

Restaurant  
of the Month  
Switzerland

*blindekuh*  
mehr als ein restaurant



blindekuh

## The world's first restaurant serving food in the dark

The restaurant blindekuh, named after the game "Blind Man's Buff", is indeed a very special place. Founded in Zurich, and extended to a second branch in Basel, it was the world's first restaurant where sighted people could experience what it means to be blind during dinner time. Meals are held in pitch black darkness.

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Standing in front of the Zurich blindekuh restaurant, the front is reminiscent of what this place once was: a Methodist church. A few steps lead toward a heavy two-winged door, then customers enter the lobby where the menu is projected onto a wall. Further

into the building there is nothing to see but darkness. Pitch black darkness. The waiter or waitress leads customers towards the tables, asking the first to put both hands on his or her shoulders and the others to line up accordingly, thus forming a line.

The founders of the blindekuh restaurant got their inspiration during an exhibition at the Museum für Gestaltung in Zurich in 1998, allowing people to experience what it means to be blind: On September 17, 1999 blind pastor Jürg Spielmann, blind social worker Andrea Blaser, blind singer Thomas Moser and visually handicapped psychologist Stefan Zappa opened the world's first restaurant serving food in complete darkness. A concept Jürg Spielmann had tried out before with private guests at his own house.

### Discovering the sense of taste

For his guests this was a rather outstanding taste experience: With their eyes covered other senses suddenly became more alert: the nose detecting the finer notes in dishes and also the food's taste became far more intense. Just imagine closing your eyes, not seeing but smelling. Is it rosemary or thyme? Maybe there are carrots on the plate and potatoes. But are they baked or mashed? Only taste can tell. But navigating fork, spoon and knife in the dark is everything but easy for those accustomed to seeing.

At the blindekuh restaurant the customers' requests are shouted, which can lead to a certain noise level. Whoever needs to use the restroom during dinner time has to ask a waiter to be guided back to the lit en-

trance area. All waiters and waitresses are blind or partially sighted and therefore it is easier for them to navigate in the dark. To avoid collisions with their colleagues they rely on oral communication.

For all those not up to the challenge of having dinner in darkness the Basel restaurant has a separate bar, where snacks and drinks are served in a lit area.

### After a somewhat rocky start, the blindekuh idea became an international success story

The restaurant is carried by a trust. In 1999, the same year blindekuh was founded, a concept was designed for the Expo.02. The blindekuh-Pavilion was among the most successful projects during the exhibition. In March 2005 a second restaurant opened its doors in Basel. The head chefs in both establishments love to work with fresh and local produce, changing the menus weekly. The prices are in line with the respective local average.

### Among Switzerland's most important employers of blind people

The concept has found imitators all over the world and has made dining in the dark quite popular with those searching for new taste experiences. Restaurants of this kind can now be found in New York, Moscow, in Berlin as well as in Hong Kong. Today employing around 30 visually handicapped people, the blindekuh restaurants are among Switzerland's most important employers for the blind and partially sighted.

But blindekuh is more than a restaurant. It also hosts performing arts. Often enough this demands quite a lot from actors and singers who are accustomed to see what they are doing and to perform in a setting where the audience can see them. But where the eyes fail, hearing becomes more alert. And therefore blindekuh is the perfect space for acoustic performances, be it a concert or a literary event. All cultural events are announced on the blindekuh website. Above that, blindekuh offers educational courses making it possible to uncover unknown talents and to enhance the use of the senses.

[www.blindekuh.ch](http://www.blindekuh.ch)

Left: Restaurant blindekuh in Zürich  
Below: blindekuh in Basel

