IELTS Academic Reading Practice Test 34 The Spice of Life!

A When thinking of the most popular restaurant dish in the UK, the answer 'chicken tikka masala' does not spring readily to mind. But it is indeed the answer, often now referred to as a true 'British national dish'. It may even have been invented by Indian immigrants in Scotland, who roasted chicken chunks (tikka), mixed them with spices and yoghurt, and served this in a bowl of masala sauce. The exact ingredients of the sauce vary from restaurant to restaurant, but the dish usually includes purced tomatoes and cream, coloured orange by turmeric and paprika. British cuisine? Yes, spices have come a long way.

B Spices are dried seeds, fruit, roots, bark, or vegetative parts of plants, added to food in small amounts to enhance flavour or colour. Herbs, in contrast, are only from the leaves, and only used for flavouring. Looking at the sources of some common spices, mustard and black pepper arc from seeds, cinnamon from bark, cloves from dried flower buds, ginger and turmeric from roots, while mace and saffron are from seed covers and stigma tips, respectively. In the face of such variety, it is becoming increasingly common for spices to be offered in pre-made combinations. Chili powder is a blend of chili peppers with other spices, often cumin, oregano, garlic powder, and salt. Mixed spice, which is often used in baking, is a British blend of sweet spices, with cinnamon being the dominant flavour. The ever-popular masala, as noted, could be anything, depending on the chef.

C. Although human communities were using spices tens of thousands of years ago, the trade of this commodity only began about 2000 BC, around the Middle Last. Early uses were less connected with cooking, and more with such diverse functions as embalming, medicine, religion, and food preservation. Eventually, extensive overiand trade routes, such as the Silk Road, were established, yet it was maritime advances into India and East Asia which led to the most dramatic growth in commercial activities. From then on, spices were the driving force of the world economy, commanding such high prices that it pitted nation against nation, and became the major impetus to exploration and conquest, it would be hard to underestimate the role spices have played in human history.

D. Originally, Muslim traders dominated these routes, seeing spice-iaden ships from the Orient crossing the Indian Ocean to Red Sea and Persian Gult ports, from where camel caravans transported the goods overiand. However, aithough slow to develop, European nations, using aggressive exploration and colonisation strategies, eventually came to rule the Far East and, consequently, control of the spice trade. At first, Portugal was the dominant power, but the British and Dutch eventually gained the upper hand, so that by the 19th century, the British controlled India, while the Dutch had the greater portion of the East Indies (Indonesia). Cloves, nutmeg, and pepper were some of the most valuable spices of the time.

E. But why were spices always in such demand? There are many answers. In the early days, they were thought to have strong medicinal properties by balancing humours, or excesses of emotions in the blood. other times they were thought to prevent maladies such as the plague, which often saw prices of recommended spices soar. But most obviously, spices flavoured the bland meat-based European cuisines. Pepper, historically, has always been in highest demand for this reason, and even today, peppercorns (dried black pepper kernels) remain, by monetary value, the most widely traded spice in the world. However, saffron, by being produced within the small saffron fiower, has always been among the world's most costly spice by weight, valued mostly for its vivid colour.

F. Predictably, the majority of the worid's spices are produced in India, although specific spices arc often produced in greater amounts in other countries. Vietnam is the largest producer and exporter of pepper, meeting nearly one third of the world's demand. Indonesia holds a clear lead in nutmeg production, iran in saffron, and Sri Lanka in cinnamon. However, exportation of such spices is not always simple. Most are dried as a whole product, or dried and ground into powder, both forms allowing bulk purchase, easier storage and shipping. and a longer shelf life. For example, the rhizomes (underground stems) of turmeric are boiled lor several hours, then dried in ovens, after which they are ground into the yellow powder popular in South-Asian and Middle-Eastern cuisines.

G. However, there are disadvantages in grinding spices. It increases their surface area many fold, accelerating the rate of evaporation and oxidation of their flavour-bearing and aromatic compounds. In contrast, whole dried spices retain these for much longer. Thus, seed-based varieties (which can be packaged and stored well) are often purchased in this form. This allows grinding to be done at the moment of cooking or eating, maximising the fiavour and effect, a fact which often results in pepper 'grinders, instead of 'shakers, gracing the tables of the better restaurants around the worid.

Questions I-5 Reading Passage one has seven paragraphs, A-G. Choose the correct heading for Paragraphs B-G from the list of headings List of Headings TUses of spice i Spices for cooking ii Changing leaders iv A strange choice v Preserving flavoursS vi Famous spice routes vii The power of spice vii Some spices ix Medicinal spice

x Spice providers Example Answer Paragraph A

- 1. Paragraph B
- 2. Paragraph C
- 3. Paragraph D
- 4. ParagraphE
- 5. Paragraph
- 6. Paragraph G

Questions 10-13

Do the following statements agree with the information given in Reading Passage One? TRUE if the statement agrees with the information FALSE if the statement contradicts the information NOT GIVEN if there is no information on this 10. The ingredients of masala are fairly standardised 1. The demand for spices led to greater exploration. 12. Vietnam consumes a lot of pepper.

13. Seed-based spices can be easily stored.

Unsung and Lowly Creatures

Earthworms are not creatures likely to attract much attention. socretive, silent, slow-moving, and featureless, aimost no one would ever think. Let's quote Charles Darwin, who wrote: it may be doubted wheather there are many other animals whichs have played so important a part in the history of the world as have these lowly-organised creatures'.

That is high praise indeed for what is basically a slimy, muscular, moist, segmented tube. This tube is also hermaphroditic, meaning that there are both male and female segments in the one creature. Some segment contain testes, others eggs, released ooze, exchange, and store fluids, and then a long complicated process eventually leads to the secretion of an egg case. From this, small but fully-formed worms will emerge, reaching full size in about one year, and living for one or two years after that.

Yet edrthworms are rarely seen, spending as they do their whole lives underground. only atter heavy rains can they sometimes be found on the surface, apparently stranded. Three hypotheses are put forward to explain this. The stormwater may fiood their burrows, forcing them upards. Alternatively, the worms may be taking advantage of the wet conditions to either travel more quickly through the open air (compared to burrowing beneath the ground), or otherwise to meet and mate. Whatever the case, if they find themselves on concreted, rocky, or hardened earth, they are effectively trapped. If this is during dawn, in high summer, or in the daytime, these earthworms quickly die due to bird predation or dehydration.

Normally, however, worms quietly go about their hidden business, and this often leads to an underestimation of their actual numbers. Darwin himself thought that arable land contained about 50,000 worms per acre, yet modern research has suggested that the figure could reach as high as almost two million. Putting this another way, the weight of earthworms beneath the soil is often greater than that of the cows, horses, and sheep are zing upon is surface. And those worms are just as hungry. Worms do, in fact, have a small mouth and a simple but effective digestive system, similar to the animals above, Food is sucked into the body, then pushed along the length of the Worm through muscular action, passing through the crop, gizzard, intestine, and finally the anus.

Perhaps surprisingly, it is this constant eating which so benefits the chemistry of the soil. Earthworms feed on undecayed leat litter and organic matter. They pull pieces down into their burrows, shred them into smaller parts, and then consume each of these, along with small soil particles. In the worms' gut, everything is ground into aa fine paste, to be eventually excreted, releasing essential minerals in an easily accessible form. One single worm may produce over four kilograms of this digested paste per year. Multiply that by a million worms, and one can understand Darwin's comment about 'unsung creatures which, in their untold millions, transformed the land.

The other great benefit relates to earthworms search for food. It might surprise many to know that these creatures are very mobile, moving to the surface then down into the sater depths on a daily basis. Alded by the secretion of lubricating mucus, they push themselves through the soil using Waves of bodily contractions, which aiternately shorten and lengthen their form. The point is, water can also move through their tunnels. More importantly, as the worms travel, they push air in and out of the soil on a continuous basis. In the same way that animals need oxygen, so too do the myriad micro-organisms in the soil. Thus, without worms, the ground would become waterlogged, airless, and less productive for farming purposes.

Naturally, with so many worms in the soil, they form the base of many food chains. Not only birds, but also some mammals, such as hedgehogs, moles, and even larger ones, such as foxes and bears, will actively dig into the ground of worms. Such predation is natural, and has little effect on Worm populations. However, the use of certain fertilisers is a different case. Earthworms depend on the temperature, texture, and moisture content of the soil, but it is its acidity to which they are most sensitive. Nitrogenous fertilisers can raise this to levels fatal to these creatures, often causing disastrous drops in numbers. The more ecologically-aware farmer avoids Such chemicals, and regularly adds a surface mulch of organic matter raising worm numbers for the natural benefit of both soil and man.

Questions 14-17 Choose the correct letter, A, B, C, or D. 14. Charles Darwin thought that worms A were only moderately important B were organised C liked arable land Dnumbered in the many millions. 15. A single worm A is either male or female. B has many segments. Cis a complicated organism Dlives for about a year. 16. Stormwater may possibly A clean out worm burrows. B slow down worms. C help worms encounter others. D harden the earth **17.Grazing animals** A often weigh less than the worms below. B are hungrier than the worms below. C have very different digestive systems from worms. D have simpler digestive systems than worms.

Questions 18-24

Complete the diagram. Choose NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS from the passage for each answer.



Questions 25-26

Complete the sentences. Choose NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS from the passage for each answer.

Worm numbers will especially fall when the soil has high (25)-

Adding mulch to the soil shows (26).