

Three key factors that will inspire 2022 restaurant dining



Today's restaurant patrons have high expectations for their restaurant dining experiences, according to a new Culinary Visions consumer research study. More than 2,000 U.S. consumers weighed in on factors that are important to them when dining out. With the challenges posed by a pandemic-centric culture, dining out is returning to more of a special occasion than the everyday fast fuel stop it was pre-pandemic.

“Studies we did during the early days of the pandemic found consumers exhausted but resigned to the many limitations imposed on their regular

dining habits. Yet today, they are looking for many of the same characteristics that drove their dining out choices pre-pandemic,” said Sharon Olson, executive director of Culinary Visions. “In fact, the emerging new normal looks a lot more like the old normal with more empathy and appreciation for those involved in bringing food to the table.”

Three characteristics that are important to consumers when dining out in today's world emerged in this latest study. The findings provide insight for restaurants hoping to build a better 2022 for their customers, their employees and their businesses.

Restaurant patrons enjoy comfort and indulgence

The appreciation for beautiful food, well prepared with a few simple ingredients is a favorite with 82 percent of those surveyed. Indulgence continues to be part of the appeal of restaurant dining with 86 percent of survey participants noting that warm, rich, satisfying meals make them feel good.

New forms of private dining emerged in 2020 and are continuing to draw diners in 2022 as a substantial number of restaurant patrons are reporting that they like the intimacy with their dining companions. 77 percent said they enjoy dining in enclosed private outdoor dining structures and 75 percent said they enjoy the extra privacy that socially distanced tables offer in restaurants. Although many restaurants are going out of their way to make single diners feel welcome and comfortable, the majority of consumers surveyed (69 percent) said they will hardly ever dine in a sit down restaurants if they do not have a companion.

Global flavors feed the need for global travel

Travel experiences were creating enthusiasm for a wide range of international flavors on menus across America pre-pandemic. The ease of travel has become a thing of the past for now, but the taste for global flavors continues to soar. Restaurants continue to be the destination when consumers are craving flavors that take them on a culinary journey. 80 percent of consumers surveyed agreed that they enjoy international foods with flavors they cannot easily prepare at home.

A deeper appreciation for chefs has emerged as consumers have realized that takeout and delivery in disposable containers cannot deliver the same attractive presentation at home. 82 percent said they appreciate the skills of chefs who create beautifully composed meals.

Everyone involved in bringing food to the table is important

Recent years have given restaurant patrons a deeper understanding of everyone involved in bringing food to the table. Restaurant employees and local producers are top of mind with consumers. 82 percent of those surveyed said they appreciated restaurants that focus on supporting local food producers. 87 percent said they like to dine where employees are treated well.

About the Survey

2,109 US consumers were surveyed in November 2021 about their restaurant dining expectations. Participants were surveyed on-line and asked closed-ended questions. 30 percent of those surveyed were under the age of 34, 40 percent were ages 35-54 and 30 percent were ages 55 and over. The consumer female to male ratio was 67:33, respectively. Of those consumers surveyed, 49 percent live in a 1 or 2 person household, 51 percent live in a household of 3 people or more.