there is plenty of trade to be won from the start of December onwards. One key to a successful Christmas is to keep the food offer as flexible as possible. For every group of customers looking for turkey with all the trimmings, there are others looking for different options:

- **Buffet** The casual, stand-up appeal of a buffet works for groups that don't have the budget for a three course meal, or who want to network during their festive get-together. If you have the space, buffets can work side-by-side with sit down Christmas meals, and by carefully selection the food offered can be largely prepared in advance, preventing kitchen bottlenecks;
- **Sharing patters** Don't neglect your drinking trade. Friends meeting informally for a Christmas drink will see the appeal of sharing plates of cheese, cold meat, and similar snack food after a pint or two;
- **Turkey alternatives** Many people have turkey overload well before 25<sup>th</sup> December, so offering main course options such as fish, home-made pies,



and, of course, interesting vegetarian choices will appeal. For large groups, take an email on booking and ask for menu choices a few days before to help with kitchen planning.

Another way to differentiate your offer is to make the most of one of your USPs as a pub – great beer. Matching your beer range to festive food gives customers a different experience, and can be done simply by offering suggestions and tasting notes on menus. You can try your own matches, but here's some suggestions to get you started:

- **Roast turkey** The richness of a roast dinner is nicely complemented by the malty notes of *London Pride*, while the hop character helps to clear the palate for the next mouthful;
- **Smoked salmon** The gentle, refreshing bitterness

“ IN TERMS OF MONEY IN TILLS, SOME OF THE MAJOR BRANDS RECORD CHRISTMAS DAY AS THEIR BIGGEST OF THE YEAR ”



of *Seafarers* is an ideal match with the smoky flavour of salmon, as well as with other seafood dishes served as an alternative to turkey;

- **Mince pies and Christmas pudding** Match the rich, dark and complex flavours of *London Porter* to the fruit and spice in these traditional Christmas desserts;
- **Cheeseboard** The rich fruit and citrus notes of *ESB* match with the strong flavours of Stilton and Cheddar, as well as any chutney;
- **Turkey curry** If you're making the most of leftovers to serve up a spicy turkey curry between Boxing Day and New Year, match it to the distinctive hoppiness of *Bengal Lancer*, a true India Pale Ale. If nothing else, it'll give you something to look forward to once the Christmas rush is over! 🍷

JOHN PORTER'S COLUMN IS  
BROUGHT TO YOU IN ASSOCIATION  
WITH STAROPRAMEN



A 5% Bohemian Pilsner with a full-bodied taste, rich floral hop aroma, notably soft and malty but with a delicate well-balanced flavour.  
Brewed in Smichov, Prague since 1869.