



THE A TO Z OF AL FRESCO DINING IDEAS

26

AL FRESCO DINING TIPS  
FOR THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY



*"Cooking and eating food outdoors makes it taste infinitely better than the same meal prepared and consumed indoors."*

**FENNEL HUDSON**  
COUNTRYSIDE AUTHOR AND BROADCASTER



## EVERYBODY WANTS A *bite* OF AL FRESCO DINING RIGHT NOW



Al fresco dining has become increasingly popular in the UK in recent years.

What was once mainly enjoyed on holiday in warmer climates, has steadily become a firm fixture on the minds and menus of Britain's customers and the hospitality world at large.

In fact, according to research carried out by guest experience management company, HospitalityGEM, 79% of people say dining al fresco would encourage them to increase their dwell time.

And who can blame them? What's not to love about sitting outside, chatting and relaxing with friends, family and acquaintances with a drink or two and good food?

These days, al fresco is big business for pubs, bars, restaurants and hotels, particularly when the weather's good. To honour (and help promote) the current trend, we're providing some real food for thought - 26 al fresco dining tips for the hospitality industry that are inspirational and easy to follow.

Go ahead and tuck in, we hope you enjoy it....



**Jason Eastwood**  
Managing Director, Canopies UK



## A is for *Atmosphere*

What makes a great al fresco dining experience to remember other than a great menu? The overall atmosphere, and to create that you need to tick all of these boxes – food, drink, music, furniture and lighting. Aim for laid back and casual and presentable, but not pristine, which can make people feel less inclined to stay for hours.

## B is for *Blankets*

Just because your guests are outside doesn't mean they should feel uncomfortable because they're sat on hard chairs or benches all night long. Consider incorporating soft furnishings, such as blankets (fleecy and faux fur), as well as thick, comfortable cushions, so that they feel cosy and warm when the temperature drops. It'll also encourage them to linger for longer at the table too.



## C is for *Cantabria*

No al fresco dining experience is complete without a Cantabria outdoor canopy. Featuring a retractable roof that can be opened and closed at the touch of a button and incorporating heating and lighting, guests can dine al fresco to their heart's content come wind, rain, snow or shine.

## D is for *Drinks*

Some guests will fancy a bite to eat, others won't, but you can guarantee most will order at least one drink to keep themselves cool and refreshed (especially if the heat of the midday sun's beaming down on them). Spritzers, mocktails and cocktails are all perfect examples of al fresco summer-loving drinks, from Aperol Spritz, G&T and iced tea, to fruit-infused water and fresh lemonade.

## E is for *Experience*

Customers these days are looking for far much more than good food, they're after the overall ultimate experience. Great drinks, food, service, hospitality, atmosphere and location, right down to great interior design and furniture. These factors all count in creating a memorable and return-worthy al fresco experience.





## F is for *Food*

Your menu is one of the main things that's guaranteed to entice people to sample your al fresco experience over others, so make sure you give it plenty of consideration. Dishes that people can share and easily nibble away at while drinking and chatting away, always fare well, especially when it's hot and sunny.

## G is for *Games*

Most al fresco diners like to sit and relax while others, such as families, like to keep themselves occupied. If your outdoor space is large enough, invest in a collection of outdoor games, such as croquet, outdoor chess, Jenga or Connect 4, which will keep adults and children (and observers) occupied for hours on end.



## H is for *Hideaway*

Now this is an idea that can be brought to life in both large and small outdoor spaces. Make your al fresco dining experience that little bit more special by positioning it out of the way, making it perfect for more intimate and relaxed get-togethers. Placing flowers and foliage around the edges will add to the mystery and intrigue, just don't forget to leave plenty of space for an access path.

## I is for *Informal*

The outdoors is always open to a more relaxed atmosphere and al fresco goes hand-in-hand with this vibe. Whereas everything may be matching inside, mismatched chairs and lounge pieces help add to the laid back al fresco mood. But it's still important to retain that professional feel by welcoming guests, providing them with an attentive service and keeping the area clean and tidy.

### Think:

Grilled halloumi...

Creamy houmous...

Crisp salads...

Deep pan and thin crust  
pizza slices...

Plump olives...

Griddled vegetables...

Fresh dips...

Crispy tartlets...

Frozen yoghurt...

Crunchy bruschetta...

Ingredient-packed tortilla...

Refreshing sorbet...



## **J is for** *Jam jars*

Table accessories are a really simple, yet highly effective way of bringing al fresco areas together, as well as helping them look complete. They don't have to be too elaborate either, as a little decoration can go a long way. For example, freshly-picked flowers in jam jars add a lovely summery feel, plus the jars are chunky enough not to topple over in the wind.

## **K is for** *Knives (and forks)*

Keep outdoor dining a relaxed affair by allowing guests to help themselves to cutlery that's handily placed in a ceramic holder on the table. Using a mixture of colours will help create an informal look. You may also want to use pots that are large enough for the napkins too, so that they don't blow away.

## **L is for** *Lighting*

Lighting is key in enabling customers to sit and relax outside during both the day and night. Pair functional lighting, such as floodlights, with strategically-placed lighting, such as solar posts, tea lights (in lanterns or hurricanes to keep them fire-safe) and string lights, to create more of a laid-back, magical vibe.

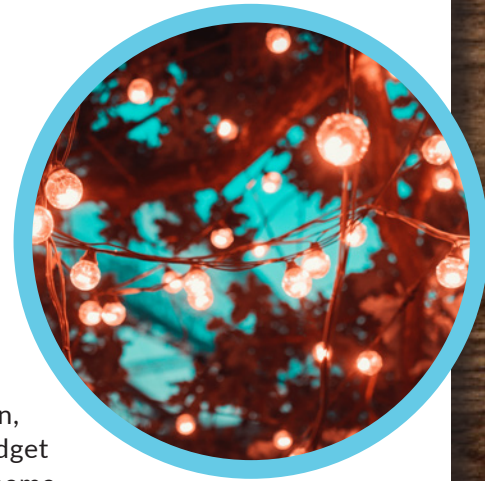
## **M is for** *Music*

Music can instantly make al fresco areas feel more authentic, not to mention, help create a good atmosphere. Recorded music is sufficient, but if your budget can stretch to it, why not consider live music that fits within the al fresco theme every now and then?

## **N is for** *Noise*

Invariably a busy garden is going to generate more noise as people chat away day and night, but you don't want it to become so unbearable that guests struggle to hear themselves talk. If you have the space, plan your layout so there's enough of a distance between one table and the next. It'll also provide valuable elbow room too.

**Note:** Don't forget to check if you're within a restricted noise venue, which means you may only be permitted to serve outdoors between certain hours.



## O is for *Outdoor canopies*

More-and-more hospitality managers are installing outdoor canopies because they enable them to get more use from their outdoor space all-year round. And this includes being able to provide their guests with the al fresco dining experience all-year round too.



## P is for *Pergola*

Many a pergola can be seen in warmer climes, adorned with grapevines that are bursting with colour and life. And there's no reason why they can't become a common feature among UK al fresco dining hot spots too. They're a feature that instantly makes you feel like you're abroad and a strategically-placed structure is perfect for creating a feeling of enclosure, without obstructing the view.

## Q is for *Queues*

Nobody likes having to queue for things, especially when they're waiting for an ice cold drink on a hot sunny day. Having a pop-up bar outside can help make sure your guests get served in good time and take the pressure off your main bar staff too. The buzz around the outdoor bar will help add to the al fresco atmosphere.

## R is for *Rustic*

If you can rock the rustic vibe, then you're well on your way to providing your guests with an authentic-feeling al fresco experience. Rustic furniture is often made from raw logs, boards and stone. Choose oversized wooden tables and stools that are designed to feel cosy, easy and comfortable.

Installing one of our Cantabria canopies can generate up to 184 additional covers\* and an additional weekly revenue of more than £7,000.\*\*

\*Based on Friday and Saturday, 2 sittings per day.

\*\*Based on £40 per cover = £7,360.

## S is for *Space*

A bit of an obvious point, but an incredibly important one. Before you look to offer al fresco dining, make sure you have sufficient space for it. Is there plenty of room for tables and chairs and staff and guests to easily move around? Don't forget, al fresco diners can be accompanied by dogs, children, bags and pushchairs, which all take up additional valuable space.

## T is for *Terrace*

Do you happen to have an outdoor terrace that's not used quite as much as you'd like it to be? Then it may well fare better as an al fresco dining area. One of our clients, Alec's Restaurant Bar & Grill, turned their underused outdoor terrace balcony into an outdoor dining area. Now guests can enjoy the benefits of al fresco dining and the venue's beautiful views in all seasons.

## U is for *Unique*

Al fresco dining is what you make of it. Providing guests with a place where they can go for a drink or a bite to eat outside is the main part of the equation. How you interpret that, really is up to you, which is why there are so many unique al fresco dining venues out there, for reasons such as their location, views, menu and overall vision!

## V is for *Vintage*

Traditional al fresco dining is renowned for being rustic and chic, and one way quick and easy way to achieve this vibe is by using vintage furniture or, vintage-inspired furniture (depending on your budget). French-style wrought iron or chunky wooden, wicker, rattan or cane furniture wouldn't go amiss here.







## W is for *Weather*

Unfortunately, the great British weather is renowned for not being that 'great', especially during summertime. But dining al fresco is one of life's simple pleasures and something Brits love to indulge in. Fortunately, they can do this in all seasons at venues that have brought the outdoors indoors by installing an outdoor canopy, complete with heating and LED lighting.



## X ...*Marks the spot*

Make sure your al fresco dining area is firmly on the map by making sure it's easy to find – a) from the roadside and b) via online searches. Tactics, such as signage, social media posts and local SEO advertising can help you promote what you're doing to existing customers, as well as visitors/tourists who may be paying a flying visit to your area.



## Y is for *Younger guests*

Playing outdoors is a great way of enabling children to burn off some of their energy, so it's not unusual for families to head outdoors and enjoy the al fresco dining trend. Does your al fresco area cater for younger guests? One way you can easily achieve this is by creating a corner for parents and children that's next to your play facilities and/or outdoor games.

## Z is for *Zones*

How big is your al fresco area? If it's large enough, then you may want to consider turning it into a series of zones, not just for children and parents, but for smokers, diners and drinkers, so that everybody feels cared for and right at home.





## ABOUT CANOPIES UK

Canopies UK is the country's leading designer, manufacturer and installer of high quality canopies. Established for more than 25 years, the company employs over 50 staff at its Lancashire headquarters, which incorporates offices, production space and warehousing.

Serving a multitude of sectors, including hospitality, education, healthcare and construction, Canopies UK delivers excellence through site-specific calculations and unrivalled product quality.