

BUFFET ETIQUETTE

by Carolann Philips

A buffet is a form of dining service in which food is spread out on tables in a public area and diners generally serve themselves. Whether at a private party, corporate event, or wedding, buffets are a popular way of serving meals for a large gathering. They are cost effective, time efficient and require minimum staff attendance.

The informal service setting does not compare to the experience associated with fine dining in a sit down meal yet this does not imply that the rules of dining etiquette do not apply. Here are some pointers on the dos and don'ts of buffet etiquette.

Before approaching the buffet table, look at the dining tables. If eating utensils such as a spoon, fork and knife are already there, you don't have to look for them at the buffet table. Always take your position at the end of the line. Wait for your turn and don't push your way through. Another reason why buffets are the popular choice at corporate events is because they allow for networking opportunities. Use this time to chat with the others waiting. Gender and status privileges do not apply in a buffet line, yet do not decline to accept a place if a guest in line offers you one ahead of himself. Even if multiple serving spoons are available, don't reach into the same dish as another diner. Hold your plate as close to the dish as possible while serving yourself to avoid spillages. For the same reason, avoid over loading your plate. Avoid leaning over the dishes or smelling the food while serving yourself. Take small servings as second helpings are permissible. Exercise

choice and arrange the food on your plate in such a way that it presents an appetizing picture. Once you have served yourself do not leave the serving spoon in the dish. Instead, place it on the platter in front of the dish. Wait for the food to be replenished instead of scraping the dishes. Eating in the serving line is inappropriate behaviour. If the buffet line servers are helping you, never forget to say ‘please’ and ‘thank you’. This is a commonly overlooked courtesy at buffets where most people assume polite phrases do not hold good when serving your own food. Do not stare at others plates. If you are invited by people to join their table as you leave the buffet line, you may graciously accept or graciously decline, perhaps by saying “Thank you. But I’m sorry. I promised to eat with Carolann and her family.” If you are eating while standing, ensure you are not blocking access to the buffet table and serving line. If you wish to take a second helping, it is considered polite to use a fresh plate for every food trip. This is because it is considered unhygienic for other diners when you serve food onto used plates with a common serving spoon. However, if it is a private party being hosted in a restaurant and you know the host is paying by the head or if you are in a private home, you should retain your plate. Never scrape or stack your plates when you have finished. As the buffet is a self service meal, never ask the waiters to get you a second helping.

Practicing appropriate buffet etiquette can help you and the others enjoy a myriad of cuisines without embarrassment and make this trendy style of eating a pleasant affair!

Carolann Philips is an etiquette & protocol consultant, behavioral skills coach and professional enrichment trainer. Her educational qualifications include a Post graduate diploma in Instructional Design, a Bachelor's degree in French and English Literature, and an International Diploma in Travel and Tourism Management. Her professional credentials include being certified by Etiquette Survival LLC, Los Gatos , California, certified for training design &

delivery by the American Society for Training & Development, and she also holds a certification in personality assessment by Psytech International, UK besides a host of other certifications.

Carolann has had the pleasure of delivering programs to a diverse clientele; from major airlines, leading banks, embassies, and reputed business houses to the modeling & fashion industry and royalty within the GCC. She is also a columnist for the 'Thursday' magazine, a local publication.