

# Paris diners face €200 charge for a no-show

**France**  
Adam Sage Paris

There was a time when no French diner would have dreamt of booking a table in a top restaurant and failing to show up.

Nowadays the practice is common, generating claims that the nation has adopted the bad dining manners of Britain and America.

In response, some chefs have started to charge cancellation fees that can run to hundreds of euros if customers book a table and then fail to appear.

In a sign of sweeping change in French gastronomic culture, hundreds of restaurants have signed up to a system that obliges customers to leave their debit card details when they make

a booking. The most celebrated among them warn that in the increasingly common event of a no-show, a fee will be deducted.

The Tour d'Argent restaurant in Paris, for example, which is renowned for its duck dishes, has introduced a cancellation fee of €100 per head at lunchtime and €200 for the dinner service. The 58 restaurant in the Eiffel Tower says that customers who book and then cancel less than ten days before the meal must pay the "total amount of the cancelled service", which is at least €86 per head.

The charge is a response to changing gastronomic habits in a society that once revered its chefs as cultural figureheads who were of far greater import-

ance than their customers. Now they tend to be viewed as ordinary service providers. "More and more customers make several reservations for the same day then cancel yours without warning. It's the channel-hopping culture," Quentin Giroud, owner of the Aspice restaurant in Paris, said. "Originally it was the tourists, notably the Anglo-Saxon ones. Today it's general."

Nicolas Chatenier, the managing director of Les Grandes Tables du Monde, an association of top restaurants, said: "Even in great restaurants customers cancel without having the slightest idea of the economic impact of their action."

The consequences are particularly problematic in French restaurants

because of the country's fondness for lengthy meals. In Britain and the US, for instance, many restaurants can take two bookings for the same table safe in the knowledge that the first diners will have finished well before the second group arrives.

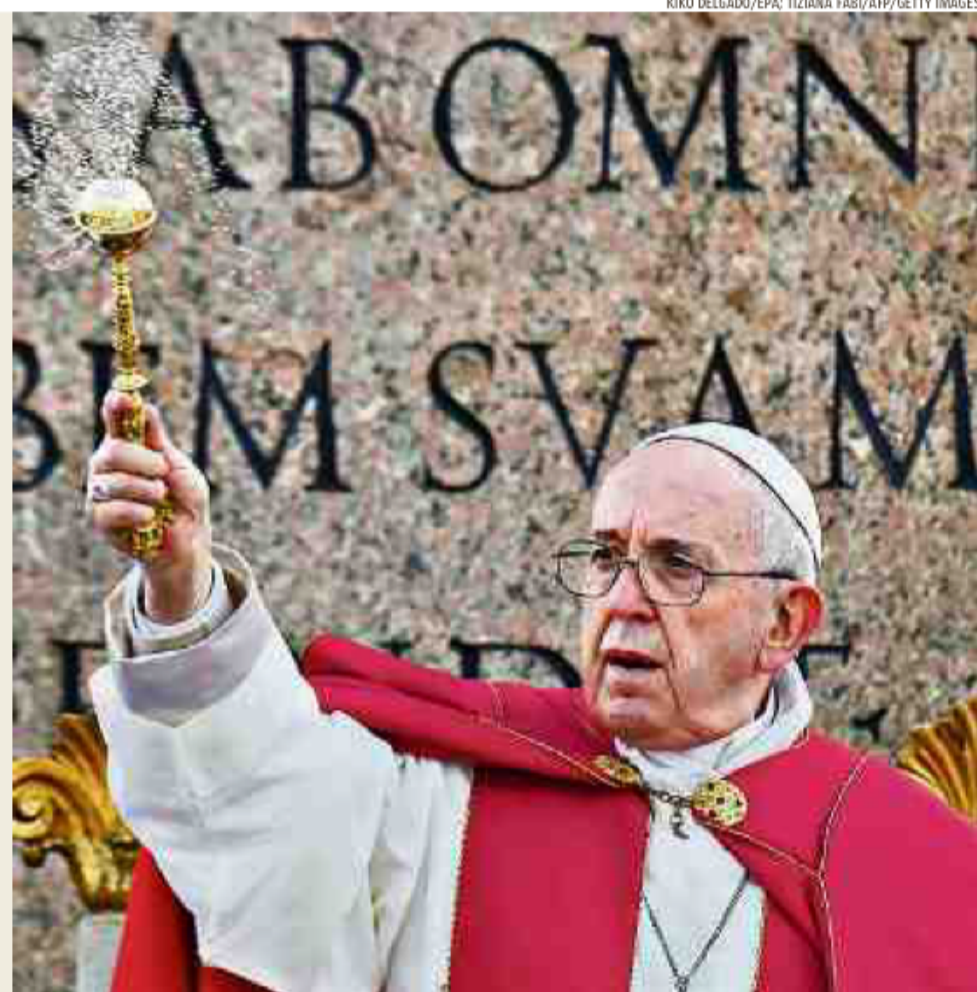
In France this is all but impossible: few French people want to eat dinner before 8pm, and lingering for anything less than two hours at the table is considered to be rushing. As a result the financial consequences of a no-show are serious. "They can account for a 25 to 30 per cent drop in revenue," Xavier Zeitoun, founder of Zenchef, a restaurant booking site, said.

Mr Chatenier outlined the financial scale of the problem: "For a [Michelin]

starred restaurant, the losses can range between €60,000 and €150,000 a year," he said. "In some cases, just one table being cancelled can mean you lose all the profits you would have made in the evening."

Mr Zeitoun said that 245 restaurants had adopted his system of obliging customers to leave debit card details when they made bookings, and added that he was getting dozens of new chefs to sign up every month.

Other chefs, such as Yves Camdeborde, have opted for another solution. He simply refuses to take bookings at his Comptoir du Relais in Paris, where customers have no option but to turn up on the night and queue in the hope of getting a table.



KIKO DELGADO/EPA; TIZIANA FABI/ATP/GETTY IMAGES

## Crowds flock to hear Pope launch Holy Week

The Pope began Holy Week by blessing palm fronds and olive branches in St Peter's Square before delivering a

homily praising Jesus's silence in the face of his trials (Philip Willan writes).

About 50,000 people gathered for the Palm Sunday Mass

remembering Jesus's entry into Jerusalem before he was crucified. "Festive cries followed by brutal torture. This twofold mystery accompanies our entrance into Holy Week each year," the Pope said.

"The silence of Jesus throughout his Passion is profoundly impressive.

He overcomes the temptation to answer back, to act like a 'superstar'. In moments of darkness and great tribulation, we need to keep silent, to find the courage not to speak, as long as our silence is meek and not full of anger."

In the coming week the Pope will wash the

The Pope led Palm Sunday Mass in Rome, while the Brotherhood of Sorrows marched in Ferrol, northwest Spain

feet of inmates at a local prison, lead Way of the Cross reflections at the Colosseum and preside at Easter Sunday Mass. The Easter celebrations come at a delicate time

in his papacy, with criticism of the Vatican's response to the clerical child sexual abuse scandal.

A 6,000-word essay published last week by his predecessor Benedict XVI, who retired in 2013, blamed the sexual revolution of the 1960s, which is at odds with Pope Francis's

view that the scandal is the result of an abuse of clerical power.

Massimo Faggioli, a Catholic historian, has argued that Benedict is being manipulated by the Pope's conservative enemies and that it underlines the need for clear rules on the role of retired popes. Libby Purves, page 29

## German military failings 'begin at top'

**Germany**  
Oliver Moody Berlin

Angela Merkel's former chief military adviser has blamed the parlous condition of the German armed forces on the "cowards and bureaucrats" in charge, including the defence minister.

Erich Vad, a retired brigadier-general who worked in the chancellor's office from 2006 to 2013, said it was preposterous that Germany spent nearly as much on its troops as Russia but could not field an effective fighting force.

The problems of the country's military are a matter of national anguish. The army is under strength, half of the air force's jets are out of action and the navy has at times in the past year been without a single seaworthy submarine.

Germany's defence spending is also projected to begin falling in real terms

by the early 2020s, despite considerable pressure from President Trump to increase the budget to the 2 per cent of GDP that is expected of Nato members.

General Vad, 62, who has become a lecturer and public relations consultant, said the problem was weak leadership. "I was in Israel a couple of weeks ago," he told *Bild am Sonntag*. "A general there who is a friend of mine said to me: 'With a defence budget of more than \$45 billion, how do you Germans manage to be so unfit for purpose? We Israelis only have a third of your money and our air force flies day and night.'"

"Russia has a little more money than we do, the Turks have less than half the German defence budget, but without a shadow of a doubt both countries have armed forces that are powerful and ready for deployment."

Since 2013 the defence ministry has

been led by Ursula von der Leyen, a staunch Merkel loyalist who promised to overhaul the armed forces' byzantine procurement system. Her critics accuse her of outsourcing the job to expensive management consultants with few tangible results. A survey published yesterday found that only 23 per cent of Germans thought that she was the right person for the job.

General Vad said that Ms von der Leyen, 60, was part of the problem. "The defence minister spends most of her time defending herself and her own political survival," he said. "It is sad and scandalous in equal measure. Our armed forces are costly, getting costlier, and still not ready for combat. The civil service does what it pleases."

"This won't do. At its heart this has to be a question of seamless, top-down political leadership."

## Berlin film industry poised for return to Weimar heyday

Oliver Moody

The likes of Disney and Amazon may soon find themselves competing for the world's eyeballs with a "Krautflix".

A powerful group of New York investors has created a German media giant in the first step towards building a European rival to the American video industry. In the space of a few weeks the empire has drawn from a €3.4 billion acquisitions fund to buy four German film and television companies including the studios behind *Snowden*, *Hacksaw Ridge* and *The Lives of Others*.

Berlin was one of the most important film centres outside Hollywood during the Weimar Republic but has punched below its weight since the war, with the

2003 comedy *Good Bye Lenin!* among its few lucrative exports. It may now be in for a revival.

The new conglomerate, KKR Medienhaus, hopes to dominate the European market with a Netflix-style "one-stop shop" that would make and stream its own content.

Philipp Freise, 45, European head of technology, media and telecommunications investment at Kohlberg Kravis Roberts, the parent company, said that the firm wanted to become a modern Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

He told *Welt am Sonntag*: "When you talk to managers at Netflix, Amazon and Disney you increasingly hear that Germany is the most important market after the US."