

Dining at the Most Pretentious Hotel Restaurant Ever

Shôn Ellerton, August 19, 2025

People will pay to go to a Fawlty Towers themed restaurant, but I got the real thing.



I'm sure many of us have experienced some interesting moments when dining out.

I certainly have.

I've been to restaurants with rude behaviour, bizarre settings, disgusting food, amazing food, and strange customs and rituals from cutting off business ties to having your bum whacked for not finishing your food.

As for rude restaurants, I wrote a piece titled [*Wong Kei – One of the World's Rudest Chinese Restaurants*](#), which had great cheap Chinese food but coming at the price of being abused by rude and short-tempered waiters. It became a feature because we always went back for more abuse and cheap good delicious-tasting food.

However, I recollect a time my dad and I went to a hotel perched on a headland looking over the sea in Newquay. For those not familiar with Newquay, it's one of those iconic seaside towns on the north coast of Cornwall in England famous for its beaches and surfing activities.

There are a couple of prominent hotels on the headland, the most famous being the aptly-named Headland Hotel, and the other, the Atlantic Hotel. We stayed at the Atlantic Hotel.

Now this was some time ago back in the nineties, but it's probable that things had changed substantially over the years. However, I have had reports from others

visiting the area not many months ago at time of writing that many hotel establishments seem to be still a little pretentious and snooty. Much like the substandard quality and less-than-friendly service portrayed by one of Britain's favourite comedy sitcoms, [*Fawlty Towers*](#).

I remember the occasion well.

My dad and I went on a road trip around the UK exploring Britain's narrow-gauge steam railways. It was not long after my eighteenth birthday. We took a side trip into Cornwall to visit a couple of relatives finally ending up in Newquay during a rainy evening.

We drove up to the Atlantic Hotel and went to check in.

The hotel receptionist, dressed up in a black tie and suit, gave us a blank look not entirely impressed with our appearance. We were soaked and dressed in casual attire clearly not suited to mingle with the rest of the hotel's clientele.

These days, judging from the photos online, the hotel looks like it had quite a facelift since then, but during the time I was there, it seemed old-fashioned with windows covered with thick velvet drapes, leather couches with timeless imprints of ample-sized bottoms that had rested on them, and that pervasive smell of rot or mildew or whatever that smell is that old English buildings just seem to have.

Just off to the left side of the desk, was the opening to a quite fancy looking restaurant with tables adorned with white lace cloths and, around them, exotic-looking dining chairs with a hint of rococo styling. After the receptionist handed us a pair of keys, my father asked when the restaurant closes.

The receptionist gave us a condescending look and replied that we need a reservation. We both turned our eyes into the restaurant, which had, at best, only one or two tables occupied. Considering that we were both hungry and not particularly anxious about going into the rain again, I hoped that my father wouldn't make a wise crack with the receptionist about how 'busy it looked'.

Thankfully, he just asked if we could both come down in a half-hour or so.

Not wanting to be friendly and casual about it, the receptionist made it abundantly clear that he needed to write our names down in the reservation book so kept us there until it was indelibly etched in the book.

The receptionist then asked if we both had a suit and tie to wear as no one is allowed to dine in the restaurant without them. These places really did exist, even in regional out-of-the-way seaside towns in Britain.

My father replied with the affirmative but as for me, alas, I had no tie, nor did I have a suit.

The receptionist grumbled a bit and said that I could borrow a suit and tie.

He disappeared for a bit and materialised again, holding in his hand, perhaps the most outrageously tired Etonian looking jacket along with a hideous looking stripy tie, which was cold and greasy to the touch, along with the smell of years of sweat from dirty necks from, probably, other unsuspecting victims who dared to leave a formal tie behind at home.

We both gave our thanks and then proceeded upstairs to change.

I remember how pokey the rooms were. My room had a spongy single bed with layers of sheets topped with a criss-cross old-fashioned quilt, a scratched-up old chest of drawers, a print of some green locomotive on top of an iron bridge, lace curtains, and a single standalone basin with a mirror. The toilet and bath was located down the hall which meant a short dash with a towel around the hips to perform one's ablutions. I'm sure things are different now, but this could have been one of those quintessentially tired-looking seaside hotels as visited by [*Mr Bean*](#), a British sitcom played by Rowan Atkinson. I didn't really mind it to be honest. At least I didn't have to *share* a room with my father who perpetually reeked of tobacco smoke.

We dressed up and went back downstairs.

I looked utterly ridiculous wearing this suit which was too big for me along with this most hideous of ties. The outfit smelt pretty rank as well. As for my dad, he wore, what *could* be considered a suit, although it looked a little more like a safari jacket of sorts. As for his tie, he wore an old-style pink French cravat, which looked more like a delicate scarf which was frilled and tied up with a bow.

The receptionist, who seemed to relish being the guardian of the gates of the restaurant, reluctantly allowed me to enter the holy of holies but my dad was denied entrance. I assumed it was because of his light beige 'safari suit'.

But no. The receptionist said he wasn't wearing a tie.

For the next few minutes, the receptionist and my dad had a peculiar and slightly heated debate concerning his cravat. My father gave him a historical lecture of French cravats stating that they were one of the forerunners of the modern tie. Which is, indeed, true.

The receptionist said that he would lend us another tie but my father refused. He was not the sort of person who would concede that easily, but to be fair, I would have put up a fight rather than try to stomach food whilst wearing a smelly greasy old Alma Mater school tie.

Eventually, the receptionist gave in and allowed him entry to the restaurant.

At this point, the very last of the previous guests were about to go with the two of us being the only customers left.

It was only 7pm. Certainly not a popular place with the locals to dine out I suspect.

Despite all this happening, it had become somewhat entertaining. What could possibly happen next?

We were led to our table by our waiter who was, not unlike the receptionist, rather cold in character and not particularly friendly.

He sat us down and he handed out these leather-bound menus which looked quite posh indeed. On opening them up, everything was in French and in nicely-written cursive. It looked the part, but it was certainly pretentious.

I said that, perhaps, we'd been given the wrong menus.

The waiter replied that *these* are the only menus and would explain to us what the dishes are if needed.

Now. I think many people in England would have a cursory understanding of French food items on a menu. Or at least those with a better-than-average education. So, if it was the intent to alienate the less-educated population of England, this place was doing a fine job.

My father would have none of it, and being a fluent French speaker, he spoke French to the waiter taking our order.

The waiter, very much taken aback at this unexpected occurrence, did not understand what he said and asked if he could speak in English. To this, my father

said that if those who run the restaurant expect their customers to speak in English, then why the bloody hell do they write the menus in French?

The waiter stood there mortified and in silence.

A moment later, in English, my father ordered a bottle of rosé, some sort of prawn dish with a cream sauce while I ordered a beef bourguignon with mushrooms, rice and asparagus.

We waited for nearly half-an-hour but we were, at least, given a poor excuse of a dinner roll along with one of those small individually wrapped butters of ice-cold butter to tide us over. I had to grasp the butter in my hand until it thawed out before I had any remote chance of spreading it without tearing up my roll of bread.

But, the evening was young.

The bottle of rosé wasn't entirely bad and, perhaps the main dishes will be better.

The dishes finally arrived *and* it was served on a trolley *and* from one of those fancy shiny silver platters with a dome.

Out came my dad's dish. An enormous plate with, perhaps, six or seven little prawns in the centre smothered with a cream sauce.

Out came my dish. Another enormous plate but this time with a very dark brown, almost blackish looking sludge on top of a bed of very soggy rice. There were two tiny stalks of asparagus, barely cooked on the edge of the plate.

I *do not* like trendy undercooked vegetables. They're hard to chew and they're generally tasteless to my palate. No wonder kids grown up in England are put off by vegetables. They're either hard and undercooked or overcooked to the point of becoming a grey and colourless slush.

I stared at my food for a second or so until the waiter, unbelievably, said '*bon appetit*' and without been given the chance of being verbally accosted by my dad, he vanished without a trace as we looked on incredulously at our food.

My father tried one of his prawns after discarding the molten gloop which adhered to it. After chewing it for some time, he said it had turned to rubber being so overcooked.

As for my food, it might as well have been served from one of those tinned Fray Bentos pies which you could pick up at any local shop. It was edible and okay if

it was served on a camping trip, but here I was, sitting in a fancy restaurant with cheap food commanding high prices because of the silver dome service and because the menu's in French.

Due to being hungry, I managed to finish my plate but my dad simply asked for more bread rolls and butter.

As we were still hungry, we decided to order dessert. After all, what could go wrong with dessert?

I went for the safe option and ordered a simple scoop of vanilla ice cream. British restaurants are not particularly creative when it comes to serving ice cream. What you normally get is an overly yellow coloured scoop of vanilla ice cream served in a little round metal ice cream cup. You might get a thin wafer with it, but that's it. Often, the ice cream is as hard as nails and because of the shape of the metal bowl, it's a challenge to keep the ice cream *inside* the bowl without it flying out onto the table.

My father ordered flambéed crêpes suzette, which is essentially a soggy thin pancake doused with orange syrup and brandy and then brought to the table to be lit on fire like a Christmas pudding. It was done with such earnestness and pretentiousness as to be laughable. I never could understand what's so appealing about crêpes suzette in the first place. Utterly soggy limp and lifeless sheets of insipid-tasting pancakes drowned in a cloying sweet orange liqueur. Seems such a toffee-nosed upper-class aristocratic dessert that has no place in the world of culinary delights.

The only thing good about the rest of the meal was the cognac which my dad ordered.

Well, he paid for the bill, which I expect was more than he bargained for. However, despite the service, the food, and the sheer arrogance of the place, I had an amusing time.

These days, you can dine out in restaurants with a Fawlty Towers theme and people pay good money for it.

But I got the real McCoy!