



The History of Fast Food

Fast food means big business, with hamburgers and pizzas leading the way. But these two European dishes did not get the fast food treatment until after Richard and Maurice McDonald opened the world's first fast food restaurant in San Bernardino, California, in 1948.

Fast food is the term given to many items that can be prepared and served quickly. While any meal with low preparation time can be considered to be fast food, such as TV dinners, typically the term refers to food sold in a restaurant or store which is rapidly prepared and served to the customer in a packaged form for take out/take away. The term "fast food" was recognized in a dictionary by Merriam-Webster in 1951.

The Hamburger:

The American-style hamburger sandwich was first officially recorded at the St Louis World's Fair in 1904; hot dogs were popularized at the same fair, and America's first pizzeria opened in New York the following year. The stage was being set for the advent of fast food, but it was to be nearly half a century before the McDonald brothers introduced their Speedee Service System, marking the beginning of the fast food phenomenon that has since spread from North America across the world.

The fast food phenomenon evolved from drive-in restaurants built in southern California in the early 1940s. Restaurateurs wanted to take advantage of the rising popularity of cars, so they designed restaurants that let people order and eat without leaving their vehicles. Then, in 1948, they decided to try something new: they simplified the menu so that there was nothing that required a knife, spoon or fork; they replaced all the crockery and glassware with disposable cups, plates and bags; they dispensed with waitresses, bus boys and carhops, leaving customers to come to the counter to order and collect their food; and, most importantly (so far as the concept of fast food is concerned), they divided the food preparation tasks into a production line.

The McDonald brothers opened their redesigned restaurant in 1948, and several fast-food chains that exist today opened soon after. Burger King and Taco Bell got their start in the 1950s, and Wendy's opened in 1969. Some chains, like Carl's Jr., KFC and Jack in the Box, existed before the Speedee Service System, but modified their cooking techniques after its debut. McDonald's, which started it all, is now the world's largest fast-food chain.

They called it the Speedee Service System, and the result was so successful that a host of other fast food restaurants soon followed: Keith G. Kramer flew to California, ate at McDonald's, then flew home to Florida where he founded Burger King (as Insta-Burger-King] in 1953 with his father-in-law, Matthew Burns, and Dave Thomas founded Wendy's Old-Fashioned Hamburger Restaurant in Columbus, Ohio, in 1969. George Clark, co-founder of Burger Queen, said later that: 'Our food was exactly the same as McDonald's. If I had looked at McDonald's and saw someone flipping hamburgers while he was hanging by his feet, I would have copied it.'