



Current Restaurant Trends

By Allyson Parks

Noticing more eco-friendly fare, faster service, or health food items in your cocktails at your favorite restaurant lately? You may be picking up on the latest restaurant trends which aim to appeal to customers through convenience, creativity, and a focus on nutrition and environmental consciousness.



Be on the lookout for children's cuisine and trends that target the youth demographic. A large market has opened up for adolescent cookbooks, including the bestselling *Kids Cook 1-2-3*, and children's cooking classes have cropped up in many hotels and restaurants throughout the country. There is a new wave of children and parents desiring smaller portions of regular adult menu fare as opposed to typical children's menu items such as greasy pizza, spaghetti, and chicken fingers.

Additionally, pre-packed children's breakfasts, snacks, and sandwiches are becoming popular at supermarket chains, as are new youth-oriented cooking academies and websites catering to kids' food. Beverage companies are also targeting the youth market with eye-catching colored vitamin waters.

Restaurants are also aiming to entice customers through new and creative dishes. Look for restaurants offering odd new ice-cream concoctions, such as sweet corn ice cream with a grilled chocolate sandwich. Many pastry chefs and celebrity dessert chefs are opening their own restaurants in such locations as Barcelona, Japan, New York, Singapore, and California.

Restaurants are also moving toward faster and faster service. According to restaurant consulting company Baum & Whiteman, "No one has patience anymore; in-and-out is replaced by not even in. Millions of people will be ordering food to go via their cell phones. A harbinger: A flock of fast feeders are taking text message orders that are paid for via the same web-enabled devices, promising to have orders ready when you arrive. About a third of cell phone orders already come from people in their cars."

Restaurants are also moving toward highly specialized menus

that cater to certain niches, such as businesses serving only breakfast cereals and restaurants focusing only on macaroni and cheese. Look for high-end hamburgers, new twists on the original burger, and build-your-own-burger restaurants as well. The mini-burger has also become quite fashionable, along with other smaller fare such as tapas-style items, as restaurant-goers look for smaller portions.

In the wake of "extreme eating" reality shows, new menu items that feature odd animal parts, such as tails, heads, and offal (the entrails and internal organs), are becoming more popular.

Trendy restaurants, bars, and clubs are also experimenting with cocktails that feature health food items, like herbs, pomegranate, and goji berries. They "will formulate cocktails from organic fruit juices, vegetable purees, and vitamin-filled sports drinks instead of gooey syrups on the dubious premise that if you're drinking anyway, you may as well also get your antioxidants," Baum & Whiteman says.

Look for restaurant fare that strives toward being ethical, healthy, eco-friendly, and globally conscious, with more locally produced items, organic products, fair trade chocolate and coffee, whole grains, healthier oils and no trans fat, humanely treated meat, and a movement away from bottled water in favor of filtered local water, though such initiatives are likely to be more expensive.

Also expect to see more grocery stores with restaurants, as grocery stores hire chefs to serve high-quality, quick meals that allow customers to have a well-made, convenient, hot meal at the same time they do their grocery shopping.

Customers are also looking for more casual, relaxing restaurant settings, and restaurants hope to provide this through expanding and upgrading lounge and bar menus.

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