

## 6 Ways to Make Your Next Event a Culinary Success

As an event planner, you'll no doubt be working hard to anticipate your delegates every desire, and finding ways to offer them just what they want, just when they want it. Knowing that the quickest way to most people's heart is through their stomach, food should always be a top priority at any event. And with the world of international business creating a more discerning customer than ever before, you need to be on top of your culinary game.

From a casual, continental breakfast all the way through to plated formal suppers, at an event, a meal isn't just a meal, it's an opportunity to emphasize an ethos, brand and culture.

Top international venues such as the Calgary TELUS Convention Centre (CTCC) are rising to the challenge with ever more creative and customized menus that become celebrated talking points amongst attendees. Whilst the Calgary Downtown Marriott Hotel is the exclusive catering company at CTCC, and successfully turn meal breaks into gastronomic experiences, other venues hire executive chefs from the restaurant sector and are introducing interactive, team building style activities around their food offerings.

Here we look at the top 6 culinary trends in the event space for 2019:

### **Special diets -**

Amongst the biggest current trends is catering for the rise in special diets. Gone are the days when the vegetarian option is a dish on the sidelines. Today, veggie and now vegan dishes should be offered at the same rate as non-vegetarian options, including appetizers and desserts. Similarly, a request for gluten free foods on menus is a quickly growing trend.

### **Keep it seasonal, keep it local -**

The explosion in the search for authenticity, a macro-trend that is increasingly influencing the selection of destinations and venues, is bringing considerations around food, its provenance and sustainability, front and center for meetings and event organizers.

Providing local, and where possible, seasonal food, is a great way to connect with the community and inform attendees about a city's historical influences, and the nearby climate, agriculture and popular food experiments in the area. At CTCC, ways to incorporate local, seasonal ingredients into the menus are always being sought by Chef Hussein Haji - known as Chef Haji - who oversees culinary experiences for the centre and its official partner, the Marriott. Lots of conventions request

to showcase Calgary or Alberta-based foods, for example, Alberta's famous beef and bison and Calgarian's drink of choice, the Caesar.

### **Healthy options -**

Healthy offerings and themes that encourage attendees to feel good about themselves pre, during and post-event are a recipe for success, and even those who may not normally choose healthy options above others, will likely feel a sense of empowerment and motivation when eating healthily at an event.

Healthy options may be best served 'family style' from a common platter which is another way to get conversations started.

### **Specialty stations -**

The popularity of specialty food stations is on the rise. Getting delegates moving around, talking to one another, and often coming at a lower cost than plated dinners, they can help to make a success of an event. Also, focusing on one particular type of food that attendees construct themselves can create a niche offering with a broad appeal. Each specialty station can take on a different theme or it can be taken one step further by allowing attendees to cook for themselves, such as a DIY waffle station for example.

CTCC offers create-your-own salad and create-your-own burger menus, and also does a market style bag lunch with attendees making their own selections. Ensuring that specialty stations are styled effectively is key to success and logistics such as queue forming need to be considered. Multi-level stations and longer banquet tables can often reduce wait times.

### **Food is art -**

Event chefs are thinking outside of the box when it comes to food design and increasingly, food is being artified for extra impact. Whether it's a food carving or sculpture or an intricate art display, the way food is presented adds to the experience and can highlight the finer details of what is being served. Ice sculptures for example, are increasingly popular, and are made multi-functional when converted into an ice bar to chill food. Some chefs may show their culinary genius by turning a food station into an edible art form whilst others may add strategic shelving and lighting to showcase food in an appealing and stylish way.

## **Refreshment Revolution -**

There's a refreshment revolution happening in the events world. Research shows that event attendees are now more likely to be conservative when it comes to sweet, unhealthy options or standard alcoholic drinks. Instead, we're seeing experiences such as mixologists or lighter healthier options as a preference. Requests for smoothie or juice bars are on the rise with mocktails or flavoured waters being offered in place of alcoholic drinks to ensure all attendees' preferences are provided for. Mobile bars are also coming into their own with increasing demand, particularly at larger events. Some venues are offering fun, converted vehicles as mobile bars adding to the novelty factor.