

WHAT'S NEXT FOR CARAMEL IN INDULGENT CATEGORIES ?

Food and drink brands can take inspiration from the success of salted caramel flavours and experiment with salty-sweet and bitter-sweet flavour combinations.



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Mintel recommends

Experiment with other salted flavours

Salt works as nature's flavour enhancer, and the success of adding salt to caramel opens the door for brands to explore the salty-sweet trend by adding salt to less-obvious flavours to intrigue consumers.

Explore bitter and burnt caramels

Dark or burnt caramels provide opportunities for brands to create more sophisticated flavours designed to appeal to the adult consumer.

Be bold with Asian-inspired caramels

Brands who pride themselves on providing their consumers with new and exciting flavour combinations can be inspired by the way Asian cuisines use fish sauce and soy sauce as the salty component in salted caramel.

Caramel reaches cult status

When Cadbury Caramilk came back on shelves in New Zealand last year after a 20-year disappearance, supply was depleted in less than three weeks. Some consumers were so desperate to get their fix of the caramellic chocolate that they were willing to pay 10 times the retail price to buy it online

Consumers are demanding caramel-flavoured white chocolate so much that Nestlé has made their limited edition Kit Kat Gold a permanent item in Australia.



Caramelised White Chocolate



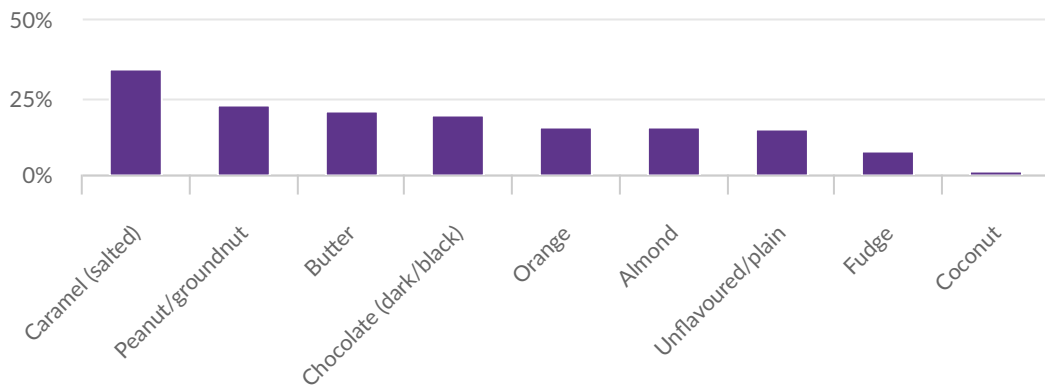
Gold Limited Edition White Chocolate Bar

Salted caramel is the fastest growing flavour in indulgent categories

Caramel flavour has always been one of the traditional favourites in indulgent categories of sweet biscuits, chocolate and confectionery.

Caramel ranks third (behind unflavoured and chocolate) with **7.8% of launches** in the combined categories from Sep 2016-Aug 2019. Within the **same period, salted caramel was the fastest growing flavour**. Salted caramel's popularity presents opportunities to experiment with new iterations of caramel.

UK, US, Australia: % change by flavour component, ice cream, sweet biscuits, chocolate and confectionery, Sep 2017-Aug 2019



Note: for the combined markets of US, UK and AU

Source: [Mintel GNPD](#)

THE SUCCESS OF SALTED CARAMEL OPENS THE DOOR FOR "SALTED" FLAVOURS

Classic flavours add "salty" to their description

The success of salted caramel has encouraged other classic flavours to capitalise on the salty/sweet trend.

Salted chocolate

Salted Chocolate Protein Bars. Salted chocolate is a logical progression from salted caramel. Chocolate confectionery brands like Lindt have helped to fuel the popularity and sophistication of salted chocolate (US).



Salted vanilla

Salted Vanilla Cookies with Chocolate Chips combines milk from the famous Hokkaido dairy region with deluxe salt to create a salted vanilla ice cream flavour (Japan).

Salted peanut butter

Salted Peanut Butter with Chocolate Flecks Ice Cream. Peanut butter is almost as popular as salted caramel in indulgent categories, so linking the two makes perfect sense in sweet categories (US).



"Salty" evolves even further in indulgent categories

In addition to the classic flavours like chocolate, vanilla and nuts, some manufacturers are experimenting with fruit and maple iterations of salty



Salted lemon

Salted Lemon Chocolate Cake. Japanese tastes can often be eclectic, so this combination of salty, sweet and tart may appeal to consumers as it starts to emerge in Japan.

Salted maple

Salted Maple Cashew Pieces in 33% Cocoa Creamy Milk Chocolate transforms Tip Top-branded ice cream into chocolate blocks in this limited edition product. A demonstration of how some flavours can move between categories (New Zealand).



Salted coconut

Mango & Salted Coconut Ice Cream Cones. Nostalgic ice cream brand Drumstick has partnered with Gelato shop Messina to move beyond mainstream flavours with the combination of fruits and salt in this retail offering (Australia).

Highlight the provenance of salt in salted caramel

In line with the Mintel Trend **Locavore**, brands can communicate the provenance of the salt in their salted caramel. Whittaker's highlights Marlborough, a region on the south island of New Zealand, while Connoisseur references the Murray River region in Southeast Australia.

These products are communicating a more artisan message through the hyper-local sourcing of their ingredients.



Marlborough Sea Salt and Caramel Brittle & Saffron in Dark Chocolate



Murray River Salted Caramel with Macadamia Gourmet Ice Cream

We have choc chips so why not salted caramel chips ?



Salted Caramel Chip Ice Cream



High Cocoa Milk Chocolate with Salted Caramel Chips

Salted caramel has reached such a mainstream status that some manufacturers are incorporating caramel chips into their product as a textural element just like choc chips.

"BITTER" CARAMEL CAN BE THE NEXT WAVE OF SOPHISTICATED CARAMEL FLAVOURS

Evolve to more sophisticated combinations of caramel

Burnt or dark caramel

Dark chocolate is positioned as a more sophisticated chocolate with its characteristic bitter profile (from higher cocoa content and less sugar). So dark or **burnt caramel** can **take inspiration from dark chocolate** with its slightly bitter profile and appeal to adult caramel connoisseurs looking for more sophisticated caramel.

Coffee caramel

Coffee culture is now well established and with this comes an elevated consumer knowledge of profiles and varieties of coffee. Caramel already has logical links to coffee through caramel-flavoured coffee, so why not further that connection by making coffee the slightly bitter hero in caramel?

Beer (stout) caramel

Dessert-flavoured beers like **chocolate stout** combine bitterness with rich, dark cocoa flavours to create a dessert beer. In return, ice cream company **Haagen Dazs has made a stout-flavoured chocolate ice cream**, so it makes sense that caramel could also use stout to generate the same bitter-sweet link between dessert and beer.



Burnt Caramel Ice Cream
(Australia)

Burnt caramel ice cream links bitterness to sophistication

Some may ask why you would want to burn anything, but **master chocolatier Michael Recchiuti knows that burning sugar brings out a great flavour**. Burnt caramel can also be linked with the popular French dessert *crème brûlée*, which characteristically involves burning sugar on top of a rich, creamy custard to provide a bitter-sweet crunchy skin.

The Lick! ice cream brand from Australia states on pack that it is "a classic flavour with a bold twist. A **slightly bitter edge gives this sweet caramel ice cream a unique sophisticated taste**".

Alter Eco also make their burnt caramel chocolate sound very sophisticated by referencing the cooking method of the caramel: "simmered to the brink of burning to obtain a caramel crunch, then drowned in deep, dark Ecuadorian chocolate".

Coffee caramel can be the bitter-sweet evolution of caramel

Coffee styles like espresso or latte communicate authentic flavour, while certain processing methods (eg cold brew) or provenance declaration help add a crafted element.

Coffee connoisseur meets caramel

Sea Salt Caramel Latte Chocolate Coffee Bites links the smooth, less-bitter variety of cold brew coffee with the milky element of latte and adds this to the popularity of salted caramel (US).



Provenance coffee meets caramel

Indonesian Coffee Caramel references the provenance of Indonesian coffee, known for its Arabica quality beans, to highlight the coffee flavour credentials in its caramel (Canada).

Could stout caramel be the next caramel indulgence?



Beer Caramel Glaze (US)



Smoke & Stout Burnt Caramel 72% Dark Chocolate (US)

We have seen a **trend of alcoholic flavours in indulgent categories**, like **ice cream with beer** being the hero.

Now both **Betty Crocker** and **McCormick** are promoting beer-based caramel recipes on their websites, so the combination of beer and caramel may not be that far-fetched.

For brands that like to push the boundaries, beer (or stout)-flavoured caramel could be the next adventure for self-identified foodie consumers.

CUISINE-INSPIRED CARMELS ARE ON THE HORIZON

The future of salted caramel could be Asian-inspired

The Mintel Trend *Patriot Games* explains how the rise of multiculturalism and mass travel is fueling a society of cultural diversity and drawing influence from other countries

Miso caramel

Otona No Amasa Chocolate & Miso Chocolate Assortment consists of Otona No Amasa-brand chocolate, with less sweetness, targeted at adults. It contains miso-flavoured white chocolate and a miso powder filling (Japan).



Soy sauce (Shoyu) caramel

Coconut & Shoyu Caramel Ice Cream. Developed by a Chinese-American chef whose unique culinary combinations have a modern international flair. This product is said to be the perfect vacation in a cup (US).

Fish sauce caramel

Salt & Straw has made a fish sauce caramel and palm sugar ice cream. Fish sauce caramel, used traditionally in Vietnam for chicken and fish dishes but also for dipping fruit, is still very niche and for the more adventurous brands (US).





Spicy Caramel Dark Chocolate (US)

Caramel flavours are inspired by the Mayan and Aztec traditions of spices in chocolate

Expanding caramel's spicy flavour horizon has been a popular subject in social media, with recipes like [sriracha caramel](#) and [salted spiced caramel sauce](#).

Products like this Ghirardelli Spicy Caramel Dark Chocolate are an interesting twist on the [traditional Mayan use of chilli in chocolate](#).

Ghiradelli has chosen to make chilli the spice in these spicy caramel-filled squares.

Other products like [Twix Speculoos Spiced Caramel Crunchy Biscuits](#) use sweet spices like cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger and clove to flavour the caramel.

These forays into the expanded caramel horizon remain primarily a "do-it-yourself" experiment, with few chocolate manufacturers exploring caramel's potential. But spicy caramel could be the breakout flavour for 2020 and beyond.

The opportunity

The success of salted caramel flavours provides opportunities for brands to explore other salty-sweet flavour combinations of both classic and emerging flavours in indulgent categories. Manufacturers can also experiment with burnt or bitter profiles of caramel to create an air of sophistication or generate bold and challenging caramel profiles inspired by Asian cuisines.



Meet the expert

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Megan joined Mintel in 2018 to specialise in the application of our Purchase Intelligence tool and report on Snacks for our global food and drink clients. Megan has a degree in Food Technology with experience in sensory evaluation, flavour descriptive analysis, consumer insights, application and marketing from her career in B2B flavour supply.

Read more by this expert | Get in touch

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