

EATING OUT...

Sometimes on a uni budget, you need to make sacrifices. You need to do things you wouldn't do, eat things you wouldn't eat. Leaving home is a complete free-for-all. No one can stop you buying and consuming the cheapest of cheap foods, especially if it's necessary for your survival. But what to do if, say, you wanted chicken tonight? And only had five dollars? And a complete and utter disregard for what you eat?

Join me on a journey through six cheap chicken experiences you can have for under five dollars, and let me try these things so you don't have to.

The Two-in-one Luncheon Tube

Cost: three dollars.

It's in Woolworths, but it's a bit tricky to find, I guess because it defies easy classification. Don't be fooled by the dog food section.

Preliminary thoughts:

'Ready to Eat' is proudly emblazoned on the side, but I'm not sure I've ever felt less ready to eat something in my life. Its thick tube like packaging and dubious meat blend also bares a distinctly unappetising similarity to dog-food, the thought of which has been rapidly lowering my readiness to eat it. It also claims to be a combination of chicken and pork, which is what I assume human meat probably tastes like, another factor which is speedily lowering an already negligible appetite for meat tube.

The sniff test:

It doesn't clearly smell like any meat I've ever experienced, except possibly being evocative of a more pungent devon.

The experience:

The first thing that hits you is the sheer density of the meat — this is one solid tube. The taste definitely doesn't smack you over the head, instead it just sort of screams 'generic meat product' in the next room, and calls it a day. It's not overwhelmingly bad, but only because it was constructed from such an unholy amalgamation of stuff that it hasn't got a distinct enough flavour to be clearly disgusting. Regardless, I won't be adding this tube to my luncheon menu.

鸡肉午餐肉 (Lunch Meat)

Cost: I forgot to write this down. It was somewhere in the ball-park of two or three dollars. Purchased at an Asian supermarket

Preliminary thoughts:

The sketchiness of this product is definitely amplified by not knowing exactly

Cheap chicken experiences you can have for under \$5



Leo Alder reports from a share house somewhere in Canberra

what its situation is. It is also a remarkably difficult thing for a canned meat amateur to open, as it doesn't have the easy pop mechanism that the other cans enjoy.

Instead, it had some sort of fat key thing taped to the top of it, but after breaking it off, there was absolutely no indication as to how to open the damn thing. I had to do some very specific googling to work out the strangely weird mechanism required to open it, where you have to peel off the wrapper, and insert the key into the side and like, twist it open.

Even then I goofed it up and had to bust into it like a savage to get at my disgusting chicken product.

Immediately it looks bad. It's so god-damn pink. Like, the colour of one of those hairless goblin cats. I'm having a hard time trusting it as being edible without additional cooking, but, as it turns out, all of these 'chicken' products are supposedly ready to eat straight out of the can, and unfortunately, in the interests of an authentic experience that is what I must do.

Sniff test:

Oh my god, it smells so bad. I don't even know what to liken it to. Definitely nothing of this Earth. A similar smell might be akin to an alien escapee from Area 51, collapsed and rotting in the Utah desert.

The experience:

This is nothing like any food I have

ever eaten. It doesn't have the texture of food, barely has the taste of anything. I feel like it can only be classified as food on a technicality. It's wet-ish, but not moist. Yet it somehow feels both dry and slimy in the mouth. It looks and feels like memory foam, like some sort of construction putty used to seal up cracks in a wall. Or like the cheapest of rations leftover from the first world war. I don't think I've ever experienced anything with quite as intrinsically confronting a mouth-feel experience as this thing.

Even writing this a day after the fact, thinking about it still gives me intense flashbacks to eating it, to that terrible mass of chicken putty just sitting stagnant in the mouth. Oh God, in the interest of not reliving it further, I think I might hold off on further description.

On the plus side, it makes the two-in-one luncheon tube seem like a fond memory by comparison.

Coles Tin Chicken

Cost: I bought all three flavours for under five dollars. You can find it by the Spam.

Preliminary thoughts:

Three flavours! What a steal! Honestly, I've been dreading this one the most, as I suspect that the additional element of 'flavour' just adds way more things to go wrong. Also; one of the flavours is mayo, the idea of which sends violent shudders down my spine.

Sniff test:

Chilli: This one smells catastrophically bad. I cannot stress this enough. It stank up the entire room instantaneously. It smelt like cat urine. Like paint. Like indeterminate horror.

Teriyaki: When it was first opened, it

released an intense, violent attack of rotten teriyaki smell. However, on repeated sniffing it became apparent that, although initially smelling worse, it didn't have the lingering chemical warfare capabilities of the chilli.

Mayo: I gave an audible sigh of relief when I discovered it doesn't smell as pungent as the others, as I was sure that of any of the flavours, mayo would be the one to kill me. However, it still doesn't smell anything like food.

The experience:

Chilli: This one just made my monkey brain go haywire with the desire not to eat it, some leftover evolutionary defence mechanism desperately begging me to see sense. Strangely enough though, it just tastes sweet. Definitely not like meat. Or like anything really. But somehow, eating it is better than smelling it. However if you even so much as detect it through your nose it becomes intensely difficult to get down.

Teriyaki: This one takes the award for most like cat-food, tiny little can and all.

It doesn't smell as bad as the chilli flavour, however, every time you disturb it with your fork, diabolical little shotgun bursts of pungency are released making eating it difficult.

Taste wise, it's oily, it's fish-like, it's strange and hard to pin down. Its flavour is confusing and while definitely bad, it isn't hit you over the head bad. However, I definitely didn't want a second bite.

Mayo: My stomach was getting pretty damn close to full-scale revolution at



...OF THE TIN

this point. Eating it, it starts off like "oh", and then almost instantaneously deteriorates, getting exponentially worse the longer you let it stay in your mouth.

It makes me believe that the potential food poisoning aspect of this experience will probably be more appealing than the actual act of eating these things.

Chicken Hearts:

Cost: When I was in there, Woolworths refused to disclose the price of these things, on the packet or on the shelf, which is surprising as you'd think the low price point would be the only possible source of positive advertising. So... cheap? I'm certain that they're way under five dollars anyway. You can find them at Woolworths by the turkey necks and chicken feet.

Preliminary thoughts:

Now, full disclosure, I didn't buy and eat chicken hearts. At this point in my depraved chicken journey, the thought of somehow descending lower into the realm of disgust filled me with an existential dread that I simply could not shake. However, my housemate once bought chicken hearts because they were ridiculously cheap, and in lieu of my own suffering, I will catalogue his experience here.

Sniff test:

"Meaty."

The experience:

Now, this turned out to be the only thing on this list that can't just be bought and eaten on the spot. Unless of course, you want to frighten your friends with a next-level display of savagery and poor life choices. Don't do this.

I mention this, as your enjoyment of this chicken product is undoubtedly determined by whether you know how to cook it correctly or not. I have no idea

how they are supposed to be cooked, and how much that impacts the experience, but I am certain that my housemate did not cook them correctly.

With that out of the way, here's what he had to say:

"The taste was like the blandest most boring part of a chicken, like all the fun of a chicken had been taken out."

"The texture was like those little rubbery bouncy balls, you know, the ones that jump up to like, double their height. Very chewy."

"It definitely wasn't worth the price. Even if you offered me five dollars to eat it, I wouldn't. Ten dollars is a different story though."



Tinned Pigeon

Cost: Maybe like, three dollars? I forget exactly how much. This can also be found at your local Asian grocery.

Preliminary thoughts:

I bought this fully resigned to the fact that tinned pigeon is a thing that exists and that I was going to have to eat it. However, a closer investigation of the tin has led me to believe that it is, in fact, some sort of mysterious vegetable product.

Sniff test:

Smells sort of like vegetables that have been boiling too long.

The experience:

Opening it, it looks like a deep sea creature that's been preserved in brine. It's definitely not pigeon meat, but is rather some sort of weird, pickled vegetable.

Honestly, this one is undeniably the best out of all the tinned 'food' stuffs. It just tastes really, really salty and was a desperately welcomed palate cleanser to banish my previous, painful chicken experiences.

Now, I don't know if it actually tasted good, or whether my concept of good had simply been warped by a constant procession of terrible meat, but I definitely went back for a second bite.