
MODERN RESTAURANT MANAGEMENT

Dining Trends for 2024

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Experiential dining, plant-based menus and sustainability were hot topics in the Les Dames d'Escoffier International (LDEI) 2023 Trends Report. The visionary panel that explored dining away from home included members with specific expertise and interest in restaurant dining and the hospitality industry. The discussion included food, beverage, nutrition, lifestyle and unique aspects of boutique and high volume foodservice. Culinary methods and sources of inspiration for menus and venues were also part of this group's discussion.

Among the findings:

- Casual experiential dining appeals on many fronts to consumers of varying ages in different parts of the country looking for affordable culinary experiences.
- Chef driven fast casual restaurants feed consumers' desires for high quality menu items delivered quickly and on the go. Eight-six percent of dames surveyed agreed that chef driven fast casual restaurants are filling a consumer desire for high quality menu items.
- The festive nature and exclusivity of a pop up with special offerings available for a limited time appeal to consumers' desires for culinary adventure and offer opportunity for chefs to express themselves in a unique way without the constraints of working in a restaurant. Ninety-two percent of survey participants agreed that pop ups appeal to consumers' desires for exclusive culinary adventures.

- Food trucks that bring food to patrons where they live and work has become a part of everyday life. Ninety-four percent of dummies surveyed agreed that food trucks have become common place and are no longer a secret find. Discussions emphasized that even though food trucks are much more accessible, those with an exclusive following continue to thrive in many areas.
- Plant-based menus are becoming more available as the variety of offerings and demand of restaurant patrons continues the momentum. The debate over manufactured plant proteins and whole plants has begun, and it has spurred innovation in menus across all segments of the foodservice industry.
- Ninety-one percent of survey participants agreed that chefs are expressing their culinary creativity in whole plant based dishes.
- The influence of chefs continues to expand whether it is championing a cause or investigating the provenance of a unique ingredient.
- Eighty-six percent of dummies surveyed agreed that chefs have become trusted sources of knowledge beyond the menu.
- Ninety-two percent agreed that chefs are gaining recognition for their philanthropic efforts around the world.
- Foodservice patrons are interested in the provenance of everything and can be fascinated by the detailed back-story on everything from produce to protein on today's menus.
- Eighty-two percent of survey participants agreed that restaurant patrons are interested in detailed information on the sources of the ingredients in menu items.
- Dining out is often a splurge occasion, yet today's restaurant patrons are finding more options to balance their choices and manage indulgence.
- Ninety-six percent of dummies surveyed agreed that non-alcoholic beverages are here to stay as consumers want the pleasure of a cocktail without the spirits.

Away from Home Experiences

- **Family Friendly** – Approachable menus for all day dining and family friendly spaces are appealing to families and creating a new age of neighborhood dining.
- **Environmental Consciousness** – Consumer awareness and desire for more sustainable options is encouraging upcycling and waste reduction efforts that are good for business and good for the planet.
- **Chef Showcases** – Consumers are hungry for culinary experiences curated by chefs. Omakase is exploding as restaurant patrons clamor to experience chefs' tasting menus. The prix fix menu is gaining momentum as a way for restaurants to provide customer experiences and control inventory.
- **Customer and Vendor Value Alignment** – Leading restaurants are looking for value alignment with vendors focused on sustainability and transparency of business practices.
- **Upgraded Offerings in Catering and Hospitality** – Customers are looking for upscale options and customization for special events. They are no longer content with unimaginative, expected offerings on catering menus.

To learn more about the results, Modern Restaurant Management sought out LDEI's Sharon Olson.

What do you think restaurant owners and chefs should take away from the results to better meet the evolving needs of guests?

Today's restaurant guests are more knowledgeable and food savvy than ever before. Diners are interested in the provenance of everything on the menu and can be fascinated by the detailed back-story of everything from produce to protein. Eighty two percent of the members of Les Dames d'Escoffier who participated in the survey agreed that restaurant patrons are interested in detailed information on the sources of the ingredients in menu items.

What do you think are the biggest changes since the last survey?

The most significant change since the last survey is the momentum behind key trends that were emerging in the 2020 report, notably, plant-based menus and casual experiential dining.

Why do you think chefs are more interested in philanthropy?

Philanthropy has always been of high interest for chefs who are well known for donating their time and talent to charitable events. The pandemic certainly elevated that interest when restaurants were on the front lines taking care of their employees and their communities.

How important will local and sustainability in food production and restaurants become?

Local and sustainable food is a mega trend in the restaurant business. It has become so pervasive that survey participants noted that the hunt is on for terminology to replace the often-green-washed word "sustainable." Expect to see terms like carbon neutral and regenerative agriculture as consumers become more informed about the many aspects of nourishing and replenishing the earth.

In what ways did the pandemic change restaurant guest expectations?

The pandemic has had an evolving impact on restaurant guests' expectations. In the early days of restaurant re-openings, guests were appreciative and empathetic with restaurant employees who were showing up and doing the best they could with the limitations of local regulations, economic woes and supply chain issues. Yet today's restaurant patrons have become more demanding and impatient with restaurant workforce and supply chain challenges that continue to plague restaurant professionals.

Manufacturing and Products

LDEI Visioning Panel members with expertise in food science, farming, large and small scale manufacturing and product development discussed flavors, ingredients and lifestyle impact on product formulation, innovation and food and beverage products in demand.

Among their highlights:

- Convenient packages of fruits and vegetables in manageable portions for smaller households and ready to cook or consume without much prep are in demand among health conscious consumers.
- Ninety-six percent of dames surveyed agreed that ready to cook fresh produce is growing in popularity with consumers when they cook at home.
- Allergen awareness is driving demand for alternatives in many food and beverage categories making more options available for consumers.

- Ninety-five percent of those surveyed agreed that the availability of allergen sensitive alternatives to pantry staples continues to grow.
- As consumers embrace the idea of food as medicine, product developers are seeking more climate tolerant, fast growing, drought resistant plants that offer anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory benefits. It is imperative that product developers and marketers work together to make products with genuine benefits and credible claims.
- Ninety-three percent of survey participants agreed that foods and beverages with medicinal benefits are growing in popularity.
- The sustainability journey continues as the hunt is on for terminology to replace the often-green-washed word “sustainable.” Some contenders include: carbon neutral, regenerative agriculture, soil health and responsive agriculture.
- Eighty-four percent of those surveyed agreed new vocabulary beyond “sustainable” is emerging as consumers become more informed about the many aspects of nourishing and replenishing the earth.

LDEI members with a global perspective were also quick to share thoughts and opinions. Survey participants reacted to some of the global trends identified by the panel and shared hundreds of additional comments. International flavor exploration is nothing new, yet awareness and curiosity continue to grow with 98 percent of survey participants agreeing that international flavor exploration has grown.

Following are some areas where there was strong agreement on factors that influence the popularity of global cuisines:

- Interest in regions and micro-regions of the world are taking center stage as consumers, product developers and culinary professionals delve into less explored areas of the world. Whether it is major cities or smaller markets, the top three – Mediterranean, Asian and Latin flavors – continue to take top honors.
- Among those surveyed Mediterranean (99 percent), Asian (97 percent), and Latin American (96 percent) countries scored top honors for agreement in popularity. Eighty-two percent agreed that there is growing interest in foods inspired by African countries and 64 percent agreed that Native American foods are gaining momentum. This is where the discussion begins.
- Often referred to as “third culture cuisine,” dishes that are intentional mashups of disparate cuisines are finding favor with consumers. Many global cuisines are heavily plant based and this is spreading the appreciation for international foods.
- Ninety-eight percent of those surveyed agreed that chefs are bringing their own heritage and experience to create menus combining unexpected ingredients and techniques.
- International travel has renewed appeal post-pandemic and with it comes food and culture exploration. Travel experts report interest in trips to an expanded array of destinations with uniquely appealing cultural points of interest.
- Ninety-six percent of survey participants agreed that culinary tourism is thriving.
- The number of countries actively engaged in culinary diplomacy continues to grow as countries export their culinary heritage to expand interest and positive awareness of their culture.
- Ninety-one percent of those who participated in the survey agreed that culinary diplomacy that promotes a country’s food and culture is being embraced.