

# The Dream Job Doesn't Exi...

Growing up, I've always loved to eat. My family has joked with me for decades about my love for food. Interestingly enough, I've also always had a knack for writing. Starting in elementary school, where my mother was a teacher, I wrote a detailed essay about my amazing bedroom. Many teachers came to my mother, intrigued, saying they wanted to see my bedroom because it must be fantastic, according to my well-written essay. Upon inspecting my writing, my mother laughed, 'Her room looks nothing like this.' My imagination and love for writing took off from there.



As a young adult, I attended journalism workshops and camps over the summer at the local news and record in my town. At a young age, I would joke with people who remarked on my love for food, saying, 'My dream job is to travel the world, eating and writing about it,' laughing with them because, yeah right! How would I do that?

## Stars of the Show

Let's dive into the stars of the show, or actually the inspectors that award the stars. Have you ever wondered how restaurants get Michelin Stars? Or how the Michelin Star rating system came to be? Or better yet, have you ever thought you could be a Michelin inspector? I grew up in a town in North Carolina before social media and the real internet we have today, so my ideas were limited to my views gained in my hometown (one of the reasons why I encourage young people to travel and study abroad). I had no idea then that this was actually a job. A food inspector! But not just any food inspector. There's the Michelin Guide inspector. While there are no public job listings for Michelin inspectors at this time, this article will offer a detailed exploration of the role, elucidating its primary responsibilities and the essential qualifications required for this unique career path.

A Michelin star rating is one of the most prestigious honors a restaurant can receive. As the Michelin star rating system states, ‘Coveted by many chefs but bestowed upon only an excellent few, getting a star (or three) could change the fate of a restaurant. One star signifies high-quality cooking, worth a stop; two stars denote excellent cooking, worth a detour; three stars indicate exceptional cuisine, worth a special journey.

Rebecca Burr, editor of the Michelin Guide to Great Britain and Ireland, as featured on the Michelin Guide’s website gives readers in-depth insight into this role. While I didn’t personally conduct this interview, Burr’s expertise offers valuable perspective on the pathway to becoming a Michelin inspector.

### **The Inspector Role**

Understanding the prestige of Michelin Stars naturally leads us to the architects behind these accolades: the Michelin Guide Inspectors. The Michelin Guide Inspector role entails anonymous inspections of restaurants and hotels for inclusion in the Michelin guides across North America, assessing their suitability for various classifications. This position demands significant travel, up to three weeks per month, and involves a minimum of 275 inspection meals annually. To maintain their impartiality and ensure an authentic guest experience, inspectors’ identities are kept confidential. In recognition of the physical demands of this role, the company offers fitness membership reimbursement.

## **Exploring Inspector Qualifications and Lifestyle**

### **Qualifications and Commitment:**

Traditionally, we look for candidates with a professional background, ideally from hotel school or equivalent, and at least five to seven years of experience in the industry, with some kitchen experience preferred,” explains Burr. She emphasizes the need for individuals who are “extremely understanding, observant, and passionate,” and who live and breathe their commitment to the role. Being a Michelin inspector is a demanding job, requiring lunch and dinner engagements every day and extensive travel. Burr notes that inspectors don’t just cover a specific region; they travel widely across their country and sometimes internationally. This variety keeps the job interesting and is one reason why inspectors often stay in the role for many years.

### **Key Qualities and Selection Process:**

Attention to detail, an inquisitive nature, a love for all varieties of food, and a keen sense of detecting culinary talent are essential qualities for a Michelin inspector, according to Burr. The selection process is rigorous, involving practical tests of judgment and palate. Prospective inspectors are asked to write reports on meals and to accompany existing team members to evaluate their observational skills and understanding of culinary excellence.

They need a discerning palate, the ability to objectively judge an establishment’s cuisine, and an extensive understanding of global produce, terroirs, and culinary cultures. Inspectors are also expected to be well-informed about recent developments in the restaurant industry, and possess extensive international knowledge of ingredients, culinary techniques, cuisines, and culinary fundamentals. Reflecting on these requirements, I can’t help but wonder: Is it too late for me to consider culinary school?

The scope of a Michelin Guide Inspector’s duties extends far beyond what a regular diner might imagine. Annually, each inspector is responsible for approximately 60 hotel stays, 250 meals, and traversing nearly 19,000 miles. Additionally, the Guide processes around 45,000 readers’ letters each year. This

comprehensive approach underpins the Michelin Guide's renowned system of evaluating and awarding restaurants. Let's delve deeper into this process.

Michelin Guide inspectors are more than just reviewers; they are gastronomic adventurers. They traverse 39 destinations worldwide, seeking the finest culinary experiences to recommend to food enthusiasts. Contrary to the image of a stern critic jotting notes in solitude, these inspectors, who are Michelin group employees, blend in seamlessly with other diners. Their anonymity and independence are crucial in ensuring that their experiences are representative of what any guest would encounter. They book tables under pseudonyms, enjoy meals, and settle their bills like any other customer.

### **What Inspectors Look For:**

For Burr, awarding a Michelin star focuses primarily on the quality of the food. Inspectors assess the chef's confidence, understanding of flavors and ingredients, skill levels, and the testing process behind each dish. However, the overall dining experience, including service and atmosphere, is also part of the inspectors' evaluation. They must remain discreet and blend in with other diners, a task made slightly easier in recent times with the acceptance of solo diners and the use of food photography. Interestingly, Burr mentions that Michelin inspectors have adapted to modern dining trends, including photographing food, a practice once not necessary due to the emphasis on having a photographic memory.

Inspectors evaluate restaurants based on five key criteria: the quality of ingredients; culinary technique mastery; the harmony of flavors; the personality and emotion conveyed by the chef in their dishes; and consistency across the entire menu and over multiple visits. These uniform standards ensure the Guide's selections' consistency worldwide, enabling evaluations of diverse culinary offerings, from a bustling food court in Taiwan to a luxurious Parisian hotel restaurant.

Michelin Guide Inspectors are culinary experts driven by an insatiable curiosity and a profound passion for food. They are at the forefront of global culinary trends, discovering emerging talents and sharing their insights. Their ultimate goal is to satisfy the expectations of diners who trust their recommendations.

The inspectors work collaboratively, updating their selections and reaching decisions through collective deliberation, ensuring the objectivity and currency of their recommendations. This collaborative approach guarantees that the awarded stars hold equal value from Tokyo to San Francisco, Copenhagen to Istanbul.

The prestigious Michelin Stars are awarded at special meetings, attended by the International Director of the Michelin Guides, the local Editor, and all inspectors involved in the selection process. These stars are subject to meticulous scrutiny and are awarded only through unanimous agreement. In case of any disagreement about an establishment, additional visits are arranged until a consensus is achieved.

### **Much Respect to Michelin Inspectors**

In conclusion, the journey to becoming a Michelin Guide Inspector, much like my own journey in food and writing, is one marked by passion, dedication, and a relentless pursuit of excellence. These inspectors, shrouded in anonymity, carry out their duties not for fame or recognition, but for the love of gastronomy and the commitment to maintaining the esteemed standards of the Michelin Guide. Their work, meticulous and often unseen, plays a pivotal role in shaping culinary trends and honoring the artistry of chefs around the world.

For someone like me, who cherishes both food and travel, the role of a Michelin Guide Inspector emerges not just as a profession, but as a dream job. It represents a perfect fusion of culinary exploration and global adventure, offering opportunities to immerse in diverse cultures and cuisines. Reflecting on the rigorous requirements and the extensive travel and dining that the role entails, it's clear that being a Michelin Guide Inspector transcends the conventional job framework; it's a lifestyle, a unique blend of adventure and culinary expertise, a calling for those who find joy in the discovery and celebration of world-class culinary experiences. Whether or not it's too late for me to embark on a path towards culinary school, this exploration into the world of Michelin Guide Inspectors has only deepened my appreciation for the intricate world of gastronomy and those who dedicate their lives to it.

As diners, we often see only the end result — a beautifully plated dish, a star rating, a review. But behind each of these is a story, a journey of discovery, evaluation, and expertise. The Michelin Guide Inspectors, much like my childhood self-writing imaginative essays, weave these stories, allowing us all to experience the world of culinary excellence, one meal at a time.