

RESTAURANT · OPERATING STANDARD 121

The Buffet Standard

WHO

Buffet attendants and chefs, checked by the head waiter

WHEN

Every lunch and dinner buffet, from 45 minutes before opening to the close

YOU NEED

Probe thermometer, allergen cards, warm and chilled plates, the buffet photo

TIME TO TRAIN

45 minutes, with one supervised buffet round

What this standard achieves

The guest who arrives ten minutes before closing finds the same buffet as the guest at opening: every dish full, labelled, at its temperature, with clean plates and a chef at each station. The hotel serves safe food, throws less away and learns each day what to cook tomorrow.

Measured by

01

Buffet complete and checked 10 minutes before opening

02

Every dish labelled on the house card, allergens included

03

Hot food at 63 °C or above, cold at 5 °C or below, logged each round

04

No dish allowed to lose more than a quarter before it is refilled

05

A chef at every cooking station for the whole service

06

First-time guests shown the buffet in under 30 seconds

07

One check at each table after the first plate

08

Used plates cleared while the guest is at the buffet

PHASE 1

Set the buffet

STEPS 1–6

- 01 Forty-five minutes before opening, switch on the hot wells and the chilled counters. Twenty minutes later, probe each one: hot at 63 °C or above, cold at 5 °C or below. Log the readings.
- 02 Put a clean card in front of every dish, all on the same house design: the name of the dish, a short description and its allergens. Check each card against the chef's list for today.
- 03 Give every dish its own serving spoon or tongs on an underplate. Stack at least 20 warm plates at the hot section, 20 chilled plates at the cold section and 20 dessert plates at the sweets.
- 04 Serve sauces, dressings and condiments in small bowls or jugs, each with its own spoon, or in individual pots. Never in kitchen bottles or the supplier's packaging.
- 05 Outdoors, cover every dish with a lid, a cloche or a glass hood, keep the buffet in shade, and check the insect screens before the first guest arrives.
- 06 Ten minutes before opening, the head waiter and the chef walk the buffet together, fix what is missing, and take a photo of the full display. Every refill tonight must match that photo.

PHASE 2

Welcome and explain

STEPS 7–11

- 07 Check yourself against The Presence Standard before the doors open: uniform, name badge, hands, and the occasions and allergies on today's list in mind.
- 08 Greet and seat guests as The First Two Minutes Standard sets out. Drinks are offered and served as The Table Drinks Standard sets out.
- 09 To a guest on their first visit, explain the buffet in under 30 seconds at the table: where each section is, which stations cook to order, and that the chefs will help with any allergy.
"The starters are on your left, hot dishes in the centre and desserts by the window. At the grill, the chef cooks fish or meat for you to order."
- 10 Name tonight's cooking stations and one dish from each. A guest who does not know the pasta is made to order will take it from the tray.
- 11 If a guest has an allergy, offer a plate prepared in the kitchen, away from shared spoons, and follow The Allergy Standard. A buffet spoon moved from one dish to the next carries allergens.
"With a nut allergy, Mr Al-Harbi, the chef can prepare a plate for you in the kitchen. Shall I ask the chef to come over?"

PHASE 3

Run the buffet

STEPS 12-18

- 12 One named attendant owns the buffet. Every 15 minutes they walk the whole line, starters to desserts, and write the time on the log.
- 13 Refill a dish before it has lost a quarter. Swap in a full, fresh dish from the kitchen, never pour new food on top of old, and arrange it to match the opening photo.
- 14 Wipe drips and spills at once. Replace any spoon that has fallen into the food or lies on the cloth, and wipe the rims of the dishes on every round.
- 15 Probe the hot and cold food on every round and log it. A hot dish under 63 °C or a cold one above 5 °C is replaced from the kitchen, never reheated on the buffet.
- 16 Keep at least 10 plates in each stack. Bring warm plates from the hot cabinet before the stack runs low, and never let a guest stand waiting at an empty stack.
- 17 Write the time each dish went out on the back of its card. Hot food on display for two hours is taken away and thrown out, even if it looks untouched.
- 18 In the last 30 minutes, keep every section open and full. Use smaller dishes rather than fewer dishes, so the last guest has the same choice as the first.

PHASE 4

Cooking stations

STEPS 19–23

- 19 A chef stays at each cooking station for the whole service. If the chef must leave, a colleague takes over first. An empty station tells the guest nobody is cooking.

- 20 Greet the guest at the station, say what you are cooking tonight, and ask how they would like it and whether they have an allergy.

"Good evening. Tonight it's sea bass or lamb, cooked as you like. How would you like yours, Ms Rossi?"

- 21 Hand the dish on a warm, clean plate, rim wiped, garnish placed, and name it as you hand it over. Cold dishes go on a chilled plate.

- 22 If the dish takes more than 3 minutes, offer to send it to the table. Take the table number and give it to a runner, who brings it covered and names it.

"It will be about eight minutes. Go and sit down, and we'll bring it to your table."

- 23 Keep the station clean in front of the guest: change the board and cloths as needed, keep raw and cooked food apart, and wipe the counter after every plate.

PHASE 5

At the table

STEPS 24–27

- 24 While the guest is at the buffet, clear their used plate and cutlery, lay fresh cutlery for the next course, and refold the napkin as The Table Maintenance Standard sets out.

- 25 Within 5 minutes of the guest starting the first plate, pass by the table once and ask one question about the food. Pass any comment to the chef the same service.

"How are you finding the buffet tonight? Is there anything I can bring from the kitchen?"

- 26 Offer to carry plates for a guest who uses a stick, holds a child, or has trouble with steps. Ask what they would like, fill the plate at the buffet, and bring it to the table.

- 27 When the guest returns to the buffet, a clean plate is waiting at the stack. Never let a guest carry a used plate back to the line.

PHASE 6

Close the buffet

STEPS 28-31

- 28 Fifteen minutes before closing, tell each table in person, quietly, that the buffet closes soon, and offer dessert, coffee or tea at the table. No announcements across the room.

"The buffet closes in 15 minutes, Mrs Laurent. May I bring you anything else, or a coffee?"

- 29 Take the buffet down only after the last guest has finished choosing. Start with the sections furthest from the tables, and never clear dishes while guests are eating beside them.

- 30 Throw away food that has been on display, and log what came back full and what ran out. The chef uses the log to set tomorrow's quantities.

- 31 The head waiter signs the temperature log and stores the cards in order for the next service. Faults go to the handover: a weak hot well, a broken lid, a missing card.

What to record

Temperature log

- ☐ Opening reading, each well and counter
- ☐ Reading at every round, with the time
- ☐ Dish replaced, and why
- ☐ Signed by the head waiter at close

Buffet round log

- ☐ Time of each round and initials
- ☐ Dishes refilled
- ☐ Time each dish went out
- ☐ Food thrown away at two hours

End of service

- ☐ Dishes that ran out, and when
- ☐ Dishes that came back full
- ☐ Guest comments passed to the chef
- ☐ Faults for the handover

When the situation changes

A dish runs out with no more to come

Take the empty dish away at once, turn its card face down, and tell the tables near the buffet what replaces it. Never leave an empty tray on the line.

A guest asks for a dish not on the buffet

Ask the chef whether it can be made. If it can, give a time and bring it to the table; if not, offer the nearest dish on the buffet by name.

A child reaches into a dish

Take the dish away calmly and replace it from the kitchen, without comment to the parents. Offer to help the family fill the child's plate.

Wind or rain at an outdoor buffet

Close the lids, move the most delicate dishes to the kitchen and serve them to order, and tell each table what has changed.

A large group arrives all at once

Open a second line from the other side of the buffet if it allows, and send a server to each cooking station to take orders and bring dishes to the tables.

A card does not match the dish

Take the card away at once and check the dish with the chef before a new card goes out. A wrong allergen card is treated as an allergy incident and logged.

Common mistakes

MISTAKE

Topping up a half-empty dish with fresh food. The old food at the bottom stays there all service, and nobody knows how long it has been out.

MISTAKE

Leaving the cooking station to fetch more fish. The queue forms in front of an empty station, and the guests decide the grill is closed.

MISTAKE

Using one set of tongs for three dishes. The allergen cards are right, and the food under them is no longer what they say.

MISTAKE

Refilling only when the dish is nearly empty. The guest at the end of the queue gets the last spoonful and the crust from the edge of the tray.

MISTAKE

Clearing the buffet while guests are still eating. Every table nearby sees the evening end before they have finished.

MISTAKE

Writing the cards by hand on the day. Three handwritings and a crossed-out allergen tell the guest that nobody checked.

Check your team

After training (45 minutes, with one supervised buffet round), each person answers these without the sheet.

- 01 When is a dish refilled, and how?
- 02 What temperatures are checked, how often, and what happens to a dish that fails?
- 03 What is written on every card, and who checks it?
- 04 How long can hot food stay on display, and how do you know when it went out?
- 05 What do you offer a guest with an allergy at the buffet?
- 06 What happens at a cooking station when the dish takes more than 3 minutes?
- 07 How do you tell guests the buffet is closing, and when?

The Buffet Round

What the buffet attendant checks every 15 minutes, starters to desserts.
Each line is a yes or a no, and a no is fixed before the next round.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Every dish full: none has lost a quarter | ☐ Every dish matches the opening photo |
| ☐ Hot food probed: 63 °C or above | ☐ Cold food probed: 5 °C or below |
| ☐ Every dish has its card, facing the guest | ☐ Every dish has its own spoon or tongs |
| ☐ No spoon lying in the food or on the cloth | ☐ At least 10 plates in every stack |
| ☐ Drips, spills and crumbs wiped | ☐ Sauces in bowls or pots, each with a spoon |
| ☐ Outdoor dishes covered | ☐ A chef at every cooking station |
| ☐ Dishes out for two hours taken away | ☐ Time of the round written on the log |

How to use this with your team

Brief two lines a day at the pre-service meeting. The attendant walks the round with the card for the first week, then without it. The head waiter walks one round a service with the attendant and signs the log.

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