

# Methodology

The rules behind every MenuIndex figure: how a published menu becomes comparable data, what each named figure means, and the test every figure must pass before we print it.

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MARKET

Dubai, UAE

SEGMENT

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DOCUMENT

Version 2.2

APPLIES TO

Every MenuIndex report

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

# Where this document begins.

MenuIndex reads the menus that Dubai restaurants, cafés, bars and lounges publish, and measures how those menus are built. We look at how one course is priced against another on the same menu, at where an expensive ingredient sits within the menu that lists it, and at what restaurants of a similar price level charge. This document explains the part of that work a buyer cannot see from the outside.

**What this document leaves out.** The rules that decide which menus we read at all are published in full on [menuindex.net](#) and repeated in every report. This document starts after that decision and explains what we do with a menu once we have it.

|                      |                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| UNIT OF DATA         | One menu item: a dish or drink under the name the restaurant gives it, the price printed beside it, and the heading it appears under. |
| CURRENCY             | UAE dirhams, exactly as printed. We make no adjustment for service charge, municipality fee or VAT.                                   |
| NAMED FIGURES        | Six. Each has one name and one published definition, set out in section 03. A figure without a name cannot be quoted.                 |
| TEST BEFORE PRINTING | We publish a figure only if it holds steady as our coverage grows. Section 05 gives the test and the thresholds.                      |

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## SECTION 01

# From a menu to data.

A published menu is a piece of design, not a table. How we turn it into data decides whether two restaurants can be compared at all.

## What we read, and what we set aside

We record every menu item as published: the dish or drink under the name the restaurant gives it, the price printed beside it, and the heading it appears under. Where a restaurant prints more, such as a description, a volume, a vintage or a country of origin, we record that as well. Details that most restaurants leave out, such as the weight of a dish or the strength of a drink, we record wherever they appear but use in no figure.

Some items carry no price. A menu may print market price or price on request instead, or may charge per person or by weight. We record the note or the unit as printed, and the item takes no part in any figure built on the price of a single dish. Every report states what its base leaves out on these grounds.

## How we classify an item

- **By part of the menu.** Every item belongs to one of twelve parts, and we always assign one: food; desserts; breakfast and brunch; children's menus; sharing platters; set, tasting and package menus; seasonal menus; soft drinks; the bar, which covers cocktails, beer, cider and shots; spirits; wine, including sake; and merchandise, which covers shisha and cigars. Section 07 shows how these twelve map onto the six revenue categories of the restaurant accounting standard.
- **By course.** Restaurants name their own sections, and the same course appears under thousands of headings: starters, antipasti, mezze, carne, pesce. A dictionary maps those headings onto a fixed list of eight courses: starter, main course, dessert, side, salad, soup, bread and set. Only food carries a course, because a drink has none. A heading enters the dictionary only after someone has read it.
- **By ingredient.** We mark an item when the restaurant names one of a fixed list of ingredients, either in the name of the dish or in its own description. The list is truffle, wagyu including A5 and Kobe, caviar including beluga, oscietra and kaluga, sea urchin, lobster, bluefin tuna including otoro and chutoro, foie gras and ibérico. Every report prints the rule that decides what counts, and what that rule leaves out.

### A heading we do not recognise stays unrecognised

We always know which part of a menu an item belongs to. It is the course that can remain open. When a heading is missing from the dictionary, or could belong to more than one course, we record the item as unclassified rather than guess at the nearest match. Every report prints how much of the menu it left unclassified, so that a reader can see what a figure rests on. **An empty box is loud and an invented one is silent**, and we would rather show a gap than cover it.

## SECTION 02

## One item, and one menu.

Four of the six figures in this document are worked out inside a single menu. Neither word in that phrase is as plain as it looks, so we define both before any figure uses them.

### What counts as one item

Restaurants often list the same thing in more than one place. Each case has its own rule, printed here so that a reader can see which rule produced a figure.

- **A dish that appears on both the à la carte menu and a set menu** is one priced item, and we take its à la carte price. Within the set menu we record it without a price, because the set carries a single price of its own.
- **A wine or a spirit sold both by the glass and by the bottle** is two items. We tell them apart by the serving the restaurant printed, and we never mix the two prices into one figure.
- **The same dish at the same price in two files of one menu** is one item, counted once. A restaurant that publishes an all-day list and a dinner list will often print the same dish on both.

### What counts as one menu

A file is not a menu. A restaurant may publish several files, and its menu is **the à la carte menu it offers for its main service, taken as a whole**: its all-day and dinner lists together, or its lunch list where it publishes neither. A bar list, a brunch and a children's menu are each a menu in their own right, and we do not fold them into the main one. Wherever a figure says **on the same menu**, this is what it means, and every report states which menu it read.

The definition matters more than it appears to. Without it, a figure comparing a main course with a starter might be comparing a dinner list with a brunch, and a scale running from the cheapest dish to the most expensive might be drawn from a bar list and a tasting menu at once. Both would be arithmetic without a subject.

## SECTION 03

# The six figures.

Every figure we publish is one of six. Each has a single name and a single definition, and neither changes between reports. A figure without a name cannot be quoted, checked or argued with. Wherever a figure refers to a menu, it means the menu as defined in section 02.

## Course Ratio

One course against another

How much more one course costs than another on the same menu. We take the median price of each course within that menu and divide one by the other. Every menu gives one ratio, and we report the middle menu.

**Example.** A menu prices its starters at 60 and its main courses at 120. The main course costs twice the starter, so the Course Ratio is 2.00.

## Menu Position

One dish against its own menu

Where a dish stands by price among the food on its own menu, on a scale from 0 to 100. Set menus and drinks are left off the scale, and two dishes at the same price share a position.

**Example.** Put every dish on a menu in order of price. The cheapest sits at 0 and the most expensive at 100. A lobster dish 83 of the way along has a Menu Position of 83.

## Item Premium

One ingredient against its neighbours

How much more a dish costs than the dishes printed beside it, where it names one of the ingredients we track. We compare it with the median of the other dishes under the same heading, and every report says which comparison it used.

**Example.** The other pasta dishes on a menu run to 100, and a truffle pasta costs 144. It costs 1.44 times as much as its neighbours, so the Item Premium is 1.44.

## Price Tier

One restaurant against the market

The price group a restaurant belongs to. There are three of them. Section 04 explains where their boundaries come from and how we place a restaurant.

**Example.** A restaurant where a starter, a main course and a dessert come to 300 AED a head belongs to the 250 to 350 group.

## Tier Band

One course across a price group

The usual price range for a course within one price group. We take each restaurant's own median price for that course, then report the range that covers the middle half of those restaurants. We publish a range rather than a single figure, because a single figure would claim a precision this data does not have.

**Example.** In one price group, half the restaurants charge between 235 and 285 AED for a main course. A quarter charge less than 235 and a quarter charge more than 285. The Tier Band for that group is 235 to 285.

## Anchor Price

One item across all groups

The price of an item that barely changes with the price of the restaurant. Most dishes cost far more in an expensive restaurant than in a modest one, but a few drinks cost much the same everywhere. Where the price groups sit within a quarter of one another, the item is an anchor and we publish a single price for the whole city.

**Example.** An espresso costs about 26 AED in a modest restaurant and about 28 in an expensive one. That gap is small enough to make it an anchor. A glass of wine is not one, because it costs roughly twice as much at the top of the market as at the bottom.

These examples explain the figures. They are not readings of the market: real values carry the date on which they were read, and they appear only in dated reports.

## SECTION 04

## Price Tier.

An average price for a whole city answers a question nobody asks. A restaurant does not compete with every place in Dubai. It competes with places at its own price level, and that is the comparison our figures are built on.

### Where the boundaries come from

This industry has no single standard for price groups. The conventions in use measure different things in different currencies, and none of them is set for this city. The MICHELIN Guide comes closest to a reference point: it publishes thresholds in dirhams for the UAE, counted per person for a full meal without drinks, at 150, 250 and 350.

**We treat those thresholds as a guide and not as a rule.** We tested them against the prices we read, and we publish three groups where the Guide draws four. Our lowest group runs from **100 to 250 AED** a head. Above it we keep the Guide's own boundaries, **250 to 350** and **350 and above**.

Two findings stand behind the lower boundary. The Guide's line at 150 divides two groups that behave alike in this market, and on their own the restaurants below it are too few to describe. Below 100 a head, a restaurant falls outside the segment this index covers, and we place it in no group at all.

Every report names the groups in dirhams rather than in signs, because the sign scales used by guides and by review sites do not agree with one another.

### How we place a restaurant

We place a restaurant using its own menu, in the terms the definition uses: the median starter, plus the median main course, plus the median dessert, all taken from that one menu. We place it only where the menu carries at least three priced items in each of the three courses. Where it does not, we leave the restaurant unplaced rather than estimate a group for it.

**We use nothing but the menu.** Search engines, review sites and map services publish price ratings of their own, but those ratings are estimates of the very thing we set out to measure, and they are built from what customers report rather than from what a restaurant printed. They play no part in placing a restaurant.

### Fixed boundaries, read afresh at every snapshot

The boundaries are fixed numbers, not the quarter points of our own coverage. A boundary drawn from the sample would shift whenever the sample changed, which would let our own coverage back into the figures through the side door. We place every restaurant afresh at each snapshot, from the menu as it stood on that date. A restaurant that changes its prices can therefore move between groups, and we report that as movement under section 07 rather than smoothing it away. Should the Guide revise its thresholds, we will say so in every report that follows.

## SECTION 05

# What makes a figure publishable.

Coverage of a market grows over time, and a figure that shifts every time coverage grows describes us rather than the market. We test every figure against that before we print it, and a figure that fails the test does not appear at all.

## 01 It must hold as our coverage grows.

Every item carries the date on which it entered the data, so we can rebuild the data as it stood on any earlier date. We rebuild it, run the same query against each rebuild, and take the movement as the gap between the highest and the lowest answer. A figure that moves by

**5% or less**

we publish. A figure that moves by

**more than 12%**

we do not publish at all, whatever else is true of it. Between those two, we publish it only where the report prints how far it moved.

## 02 We separate our own growth from the market.

We also run the query on the restaurants that appear in every rebuild we compare. Movement across that fixed set is the market, and the difference between the two is us. We never present a figure as a change in the market unless it moved across the fixed set as well.

## 03 A range, not a single figure.

Where we publish a price level, we publish it as a range: the Tier Band defined in section 03. Before we print the figure at the centre of that range, we draw the same restaurants again at random, many times over, and print it only where the middle half of those draws stays within a tenth of it.

## 04 The median, not the average.

An average follows the most expensive item on a list rather than the market, and here that item can cost several hundred times the ordinary one. A single tasting menu or a single cellar list would otherwise speak for everyone.

## 05 Every figure names what it is a share of, and shows its arithmetic.

A percentage states its base in the same sentence, and we never use a share of everything we cover, because a reader cannot check it. Where a report says that something adds forty per cent, we print the price without and the price with, the difference in dirhams, and the sum itself on a line beneath, drawn from a real menu with the dish under a generic name and the price rounded to the nearest ten dirhams, so that the arithmetic can be checked but the restaurant cannot be found.

## 06 The matching rule appears beside the table.

A strict rule and a broad rule give different answers on the same data, so we print the rule that produced a figure next to the figure itself.

A figure with fewer than two comparable rebuilds behind it is published marked **first reading**, and the test applies to it from the second onwards. Prices appear in dirhams exactly as the menu shows them. We round a single figure to the nearest whole number, the lower end of a range down and the upper end up. Every figure comes from a stored query run against a dated snapshot, so the same query run again on the same snapshot returns the same answer.

## SECTION 06

## Aggregation and anonymity.

Our reports describe a market and never a competitor. That is a guarantee rather than a promise, and it holds for every table we publish.

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### No restaurant is identified

We never name a restaurant in a report, never quote one, never place one in an order of merit, and never leave one identifiable from the text, a table, an example or a caption. No report carries a figure that belongs to a single restaurant. What a client receives is the shape of a market: how it is built, where an ingredient stands within it, and what restaurants at a given price level charge.

### Where we hold data back

Some breakdowns we hold rather than publish, and we mark them as withheld in the table they belong to, so that a reader can see where the data stops instead of mistaking a gap for an absence.

District is the clearest case. We use it within our own analysis to check our figures, but at that level of detail a table of prices describes a short and identifiable list of restaurants rather than a market, so it never leaves the building. The same applies to any breakdown drawn narrowly enough to point at one business, however it is drawn.

### The one report built for a single operator

The Menu Position Report is the exception, and a narrow one. It describes the menu of the operator who commissioned it and names that one business, its own. Everything it measures that menu against stays aggregated: the price group the restaurant belongs to, the ratios normal for that group, and the bands that restaurants at that level print. No other business is named or left identifiable within it. A machine builds the report from the rules in this document, and it takes the same form for everyone who buys it.

### What a client cannot buy from us

No product, price or arrangement will persuade MenuIndex to hand the menu record of a restaurant to anyone but that restaurant, to rank named businesses, or to supply a breakdown narrow enough to amount to either. This is not a setting on a report. It is the condition on which the reports exist.

## SECTION 07

## Snapshots and standards.

Menus change. A benchmark is therefore a reading taken on a date, and every figure we publish is tied to the reading it came from.

- **Every report we produce to order carries a date.** It states the snapshot it was built from and what each table rests on. Those volumes belong to the report and not to this document. The sample report and this document carry no date, because they describe how the work is done rather than what anything cost on a particular day.
- **A menu republished is a new reading.** We keep earlier readings as they were read and never rewrite them, and that is what makes a comparison between two dates possible at all.
- **A menu withdrawn stays in its snapshot.** We do not revise a figure once a dated report has carried it. A restaurant that closes remains in the snapshots that read it, and we do not read it again.
- **We publish movement only where two readings can be compared.** A comparison between two dates rests on the restaurants read on both. Where our coverage has changed enough that a difference would describe our reading rather than the market, we withhold the comparison. It is the test in section 05, applied across time instead of across restaurants.

### How our categories map to the restaurant accounting standard

We classify menu items to the revenue categories of the Uniform System of Accounts for Restaurants (USAR) wherever we can, so that our categories line up with the ones an operator already keeps its books in. Every priced item falls into exactly one of the categories below. None is left outside, and none is counted twice.

|                                                                                                 |                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Food, desserts, breakfast and brunch, children's menus, sharing platters, set and tasting menus | 4100 Food Sales          |
| Soft drinks, including alcohol-free beer, wine and cocktails                                    | 4200 Soft Beverage Sales |
| Spirits, cocktails and shots                                                                    | 4300 Liquor Sales        |
| Beer, cider and hard seltzer, wherever a menu lists them                                        | 4400 Beer Sales          |
| Wine, sparkling wine and sake, and wine packages                                                | 4500 Wine Sales          |
| Shisha, cigars and other merchandise                                                            | 4600 Merchandise Sales   |

Base: every priced menu item in the dataset, classified once.

**The limit of that alignment, stated by us rather than found by you.** USAR is a standard about money received: revenue and cost. We have neither. We measure the price a restaurant prints on a menu, before any discount and before anything is sold. The alignment holds for the way items are grouped and nowhere else, and we do not use the USAR accounts that call for a restaurant's own records.

## SECTION 08

## Terms and scope.

These are the words used in every report, in the sense they carry there. The six named figures are defined in section 03 and are not repeated here.

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**Menu item.** One dish or drink, on one menu, at one price. The unit of everything we count.

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**Menu.** A restaurant's à la carte menu for its main service, taken as a whole. A file is not a menu; see section 02.

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**Menu section.** A part of a menu as the restaurant printed it, under the heading it printed.

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**Course.** What a dish is: a starter, a main course, a dessert. Read from the menu section through the dictionary in section 01.

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**Restaurant.** One place, counted once. The word covers everything we read: restaurants, cafés, bars and lounges, and most are more than one of these at once. Where a group runs several, we count each separately.

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**Operator.** The business that runs a restaurant, and the reader a report is written for.

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**Median.** The middle price: half the items cost less and half cost more.

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**Band.** A range published in place of a single figure, wide enough to cover the ground that figure could move over.

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**Breakdown.** Any slice of the data reported as a figure: a course, a category, an ingredient, a price group, a cuisine.

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**Withheld.** A breakdown we hold and do not publish, because publishing it would point at an individual restaurant.

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**Snapshot.** A dated reading of the data, kept as it was read and never rewritten. Reports produced to order name the snapshot they came from.

### The limits of a report

We read what a restaurant publishes with a price. A restaurant that publishes no prices at all is not in the data. Within a restaurant we do read, a line that carries no number of its own, because the price belongs to a set menu or a brunch, or because the kitchen prints market price, is recorded as part of the menu and never enters a figure. We read prices as printed, and menus differ over whether a printed price includes service charge, municipality fee and VAT; where a menu states its own policy we record that statement and report it alongside the figures built on it. A reading belongs to a date, and a menu can change the day after.

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**Disclaimer.** This report is built entirely from menus that restaurants publish openly themselves. MenuIndex records those menus as published, does not verify them, and accepts no responsibility for their accuracy or for any decision taken on the basis of this report. The figures are aggregated market statistics. No individual restaurant is identified, and the report is market intelligence rather than advice. Full methodology at [menuindex.net](https://menuindex.net) · [team@menuindex.net](mailto:team@menuindex.net)

A sample report, **The Truffle Index**, is published alongside this document and applies these rules from end to end to a single ingredient. Questions about a figure · [team@menuindex.net](mailto:team@menuindex.net)