

Unit 304: Contribute to the guest experience

Handout 5: Factors that influence guests' dining experience

A wide range of factors influence the impact of a meal. Many professionals within the industry focus on their specific area e.g. restaurant staff think that they are the key factor to a satisfying dining experience, chefs think the food is the most important part. In reality it is a combination of the venue, service, food and wine that determine the overall experience of the customer.

- **Setting** – the setting of the property or restaurant creates the first experience for the customer and its visual impact will create an expectation of the type of food, service and wine that may be served. For example, a modern style restaurant, set right on the waterfront would create expectations of a trendy seafood menu with professional service. In contrast, a wood panelled vintage home with antique furniture would probably provide classical food with silver service.
- **Ambience** – this term is used to describe the overall surroundings and atmosphere of an establishment and 'how it feels'. Many establishments aim to be a 'home away from home' to entice the customer to feel relaxed and comfortable and thus enjoy their experience.
- **Menu** – the menu is the key selling tool of the establishment and must be able to convey the aims of the business and its focus on food and wine. The type of food and wine served is advertised through the menu and must reflect the overall aims. Pricing and presentation of the menu will portray the focus on a specific clientele.
- **Service** – the type of service provided also sets the tone. Friendly service such as in a typical Italian restaurant run by the whole family will appeal to the local diner or families. Polished service provided in a fine dining restaurant displays a high level of skill but may be intimidating. Professional service should always be the aim with basic service skills a given.
- **Wine service** – the waiter or a highly qualified sommelier will be able to provide in-depth information about the products on the wine list. They will be able to explain key flavours and their interaction with specific foods. Wine varieties will be presented and opened with flair and the correct skills. Decanting correctly and tasting of the wine with subsequent service and topping up are done to the highest degree.
- **Style of establishment** – the overall presentation and feel contributes to the ambience and establishes specific customer expectations. Informal or formal, modern or classical in presentation and fit-out, all achieve a certain surrounding and must be backed up by the staff.
- **Reception** – the establishment style is indicative of the reception given to the guests. A more formal welcome by a maitre d'hôtel in a suit or a more laid back resort style uniform creates a different impression, however the greeting still has to be respectful and professional.
- **Ability and focus** – the high end of the industry will have a large focus on skill set and customer focus, with excellent execution of tasks and a high ratio of staff to customers. At the lower end of the spectrum service provisions will be more simplified and higher staff ratios apply.
- **Perceived value** – this is subjective as people have different priorities and some would feel that a waiter decanting a \$200.00 bottle of wine and pouring it carefully is worth every cent, whilst another person would think this to be extravagant. Value depends on the financial situation and the emotional feeling attached to the products and services. Good wait staff will be able to assess preferences of guests and adjust their service provision accordingly.