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## To Go, Please



Culinary innovation has **hit the fast lane**. Getting your meal from the back of a truck parked in a

**To be in the fast lane means to live a risky life, so hitting the fast lane is to start this type of life. But the writer is making a pun because she's writing about trucks which can literally drive in the fast lane.**

lot somewhere is no longer an act of starving desperation. Mobile cooks now serve everything from sushi to Texan barbecue and have devotees lined up down the street.

Not surprisingly, in the US we can **trace** the craze back to Los Angeles. In fact, the city held its first Street Food Fest in 2010. In 2008, Roy Choi, a classically trained chef, took his Korean-Mexican fusion food to the streets via a truck he named Kogi. To say his business took off would be an understatement; Kogi is often the example given when talking about this new **foodie** obsession. Mr Choi now has five Kogi trucks **roaming** the streets of LA sharing their motto that 'high-end food at street level prices' is possible. But the trucks aren't anything new – in certain LA neighborhoods, vans serving tacos and other Mexican specialties have been in operation since the 60s. And people like them – regulars always know who does the best sauce, or which truck has the better meat.

In London, transport cuisine has similarly **soared in popularity**. Hit the King's Cross area weekdays around lunch time and you can sample the goods from up to seven different food vendors. The trucks **rotate**, so you could pop over every day and always dine on something new.

**Mash-up: When you say mash, you might think potatoes, but nowadays most young people use mash-up to mean a mix of very distinct things. Mash-ups started with mixing videos together. Now it can be used to talk about books and even restaurants.**

Most food trucks have their own **spin**; creating a mash-up of cuisines, or bringing regional favorites to a different part of the country. Comida brings authentic Mexican food to the streets of Boulder, Colorado and Creole food from Louisiana is in Seattle, Washington, courtesy of the food truck, Where Ya At Matt. In Portland, Oregon,

usually considered a foodie city; you can get Norwegian food from the back of the Viking Soul Food van, while Schnitzel & Things cooks up Austrian food for the masses in New York. Dessert-only trucks can be found across the country; in Scottsdale, Arizona, Torched Goodness only serves crème brûlée.



Courtesy of StreetZa

When Scott Baitinger and Steve Mai launched [StreetZa](#) in 2008, a pizza truck in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, they never even thought of going the traditional restaurant route.

“We were the first ‘gourmet’ food truck in our market,” Mr Baitinger told *The Word*. “We realized that the flexibility to reposition ourselves into high traffic areas was the key to becoming profitable quickly.” He says the **overhead** with a food truck is about 20% of a small take-out only traditional pizza restaurant.

“We do face lots of restrictions and fees when we sell in certain areas, but those still are tiny in comparison to leases, real estate taxes and building improvements,” he added.

This cost savings was also a big reason behind Prague’s currently sole food truck – [Food Spot](#). Food Spot manager Zuzana Němcová told *The Word* they were also inspired by the food truck trend in America.

“There are already many restaurants in Prague, but no food trucks, so the decision was quite easy,” she said. “Going mobile gives us an opportunity to be where the action is. Not only can we organize lunches everyday in different locations, but whenever there is a concert, sports event, etc., we can be right there.”

Food Spot focuses on Tex-Mex cuisine which Ms Němcová says has been made a bit milder for local palates. They also do weekly specials, “according to the cook’s taste buds – but jalapeños are must,” Ms Němcová said.

With no set location; food truck owners typically post where they’ll be and at what time on their Facebook page or Tweet the info to their followers. Savvy truck owners know the key to getting the customer into their food line is making a connection with them. Food Spot posts and tweets their location and menu daily, regularly hitting spots in Holešovice, Anděl and Karlín. StreetZa has **placed a big focus** on their customer interactions.

“By including as many people in every process, we have made them a part of our food truck,” Mr Baitinger said. “They want to see something that they are part of succeed, and do more things to share the StreetZa message and product mix.” Mr Baitinger and Mr Mai have crowdsourced their Twitter followers and Facebook friends to help select the company’s logo, the truck’s design and the types of pizza they serve. Mr Baitinger says the current favorite is the Slice of Milwaukee which includes locally made meats and cheeses.

Having your lunch from the back of a truck certainly gives a different **vibe** to your meal. You may be standing up, juggling food and a plate – in closer **proximity** and with more access to your dining companions than you’d have in a typical sit-down restaurants. This ambiance **brings a bit of life** to city streets, infusing the areas with more of a neighborhood atmosphere versus a rushed downtown mood.

It’s not just food that has been given wheels; there’s a host of other companies that have caught on to the idea that showing up where your customers are likely to be will make sales. There’s the Renewal Retreat – a mobile spa, when you just need **to pop in** for a quick **facial** or the portable karaoke truck, RVIP Lounge & Karaoke Cabaret. With smoking restrictions in many bars and restaurants, a number of mobile cigar lounges have emerged from the smoke. Need a DNA test? Who’s Your Daddy (yes, that is the company’s name) will do one in the back of their truck; sending you the results in about a week.