Eating out—understanding how the restaurants “per kilo” work in Brazil

It is probable that in no other country in the world are the restaurants called “per kilo” or “self service” where the guest serves himself and pays for the food based on the weight of the plate, so popular as in Brazil. In São Paulo, there is one on every street corner and they can be a great option for people in a hurry or, depending on the place, people wanting to economize.

The problem is that the majority of people that come from abroad don’t know this type of system and don’t know how to find a restaurant like this. To help, we have provided this small manual. Check out our tips and enjoy the best that these “per kilo restaurants” have to offer.

**Tips on which to choose**

Paying attention to the cleanliness of the place is basic, and it’s also worth remembering to check if the environment is clean, if it’s aired out, and if the employees use caps and gloves.

Check to see if the place has a good number of people dining there and if there is a lot of leftover food on the plates of those who have already eaten, because this can indicate a bad quality restaurant.

The price is always important. If it is really low, less than R$20.00, do not trust the quality. The price per kilo of restaurants considered good is, on average, R$35.00.

Remember that the price, in general, does not include drinks or dessert. Some more popular restaurants offer juice or gelatin as a courtesy.

**How it works**

Soon after entering, there is a place for trays, plates, cutlery and napkins. In some restaurants, there are little cups for desserts. You take what you need and get in line to serve yourself.

Hot food and cold food are usually separated into sections. Drinks as well as sweets can be found in refrigerators in easy reach.

The first table of cold food contains salads, cold meats, eggs, fruits and in some cases desserts. In others, the sweets can be on the last table together with the drinks or in refrigerators.

Normally after the cold food section come the hot plates. Many restaurants have an area also that serves grilled meat. Take advantage of this and try the famous Brazilian barbecue.

After serving yourself, go to the scale and put your food there so the attendant weighs the plate and marks the weight and price to be paid on your bill. Your bill will either be written on paper or you will be given a card with a specific number that electronically has your bill on it. Simply take that card to the cashier when you are ready to pay.

The scale already discounts the weight of the empty plate, which is called the “tare”. The majority of the time, the dessert is weighed on another scale and on top of a plate as its price is different than the price of the food.

In some places, you pay immediately after weighing the food, in others, upon leaving. If you pay upon leaving and if you were served at the table, probably you will be charged an additional 10% service charge for the amount of food consumed. You are not obligated to pay this service charge in any restaurant, bar or cafe in Brazil, but it is something very common that is similar to a tip.

So you see, it’s not so difficult! With time you will get accustomed and can have great experiences in this type of restaurant.