

Serious issue settled as scientists reveal that Guinness in Ireland tastes best by far

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A SERIOUS science journal has dared to go where no science journal has gone before by tackling a question that has long vexed mankind (especially when sitting in a pub): does Guinness travel well outside Ireland?

The answer, tentatively, is no. But despite sampling 103 pints in 71 pubs and 14 countries, the researchers admitted further study is needed to back up their preliminary findings that, when ambience and other variables are discounted, Guinness really does taste better here.

The survey was conducted under the umbrella of the Institute of Food Technologists, an international not-for-profit organisation based in Chicago, and published in the latest issue of its monthly *Journal of Food Science*.

It comprised four researchers from countries with a long brewing tradition – Ireland, England, the Netherlands, and Germany – carrying out the fieldwork over an 11-month period in conjunction with their existing assignments and travel arrangements.

All used identical equipment: including a thermometer, a ruler (to measure head depth), a stopwatch (to measure pouring and drinking time) and a standardised checklist for rating various quality indicators.

But central to each test was a visual analogue scale, scoring the pint's taste on a scale of 0 to 100. On the overall score, the average Irish pint rated 74. The average for all other countries was 57.

The researchers also considered a range of explanations for the discrepancy, including what they called the “conspiracy theory”, a popular suspicion that the brewery produces three different qualities of Guinness.

The study summed up the belief thus: “The finest quality is given to its own employees, the second best is sold to the people of Ireland, and the worst is exported”.

But the theory was undermined, the researchers said, by their experience that the stout served in the brewery was not the best they had in Dublin.

The four-man team did admit the possibility that the “craic” or “ambience” of the Irish drinking environment could influence quality judgments. They also found evidence for the “line” theory: that Guinness is best enjoyed in pubs where demand for it is high, so that it is never sitting in the pipelines for too long.

That the *Journal of Food Science* is a serious publication can be inferred from some of the other material in the March issue. One feature is headed: “Technological Optimization of Manufacture of Probiotic Whey Cheese Matrices”. A second reports: “Improved Sauerkraut Production with Probiotic Strain *Lactobacillus plantarum* L4 and *Leuconostoc mesenteroides* LMG 7954”.

And then there is the catchily titled “Discrimination of Alicyclobacillus Strains Using Nitrocellulose Membrane Filter and Attenuated Total Reflectance Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy”.

The journal also features a study on the development of food for Nasa space missions. Astronauts now

enjoy a tastier and healthier diet than ever before, it concludes, but there are challenges still to be faced before they travel “to Mars and beyond”. There is no mention of the use of Guinness in the project.

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