

# Bring back your buffet

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Creating a stampede at the buffet bar was an easy trick a few years ago. All it seemed to take was a well-placed marquee with the ubiquitous blurb: "For An Adventure In Eating, Try Our Buffet."

Diners poured in to feast on chicken, roast beef and ham — which always seemed to be featured — and help themselves to heroic portions of mashed potatoes and green beans.

Besides the food offerings, patrons liked the freedom of the buffet: no waitresses, no menu guessing, no waiting to be served. Customers also liked the idea of going down the line unhampered, free to browse and make their selections.

In a very real sense, the buffet was an adventure. Diners were excited by a full array of food colors. They also enjoyed increased food variety and the concept of "building your own meal" was different and exciting. Patrons could frequently be heard coaxing one another: "Oh, go on try some, you haven't sampled these before," or "I wonder how this tastes with that?"

For awhile everyone was happy. Patrons were getting a good deal more variety as well as a lot to eat. Club managers were gaining increased business and higher check averages.

Then came what managers must have thought was the new national pastime. People started counting calories. They became concerned about their weight. Managers could no longer make it with just quantity; they had to deliver quality, too.

The favorite standards — chicken, roast beef and ham — started losing a lot of their pull power. And the rising cost of these items, plus labor costs in the

kitchen, almost prohibited operators from trying new and dramatic recipe ideas to rekindle enthusiasm.

For awhile the American dream buffet seemed to be on the skids. Today, however, the buffet is getting new and strong attention from some alert and innovative operators. Capitalizing on the nation's unrelenting love for casual dining, these operators have re-styled the buffet to fit the '70s. Restyling incorporates greater menu variety and production flexibility through intelligent use of convenience foods.

With so many different convenience foods available today, managers can quickly change menu offerings and be truly creative with little of the cost risks involved in earlier times.

Preparation of hot entree items serves as a good example. These items are the ones most people "load up" on. They are usually meat items and unless prepared skillfully will incur costs that soon eat up profits.

Using a so-called "quick-fix" approach, managers can mix and match convenience foods with meat and non-meat items to create exciting low-cost buffet entrees. In most instances, it's simply a matter of assembling foods that are already prepared. Quick-to-heat and ready-to-serve, these entrees can be prepared in needed quantities with a minimum of labor.

The "quick-fix" approach also alleviates the strain put on kitchen crews and production capacities when unexpected increased volume occurs. Further, such an approach rules out the risk of over producing when patron cancellations, bad weather or other circumstances alter expected customer count.

Operators also are able to offer patrons a wide variety of entrees to

match today's more inquisitive tastes. Increased travel by more people to an ever-growing list of places, has greatly altered eating attitudes and tastes. Such buffet items as sweet sour turkey Pilaf, Bavarian meat and potato turnover w/raisin sauce and River Queen Chicken Shortcake are exotic and inviting. With the use of convenience foods, they also are easy and economical to prepare.

Along with those items, consider the merchandising strength that could be added to your buffet with an unusual soup station offering a fine seafood bisque or a classical gaspacho. Or why not try a "build it yourself" appetizer bar featuring petite Polynesian shrimp dainties or sardine puffs?

Buffets certainly offer profit opportunities when convenience foods are added to salads. Imagine, for example, the additional appeal salads would have if dressed with Hearts of Palm, Salsify, Pickled Asparagus Spears, quartered celery hearts or artichoke hearts.

Spiced fruits are another quick and convenient way to add color and flavor to entrees and salads as well as appetizer and relish trays. Spiced apple rings, for example, are excellent with roast pork, duckling and roast or fried chicken. Spiced whole crabapples, yellow cling peaches and spiced Keifer pears offer great versatility with meat and fish entrees as well as light salad or fruit plates.

Today's buffets offer almost unlimited creativity. The straight chicken, roast beef and ham trio has been replaced with a whole new exciting mix of entrees, salads, relishes and specialty plates.

Check some of the recipe ideas on the next page and see if they might make a lively, profitable addition to your buffet menu:

## Seafood Delmonico

Combine all ingredients carefully (drain and reserve clam juice for use in chowders). Heat and serve in patty shell or over steamed rice for an excellent entree. For cocktail receptions or hot hors d'oeuvres, heat and serve in petite fish shape pastry puffs.

Yield: 200 — 5 ounce portions

- 6 No. 5 ounce cans of Tuna ala King
- 6 No. 5 cans Newburg sauce
- 3 No. 5 cans chopped clams
- 4 No. 2 cans cleaned broken shrimp
- 8 doz. hard-cooked eggs, diced
- 1 pt. pimentos
- 1/3 cup parsley flakes
- 1 pt. Sherry Newburg wine



Two other possibilities for the buffet are Tahitian-style Tuna (above) and Pork and Cabbage Rolls (below). With a No. 10 can of tuna, a cup each of diced green pepper and pimentos, one quart diced celery and a pint of pineapple tidbits along with Monterey dressing can give you an appetizing addition to any table. The Pork and Cabbage Rolls are easy to prepare and can be placed on a pasta pilaf.



## Oriental style pork

Combine all ingredients, mixing gently (mixing with soy sauce first to disperse). Blanch pea pods lightly (do not overcook). Fold into above. Serve on steamed rice, garnished with toasted sliced almonds and mandarin orange segments.

Yield: Approximately 200 — 4 ounce portions

- 2 No. 5 cans chop suey in vegetables
- 8 No. 5 cans sweet/sour sauce
- 6 No. 5 cans of plt cooked barbecued pork
- 1 pt. soy sauce
- 2 tsp. ground ginger
- 6 lbs. snow peas (pods), frozen

## Curried petite meatballs

Combine chicken fricassee gravy and curry powder, mixing well with wire whip to disperse curry powder evenly. Add sliced apples and seedless raisins. Drain and reserve stock for soups and gravies — add drained meatballs to above sauce, mixing carefully. Heat and serve curried meat balls over steamed rice or buttered green noodles, garnished with shredded coconut with side garnish of chutney, salted peanuts and diced, fresh, green peppers.

Yield: 200 — 5 ounce portions

- 10 No. 5 cans of chicken fricassee
- 1/2 cup curry powder
- 2 No. 10 cans of sliced apple
- 3 lbs. seedless raisins
- 6 37 ounce cans of Scandinavian meatballs

## Chicken liver mousse

Dissolve gelatin in salted water. Set aside. Take chopped chicken livers, brown sauce, mayonnaise, ground nutmeg, garlic and cognac and whip these ingredients together at slow speed in mixer until well blended. Add dissolved gelatin, blending thoroughly. Adjust seasoning. Pack into moistened oil greased molds. Chill thoroughly.

Yield: 335 — 3 ounce portions. Can be served in individual molds or in bulk for buffet.

- 18 oz. gelatin
- 2 gal. water
- 1/2 cup salt
- 24 1 lb. cans chopped chicken livers
- 4 No. 5 cans brown sauce
- 1 gal. mayonnaise
- 2 tsp. ground nutmeg
- 2 tsp. garlic powder
- 1 pt. cognac

## Ratatouille

Combine all ingredients except La Scala dressing, adding dressing to flavor level desired. Serve warm, or chill as an appetizer or salad on crisp lettuce or feature on buffets.

Yield: 350 — 2 1/2 ounce portions.

- 4 No. 10 cans of eggplant in tomato sauce
- 2 No. 10 cans of zucchini and tomatoes (lightly drained)
- 2 No. 10 cans of green pepper strips
- 1 qt. La Scala dressing