

BUFFET CATERING

In culinary terminology a buffet is a large tier stand on which various dishes of fish, poultry, meat, cold sweets, vegetarian items, crisps, & non crisps are arranged in a decorative manner. It is a most agreeable and practical way of serving guests because it is so versatile and can be adopted in many ways. A buffet can be used at many kinds of formal, informal entertainment, reception, weddings, birthdays, dances, & hosts of similar occasions. A buffet can be successively used when it is necessary to provide a substantial meal in an informal atmosphere for a larger number of guests. In fact buffet is used as a short window and the eye-catching piece of establishments. Every buffet must be arranged so that guests are served easily and quickly. The approximate number of large and small plates, cutlery, glasses and napkins must be provided at the convenient points and the buffet can be set out so that the guests can help themselves. If the hotels want to have the sustained business it is necessary that the food and drinks be attractive and interestingly different from the routine. Setting up a buffet demands a creative touch. The one in charge of this operation will do well to keep in mind the old saying "the eye is first to feast." Buffet calls for tasteful arrangements, display, and decoration of food items.

There are few points to be observed in planning and organising a buffet: Relationship of food among various drinks:

In arranging cold buffet the same rule must be followed as for food service in hot cuisine. If the guest is urged to step up on the right side of buffet to follow the line to the left, the food items must be placed from left to right in order of regular meal. Small hors d'oeuvre items, soup, fish, meat, entree, salads, vegetables, sweets, desserts. It's better to have main dishes placed on higher levels with garnishes and salads & salad dressings in front at lower levels.

Selection and Placement:

A good selection of food items for a regular buffet should include those enlisted on a complete menu. Classical menu is divided into several groups and the guests make selection with or without regard of grouping. One should however keep in mind catering for pleasure as well as nutritive value, for careful selection in combining foods for a complete meal.

Presentation to Best Advantage:

An artist would never present a painting without a suitable frame, likewise food must be presented in a correct platter or dish. Most silver platters are made with border design. This border must never be covered since it is meant to enhance the contents of the platter. With the ample supply of platters half of the battle is won. For a large fish a fish platter, long and narrow is ideal. For medium size buffet pieces use round or oval shapes. For heavy pieces square or oblong with handles are used. Salads should be presented in dishes that will not be affected by the dressing. No platters, bowls or service utensils should protrude over the edge of the table. Every platter should have an eye-catching decoration and the food should be arranged in proper order and in colourful contrast to each other. Display the food so that the guests may easily help themselves. Food is never attractive in a container that is nearly empty. It is the duty of cook in charge to have the food replaced when necessary and to ensure it's appetising issuance. On every buffet table there are food items costing more than others and these are usually used up first. This poses quite a problem, but a buffet should be planned that substitution are not made throughout the entire meal. If some dishes are to be replaced, they should be replaced by similar types.

Additional Decoration And Edible Pieces:

When there is daily buffet setup, economy must be considered. It is possible to display a few items that are not edible, though they have the appearance of edible foods. Also they will not have the faults of untrue colouring or bad odour. These dummy items if carefully handled could be used repeatedly. Never decorate a raw fish with cooked food items, since it violates the fundamental rule of culinary art. Cleanliness is the essence of buffet display, very fine decorative effects may be achieved with folded linen napkins.

Center piece:

If a buffet is small a single outstanding platter be used as a main point of attraction. In laying buffet, situation may demand building of scaffold to support the heavy centerpiece, that will stand out from all other foods in a buffet. For a classical buffet an ice carving or floral decoration is proper.

Layout And Carpenter Work:

Layout of buffet depends upon many things. Architecturally every dining space is different. The difference calls for a study of space in order to locate the buffet properly. The table should be as near as possible to the kitchen for convenience of replenishment. The various layouts are:

I shaped

Broken I

L shaped

U shaped

V shaped.

The size of the length of the buffet table depends upon whether all the guests eat the same time or whether dining period stretches over few hours. In case of small table length owing to limitation of dining area fast replenishment is the answer. For a frequent buffet service, additional carpentry work may be required, which includes construction of permanent platform & a carving drip banks, centerpiece holder or stand. And for kitchen installation of chillers, refrigerators, slicers, blade knives, different cutters and carving knives.

Plan your Buffet Preparatory:

Work a day in advance for convenience. Make some drawing & select the best plan. Decor should be befitting the occasion, therefore work must be planned. Organise and coordinate the activities before taking a decision and fixing the price. Buffet control should be enforced during and after the function in order to find out whether the party has achieved profits & whether minimal food cost has been realised. Buffet controls mainly depends upon food cost control which include:

- 1: Correct selection of Raw Materials
- 2 :Optimum utilisation of overheads & labour.
- 3:Standardisation of portions and portion control.

Total food cost control & stock taking of left overs should be accounted for.

The cost of materials should be compared with the sale, excluding the leftovers in order to find out gross profit and the difference will give the gross profit percentage.

Service at Buffet:

During the buffet service some of the staff must be positioned behind the buffet for service and replenishment of food and beverage. Others should circulate the room with the food and also clear away the dirties as they accumulate. As the dishes on the buffet become depleted, they should be replenished or cleared away so that buffet looks neat and tidy at all times.

TYPES OF BUFFET:

1. Display buffet:

These are set up in large restaurants either in the centre or at the entrance in big glass cabinets or counters to catch the customers eye. It includes an arrangement of flowers, fruits, fresh vegetables in season or an assortment of wines and cheeses part of display. The sole purpose of display buffet is to show the customers the items restaurant has to offer and thus help him to make the choice.

2: Breakfast buffet:

These are offered by hotels handling group bookings and airline crews for the reason of staff economy and speedy service. There is a wide selection of food laid out on the buffet. The beverages may be

acquired from buffet table or from the waiter. The buffet normally includes a wide selection of breakfast rolls cold meats, fish, pancakes, samosas, cereals and other breakfast items.

3: Full buffet or sit down buffet:

For this type of buffet chairs and tables are essential, which are laid up with covers. The food displayed on the buffet table gives the chef the chance to demonstrate his skills. The buffet table has to be clothed up to the ground and should be decorated simply but elegantly with either flower arrangements, isocles, butter or margarine carving.

Service for the full buffet comprises of silver service for soup, sweet and coffee with only the main course being self serviced.

Fork or Stand up buffet:

This is less formal buffet at which the meal is eaten standing with the plate in one hand and fork in the other. It is ideally suited for places with limited space. Few tables and chairs are provided with adequate water stations and an occasional table for dirties. Dinner plates are placed along with the forks on the buffet itself. The range of food is limited here compared to a full buffet as the food items like bigger joints of roast etc that has to be sliced or cut are eliminated, while curries, stews, casseroles are ideal.

Finger buffet:

This is the least formal type of buffet where food is eaten with fingers. It is a snack meal served at a time when the guest does not anticipate a substantial amount of food. Food offered should be bite size eg canapes, sandwiches, drumsticks etc. Plenty of napkins and finger bowls are essential. A few chairs and tables are required for the elderly guests.

Carrousel:

It was introduced for the first time in Britain in 1982. It comprises of a large rotating arrangement of shelf approximately 2 m in diameter with food and drinks arranged. The customer remains stationary as the carrousel revolves ones every minute to enable them to select items. Only half of the carrousel is in service, so that the items are removed from the other half. The shelves can be replenished in the running area behind the unit. The cutlery, napkins and beverages are generally separately available in order to avoid congestion at the unit. It requires less space and serves 8 to 10 people per minute. operator should be well trained to reach quickly and efficiently to maintain a steady flow rate of guests.

Salad Bars:

It is a self service set, in which each guest is given the opportunity to make his/her own salad from an attractive array of fresh vegetables and salad fruits that has been cleaned and sliced or quartered into bowls. Salad plates are available at one end of the salad bar. The guest prepares his own tossed green salad and help himself to a variety of prepared salad accompaniments and dressings. More elaborate salad bar provides cheese and different kinds of breads.

Oysters Bar:

It is a buffet featuring oysters on half shell, along with various sea food sauces and mustard that compliment oysters. Sometimes boiled shrimps and other seafood appetizers are included.

Dessert Table:

A tantalising display of tarts ,cakes, cream eclairs, fresh fruits, soft cheese are displayed in a buffet fashion. Dessert plates and forks are at hand on the dessert table. The displayed desserts are brought to the guest table on a tray or on a dessert cart at the end of the meal. Usually desserts are presented and guests can help themselves.

Small Gas Board or Smorgasbord:

Buffet featuring large section of food with many Scandinavian (Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Iceland) selection such as cheese and herring. In many places it is a set price self service buffet of any kind of food. Usually guests can come back to smorgasbord and refill their plates as often as they desire.

BUFFET BREAKFAST

Of all the hotel meals, it is very often breakfast which seems to give management the most headache. This is perhaps because majority of the guests arrive for breakfast within a few minutes of one another, all requiring fast service. However how well planned the service may be sudden influx of customers can cause havoc. To add to this, the situation may be aggravated by staff shortage. To overcome these problems and to meet the needs of the guest, some hotels have introduced a self service breakfast buffet, which has successfully provided a fast breakfast service. In many cases this approach of service of breakfast meal has improved sales.

One of the main advantage of a self service breakfast buffet is the reduction in staff requirements. The number of service staff required is less than they would be for a traditional breakfast operation of the same size.

Breakfast buffet reduces room service bottlenecks.

Overall cost is reduced as the food is prepared in bulk.

Another benefit is the flexibility it offers, the basic food selection remains unchanged, but buffet may be a useful outlet for overproduction of food in other areas from the cost point of view. The choice of items offered on the buffet can be adjusted to cope up with the fluctuating market prices. If a particular food item become very expensive it could appear on the buffet but the excess food cost would be offset by offering a selection of lower cost items as well.

One of the aim of the buffet is to sell food by eye appeal, the greater the impact by making more colourful and imaginative display, then the sale will be greater. Menu of the items sold from the buffet might have not been bought if they simply appeared on the printed menu.

With the introduction of this new style of breakfast service, the choice from the breakfast menu becomes more varied. This approach allows for a more extensive breakfast menu to be offered. The main demand at breakfast time is for fresh fruits, egg dishes and danish pastry.

With this type of operation a tight inventory needs to be kept of what goes out to the buffet and what comes back, so that a close check may be kept on buffet requirements and food costs and ultimately selling prices.

For the service of this style of breakfast meal, guests are presented with breakfast menu when they sit down and from that they make the choice of either the buffet or other types of breakfast. With the buffet breakfast all the items should be self served from the buffet with perhaps the exception of egg dishes or other cooked items and the beverages required should be waiter served.

PLANNING A BUFFET:

Workout the menu and buffet theme according to the price, number of people and type of occasion.

List all the items to be served. The particular dish or platter to be used.

Set up the schedule for food preparation and assessing the right no. Of people.

Make a service layout and nail it on the wall so that staff will know how to set up and determine how many service lines will be necessary to handle the group.

Do not over decorate the platters and table.

Do not mix inedible garnish with food.

During the service make sure that empty dishes are removed from the buffet table and place new ones. Keep extra napkins on hand to cover up soiled buffet cloth during the service.

After removing the food from the buffet table if the party is still in progress, cover the soiled cloth with a clean one.