

Unit 304: Contribute to the guest experience

Handout 4a: Cultural influences

Food cultures

Different cultures and countries have developed strong customs in regard to the food and service provided. This encompasses the way food is cooked, served, eaten and how it fits into the overall life of the person.

Food origin determines the food cooked; for example people that live close to the sea will consume predominantly seafood; farmers eat cattle and pigs.

The preparation and cooking depend on the local customs and availability e.g. Chinese cooking uses a cleaver for most cutting, a wok for cooking and therefore can be cooked efficiently using little power or heat source, whereas colder climates cook heavier braised foods.

Etiquette for eating also differs, with cutlery being used in Western countries, chopsticks in China and Japan and the hand in many Asian and Arab countries. All of these have defined rules e.g. fork on the left, knife on the right pointing inwards, stand for chopsticks, use of a specific hand for eating. Other etiquettes outline whether food is chewed with the mouth open or closed and whether you hold a conversation while eating. In some cultures, men and women eat separately. Ensure you know the local rules.

Etiquette for drinking also differs, with a variety of vessels used; from coconut shells for kava to crystal glasses for wine. Some cultures will not drink while they are eating. Some cultures will not consume alcohol. Some will have specific ways of addressing fellow drinkers such as saying “cheers” or “prost”, touching glasses or lifting them.

Diets are influenced strongly by cultures and the religious beliefs of individuals. The term ‘cultural group’ refers to a group of people who share common experiences such as ethnicity, beliefs, religion or physical attributes. Some foods may not be consumed and are sometimes referred to as taboo meaning ‘forbidden’:

Islam

Muslims do not eat pork, blood or carrion and meat must be halal. Any foods that are doubtful are ‘mushbooh’, whilst prohibited foods are referred to as ‘haram’. No alcohol is consumed.

Judaism

Foods must be kosher with specific rules for meat, e.g. no pork, hare or camel; poultry e.g. no birds of prey; seafood e.g. fish, but no shellfish and dairy, which must use kosher sources. All protein must be cooked separately from milk products.

Hinduism

Many followers are vegetarian but variations occur. Any protein being consumed should not exceed the actual needs of the person.

Christianity

Special dietary requirements within some denominations and during Lent (e.g. no meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday).

Religion based and cultural diets:**Shinto**

This is a Japanese religion aspiring to live in harmony with nature. No specific food laws apply but there is a strong emphasis on vegetarian meals.

Rastafari

Foods must be in harmony with nature and no processed or modified foods (including canned or dried) are consumed. Most Rastafarians are vegetarian and some have strict laws with regard to the cooking utensils used.

Parsi

An Agrarian Indian minority that traditionally consumes a simple lunch of rice and lentils with spicy meat and fish dishes for dinner.

Indigenous minorities

Special dietary requirements should be confirmed with clients in advance of preparation and cooking. Specific dishes are cooked and served based on cultural preferences, such as a New Zealand hangi cooked in an earth pit.