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Illustrative Essay
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How to Plan a Buffet

Planning the best buffet may not be easy, but it is easier than imagined, if one knows the secrets to planning a great buffet.

A buffet offers diners a variety of dishes from a select menu, with all usually displayed together in a single attractive setting, like on a long table with lovely table linens and flowers. A buffet offers food service professionals an opportunity to exercise their creativity by identifying themes, then creating menu, displays and decorations with these themes in mind. The theme sets the tone of an event, defining its motif: an elegant Sunday brunch, a Mexican fiesta, a New England clambake. Regardless of the purpose for the event, a wedding or business luncheon, its theme and menu must match.

Once the buffet's theme has been identified, the menu must be designed. The buffet menu should contain a selection of first courses, such as soups and salads; entrees, hot or cold, meat or poultry, fish or shellfish; dessert s and beverages, depending on the event. Keep in mind, when planning the menu, it is important to offer dishes consistent with the theme.

If the menu is for a Greek wedding feast, for example, do not offer tortilla chips and salsa. After the theme is set, members of the planning group should study the room, garden, patio or any other space in which the event will be held. The planners need to find a place for the buffet tables, dining tables, dance floor, and a stage for musicians. In addition, the planners must also consider the décor: linens, centerpieces, service ware, dinnerware and waiting staff uniforms.

Keeping hot food hot on a buffet is a big challenge, and an important one, for food safety and presentation concerns. If possible, hot foods could be served in small quantities on warm platters that are frequently replaced. The best way to serve cold food is to place chilled platters on a bed of ice, and

change the platters frequently.

A buffet is more than a salad bar at a restaurant, which simply is a variety foods laid out for the diner to grab. A buffet is an opportunity for a chef to use his or her creativity to plan and present an entire menu in an attractive fashion. But a successful buffet requires careful planning, attention to detail, and the help of many professionals in the food service facility.