

# Cheerful and Cheap

Lower priced sandwiches are likely to be sought after options if the credit crunch really starts to hit consumers' pockets. Nellie Nichols goes in search of options under £2.0 in the high street and finds many of them surprisingly good

I think the world is filling up with more and more deluded people. There are those that think Tony Blair will one day really be "up there with Churchill" and others that believe that Sarah Palin knows what she's talking about and isn't just the most attractive person in the U.S. presidential race with a great taste in shoes.

Then there are those that really believe Britain stands a chance in equalling China's spectacular achievement in the 2012 Olympics, and, oh yes, that we're not in a recession but just experiencing a credit crunch.

The reality of the situation is we are clearly in a global economic crisis and the only way out of it is to stay positive, sit tight, keep calm, ride the storm and run a tight ship. Call me old fashioned but I'm just a black and white realist which I think is the only way to be.

The British, after all, have an excellent track record of coping and, with fourteen years of food rationing in the Second World War under our belt, seem to be more than capable of surviving most things.

At the recent Lunch! 08 Show I was invited onto the panel discussing the rather inauspiciously titled 'What of Tomorrow', to discuss, amongst other things, the future of the food to go market and the issues affecting it. I spoke of the innovation opportunity I truly believe exists at the lower end of the market, which got me thinking I should set myself a target of finding the most cost effective, but still delicious and interesting sandwiches on the market today under £2.00.

That meant buying sandwiches under £2. I wasn't even allowing myself anything that cost exactly £2.00, and the other criteria was to, hopefully, be able to buy two products in the same price bracket in each outlet. I was intrigued to find

out if retailers have begun to fill their shelves with more economic lunch offerings?

To make this exercise fair and square I decided to visit a cross section of the high street. First to the coffee shops, but I drew a blank with Caffè Nero, Starbucks had zilch, under that price and the same with Costa. I did later discover that Coffee Republic could have made the criteria with 5p to spare within budget with their egg mayo, but sadly there wasn't one on my route. Clearly buying under £2.00 was going to prove quite a challenge for a satisfying, good cheap lunch and I was now getting rather hungry.

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Next port of call was Pret but the variety of Slim Prets didn't count, not being whole sandwiches, so that had me really struggling. The only sandwich on offer below £2.00 was the ubiquitous but very over seasoned, salty and a little disappointing egg mayo and cress at £1.50.

On to Greggs and things were definitely looking up on the availability front, which was just as well as it certainly wasn't on the customer service side of the counter (but I think she was just having a bad day and should really have been sent home). I

UNDER  
£2



bought  
a no-  
nonsense egg  
mayo on white  
(nothing green added, just a bit  
of black pepper) for an outstanding  
£1.09 and a chicken and bacon for £1.95.

The egg mayo was lovely, creamy and delicious on the softest bread, and, blissfully, without any of those surprising hidden big lumps of egg white which I hate. The chicken and bacon again was a great value sandwich and one I'd eat again.

Cheered on, I hit Tesco where there was an inviting and generous selection under £2.00 doing a thriving trade. I was even a bit spoilt for choice. In the end I selected a limited edition southern fried chicken and a deep fill ploughman's, both at £1.80. The southern fried chicken was one of the



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most interesting sandwiches I'd tried at this low price; very well thought through seasoned chicken and full of lots of crunchy red peppers and onion. The concertinaed slabs of strong delicious cheddar were unbelievably generous in the ploughman's, which had the welcome addition of a feisty acidic chutney – here was a cheese sandwich to be very proud of.

Could Sainsbury's, Waitrose or M & S top any of these? The stakes were getting impressively high I'd decided. On to Waitrose and here it was the egg mayo salad at £1.80 which also impressively gave a low calorie count of only 302 and a seafood cocktail at £1.60.

As a rule of thumb - let's face it - egg sandwiches can often be jaw droppingly boring and nearly everyone's cheapest offering, but here was an egg sandwich that dazzled in its make up. It's also the first sandwich I've tried under £2.00 on a really interesting bread, made with bran and poppy seeds, some fabulous mixed leaves of apollo lettuce, lollo rosso, baby spinach and red chard, vine ripened tomatoes and thick cucumber.

This has to be the absolute king of egg mayo sandwiches on the high street today and a true example of how to add interest and value to the norm. The seafood cocktail was another winner on oatmeal bread and, unlike other more disappointing versions of itself, also had the bonus addition of some jolly good prawns.

At Sainsbury's the shelves had been raided, which was good for them but not for me, so it was tuna and sweet corn and prawn mayo at £1.40 -





both good stalwarts and well made. So last but not least came M & S. Could they come in below the £2.00 mark and include a sprinkling of innovation? Well, why would anyone doubt them. There is a cheese and onion at a truly amazing price and great value of £1.00 and a Taw Valley (added provenance) cheese and celery at £1.30. Well, first of all, this isn't just any cheese and onion; someone's had the bright idea to use the less fierce than white, more beautiful to look at, red onion. A sandwich not necessarily low in fat but incredibly delicious and I love it. Then, well, the cheese and celery is very impressively made. The cheese is delicately shaved and proves such a well thought out and appropriate contrast in textures to its perfect partner, the crunchy celery above it.

So what's my conclusion? Well, if I had to choose a winner in all these I'd be hard pushed, to be honest, and have to say it would be a joint first between Tesco, M & S and Waitrose, because they all proved it's more than possible not just to make a good sandwich under £2.00, but to make an enjoyable and innovative one at the same time.

Perhaps the coffee shops should take heed because it doesn't take rocket science to work out that these are the products consumers will be attracted to in what appear to be tougher market conditions.

The days of expensive sandwiches with your latte may not be as frequent in the coming year while everyone tightens their belts and learns the disciplines of becoming more sensible with their cash. I don't believe the market is under any true threat, just that there is far more opportunity for sales growth in offering lower, more reasonably costed products.

It's always been easier to develop at the higher end with the wealth of more expensive and sexier ingredients like crayfish and avocado. But I believe now is the time to bite the economic bullet in the development kitchen and develop without the easy street likes of rare roast beef, heady smoked salmon and succulent tiger prawns. This is without doubt the most challenging development of all, and the stuff that will test any developer's mettle. But as I've said many times, and at the risk of being a total bore and repeating myself, cheap never means it has to be nasty; far from it actually.

This is not a case of 'trading down' but more a case of innovative and delicious value for money. All that's actually required is a good lateral imagination in the kitchen. I think this is a tremendous opportunity to develop some outstanding award winning products and if anyone needs any help, just shout.

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