

BUFFETS!

Are They Passe?

By Julianna McClatchey

The first thing that comes to mind when I hear the word buffet, is a large spread of low quality food and the promise of feeling way too full and sleepy when I'm done. In downtown Portland I discovered that that's not always the case. Lunch buffets can be a fun way to do lunch and can actually be delicious, healthy and fast.

The buffet has been around for centuries in one form or another and many cultures have traditions for serving large numbers of people from a common table. Ancient and Medieval civilizations banqueted. In the Netherlands, a buffet style meal is called Rijstaffel. In Sweden it's called Smorgasbord. Spain has Tapas and the Denmark buffet equivalent is called Smorrebrod. The French equivalent was introduced around 1718.

Chinese immigrants first whetted American appetites with buffet-style meals during the San Francisco Gold Rush era. According to the Smithsonian Institute, the first recorded Chinese restaurant on U.S. territory, Macao and Woo Song served the first all-you-can-eat buffet in 1849, charging a buck for the splurge.

Many years later, Herb McDonald inspired the modern buffet in Las Vegas in 1946, more out of hunger than genius. One night while working late at the El Rancho Vegas, McDonald brought some cheese and cold cuts

from the kitchen and laid them out on the bar to make a sandwich. Gamblers walking by said they were hungry, and the buffet was born. The original midnight buffet cost \$1.25.

Today, buffets are still practical, economical, and full of high quality food. For instance, Swagat Indian Cuisine in NW Portland offers 18 authentic traditional dishes for both lunch and dinner. I sampled the Tandoori Chicken, Chana Mesala, Turnip Mesala, Cabbage Pakoras, and my favorite, Chicken Makhani. Check it out if you're looking for a relaxing atmosphere with friendly service and a mastery of complex flavors and spices.

The Benson Hotel hosts an elegant and mouth watering buffet in their lobby court. Selections include Rice Pilaf Salad, Pork Loin in Mushroom Bourbon Sauce, Roasted Potatoes, Sweet and Sour Salmon and Carrot Cake, among others. According to Marketing Director, Norman Wha, "Our goal was to create choice and quality for our hotel conference guests, although most of our patrons have turned out to be business people because of the quicker lunch and larger selection."

If Sushi is to your liking, then Todai Sushi and Seafood is for you. This upscale Japanese Seafood buffet offers vast assortments of culinary delights. Items include California Rolls, Sashimi, Salmon, Calamari, Lobster Tail,

Strawberry Cheesecake, and Crème Brulee. With 40 kinds of Sushi, 20 entrees and 20 desserts seven days a week, you're guaranteed to leave full and satisfied.

The Great China Seafood Restaurant in NW Portland's Chinatown offers a 40 item Dim Sum lunch buffet everyday. Here, you can sample Shrimp Cilantro, Jalapeño Shrimp, BBQ Pork Rolls, Crab Puffs, Sesame Seed Balls, and Egg Custard among many others. "Serving Dim Sum buffet style is more economical because there are so many hand made items" said manager Li So. Planning a party or event? Great China has a lot of space to cater your celebration.

Enjoy the fine dining atmosphere of the newly opened, Pasha Mediterranean Grill. Pasha uses only the freshest organic foods for their 30 item spread. Enjoy daily fresh salads, vegetarian soups and pastas, fresh salmon, tabuli, hummus, and beef and chicken kabobs.

I must admit, I was pleasantly surprised by the wide variety of quality buffets that I found in downtown Portland. Selection, hand crafted dishes, reasonable prices, good nutrition, and lots of vegetarian choices are just some of the many reasons why they're still popular. Buffets passé? I don't think so, they're here to stay!

Article exploring lunch buffets in downtown Portland.
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