# Dessert cafés drive a £500 million revival of UK high streets amid changing social habits



Over the past decade, dessert cafés and ice-cream parlours have emerged as vibrant players in the effort to rejuvenate the UK's high streets and night-time economy. As more individuals seek affordable and enjoyable alternatives to pubs or elaborate dining experiences, these establishments are undergoing a renaissance. Analysts from Green Street, a commercial property research firm, report that nearly 700 new dessert outlets have opened across the UK, contributing to a market valued at over £500 million. This growth includes both established chains and beloved independent parlours, such as The Pudding Stop in St Albans and Cloud 9 in Brighton, stretching from Aberdeen to Plymouth.

Consumer sentiment has shifted; dessert cafés are increasingly viewed as welcoming social spaces where people can indulge in sweet treats without the pressures that often accompany alcohol-centric venues. Ria, a 24-year-old customer at a Creams location in London, remarked that such places are perfect for casual chats and affordable indulgence, especially at the end of the week. Similarly, Gemma Saunders highlights the family-friendly atmosphere these venues offer, as her daughter Elizabeth finds them a pleasant and less expensive alternative to pizza nights.

However, the recent economic surge has brought challenges. Dessert parlours have had to manage rising costs due to inflated dairy prices and increased overheads from energy and wages, coupled with fluctuating visitor numbers in high streets. Despite this, chains like Creams, which boasts 93 locations almost entirely operated by franchisees, are optimistic about expansion. The brand plans to open around ten new outlets this year and is exploring innovative locations such as cinemas and train stations. Their offerings, which include extravagant items like the Hot ‘n’ Cold Chocolate Fudge Volcano Sundae and creative milkshakes, cater to a contemporary audience drawn both by nostalgia and the effects of social media on dining choices.

Alongside Creams, other competitors like Kaspa’s and Heavenly Desserts are also experiencing growth. Kaspa’s has recently launched its first central London café, while Heavenly Desserts aims to double its presence to 100 locations within the next year. The market is witnessing a diversification of offerings, with independent parlours introducing unique flavours and experiences, capitalising on a cultural trend toward alcohol-free socialising. Jay Rayner notes that this shift towards dessert-centric outings has been amplified by a growing appetite for visually engaging treats, making their selection ideal for social media sharing, particularly among younger demographics.

Area by area, the revival of these dessert cafés serves as a nostalgic yet modern solution to the need for social spaces in communities. Kien Tan from PricewaterhouseCoopers regards these venues as “democratic meeting places,” particularly appealing to non-drinkers and older patrons seeking relaxed environments. The dynamic atmosphere is complemented by the colourful decor that often mimics a nightclub aesthetic, creating a unique dining experience distinct from traditional coffee shops, which generally close in the early afternoon.

As the cost-of-living crisis continues, some analysts suggest that while dessert outings may seem indulgent, they often provide a more economical alternative to full meals. Everett Fieldgate, CEO of Creams, notes that consumers are increasingly prioritising where and how they spend their money, opting for dessert outings as a form of affordable luxury. His insights show that even as costs rise, the allure of sharing a gigantic sundae with friends is comparatively less burdensome than a costly dinner at a traditional restaurant.

Looking forward, the dessert café phenomenon appears poised to play a critical role not only in revitalising British high streets but also in reshaping social interactions to embrace a less alcohol-reliant culture. While operators like Creams continue to adapt to market dynamics, a push from government support could further bolster these establishments, allowing them to flourish amidst rising business challenges.

In sum, what began as a niche market for sweet-toothed patrons has blossomed into a substantial segment of the hospitality industry, offering a refreshing and inclusive alternative to the conventional night out in today’s evolving social landscape.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/may/31/sweet-dreams-dessert-parlours-help-to-revive-uks-high-streets), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/food/2023/jul/16/it-feels-sinless-jay-rayner-britain-ice-cream-business-booming)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/may/31/sweet-dreams-dessert-parlours-help-to-revive-uks-high-streets), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/jun/17/ice-cream-parlours-great-britain-flavours-covid)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/may/09/ice-cream-parlours-booming-instagram-teetotalism), [[5]](https://ahdb.org.uk/news/consumer-insight-the-inside-scoop-on-dessert-parlours)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/may/31/sweet-dreams-dessert-parlours-help-to-revive-uks-high-streets), [[6]](https://cremefilledchurros.com/dessert-cafes-british-culture/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/may/31/sweet-dreams-dessert-parlours-help-to-revive-uks-high-streets), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/jun/17/ice-cream-parlours-great-britain-flavours-covid)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/food/2023/jul/16/it-feels-sinless-jay-rayner-britain-ice-cream-business-booming), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/may/09/ice-cream-parlours-booming-instagram-teetotalism)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/may/31/sweet-dreams-dessert-parlours-help-to-revive-uks-high-streets), [[6]](https://cremefilledchurros.com/dessert-cafes-british-culture/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/may/31/sweet-dreams-dessert-parlours-help-to-revive-uks-high-streets), [[6]](https://cremefilledchurros.com/dessert-cafes-british-culture/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/may/31/sweet-dreams-dessert-parlours-help-to-revive-uks-high-streets> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/food/2023/jul/16/it-feels-sinless-jay-rayner-britain-ice-cream-business-booming> - In this article, Jay Rayner explores the booming ice-cream business in Britain, highlighting the rise of parlours and dessert cafes as alternatives to traditional pubs and expensive meals. He discusses the growth of chains like Creams and Kaspa's, which have expanded to over 100 outlets each, and the emergence of independent establishments offering unique flavours and experiences. The piece also touches on the cultural shift towards alcohol-free socialising and the role of social media in popularising these dessert venues. Rayner notes that the market is now worth over £500 million, indicating a significant transformation in the UK's dining landscape.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/jun/17/ice-cream-parlours-great-britain-flavours-covid> - This article examines the surge in popularity of ice-cream parlours across Great Britain, noting a significant increase in the number of venues on high streets in England, Scotland, and Wales. The piece attributes this growth to changing consumer habits post-COVID, with parlours offering a nostalgic yet convenient option for families and individuals seeking indulgent treats. It highlights the appeal of classic sundaes and the introduction of retro flavours, as well as the role of parlours in revitalising local high streets and providing social spaces for communities.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/may/09/ice-cream-parlours-booming-instagram-teetotalism> - This article discusses the rise of ice-cream parlours in Britain, focusing on their appeal to non-drinkers and families seeking alcohol-free social spaces. It highlights establishments like Afters Original and Creams, which have expanded rapidly to provide a vibrant, alcohol-free environment for socialising. The piece also touches on the role of social media in popularising these venues, with their visually appealing offerings attracting a younger demographic. The article underscores the cultural shift towards dessert-focused socialising as an alternative to traditional pub outings.
5. <https://ahdb.org.uk/news/consumer-insight-the-inside-scoop-on-dessert-parlours> - This report from the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) delves into the resurgence of dessert parlours in the UK, noting a significant increase in the number of ice-cream parlours opening on high streets. It discusses the variety of offerings, including gelato, sundaes, waffles, crepes, milkshakes, and cakes, with an emphasis on indulgence and quality. The report highlights the role of social media in driving the popularity of visually appealing desserts and the importance of providing an experience that can't be recreated at home, contributing to the revitalisation of high streets.
6. <https://cremefilledchurros.com/dessert-cafes-british-culture/> - This article examines the rapid expansion of dessert cafés in the UK, noting a consistent annual growth of 20% since 2020. It highlights the cultural shift towards dessert-focused socialising, with these establishments becoming fixtures on British high streets, particularly in urban centres like London, Birmingham, and Manchester. The piece discusses how dessert cafés have redefined social habits and cultural expression, offering a new avenue for socialising and community engagement, and contributing to the revitalisation of local high streets.
7. <https://www.deliciousmagazine.co.uk/the-uks-best-ice-cream-shops/> - This article features a selection of the UK's best ice-cream shops, highlighting establishments that have contributed to the booming ice-cream parlour scene. It includes profiles of parlours like Darlish, which offers unique flavours inspired by Middle Eastern cuisine, and Caliendo’s Gelato, known for its quality Italian ingredients and traditional gelato-making techniques. The piece underscores the diversity and innovation within the UK's ice-cream parlour landscape, reflecting the broader trend of dessert cafés revitalising high streets and offering alternative social spaces.