

A Sweet Tooth

'Rice? for dessert?'

My Japanese friends never fail to express their shock, even horror, when I tell them that one of my favourite British desserts is a concoction of creamy rice, baked in the oven, slightly burned on top and flavoured with jam, cinnamon, vanilla or nutmeg. My mother makes it extremely well and it is absolutely delicious. Believe me.

As a rather pot-bellied (san dan bara) schoolboy I remember queuing for my school lunch, fingers crossed that it would be a rice pudding day, and if it was, I would hungrily devour the entire contents of my bowl in seconds and then return, Oliver Twist like, to the counter for 'seconds', or even, if I dared, 'thirds'.

I love British puddings. They are simple, filling, inexpensive and fun and you don't require the cooking skills of a Michelin starred chef to make them. In fact, they're **a piece of cake** (easy).

And they have amusing names:

There's 'apple turn-over', 'upside down cake', 'jam roly poly', 'sticky toffee pudding' as well as assorted 'crumbles' and 'fools'. There's a dish called 'spotted dog' and another called 'spotted Dick' whose name was officially changed by one local council to 'spotted Richard' as the original was slightly rude (ask your British friends why).

These traditional dishes went out of fashion for a while but are firmly back on the menu now. They are even being exported to Japan. In Tokyo last year, an enterprising English confectioner opened a British cake shop in Tokyo's chic Hiroo district where his handmade cup cakes **are selling like**, well..... **hot cakes** (selling very well).

I will eat almost any sweets, although I draw the line at natto flavoured ice-cream or anything with 'clotted cream' (makes me think of 'clotted arteries' which takes the fun out of it). But then I have a '**sweet tooth**' which is the way we describe people with a fondness for desserts of all kinds. This term has a positive, indulgent connotation: a more modern term '**chocoholic**' is more negative.

On your next visit to Britain check out the sweets and puddings section of supermarkets like Marks and Spencer's, Sainsbury's and Tesco's where you will be able to find a selection of good British puddings at pretty reasonable prices. Fish and chip kings Harry Ramsden's also offer the rare and irresistible bread and butter pudding.

http://www.harryramsdens.co.uk/files/harrys_restaurant_menu.pdf

And if you fancy attempting to prepare some of these dishes yourself you may want to have a look at a book like 'Delia Smith's Cookery Course' or even the best-selling 'Ma Brown's Cookbook' which has a selection of Scottish recipes including unusual desserts like 'cloutie dumplings'. This book is based on a popular Scottish comic strip about a typical Dundee family (think Sazae San the cookbook and you'll get the picture).

And finally, don't be put off by appearances. While some of the dishes mentioned in this article may not win any prizes for their aesthetic beauty, they certainly taste better than they look. Or to put it more sweetly and expressively, '**the proof of the pudding is in the eating**'