

AIRLINE CATERING

This is a branch of catering which has increased rapidly over the past years. Its growth and development are mainly the result of introducing tourist and economy class fares and the vast number of passengers who now travel by air. It has expanded the horizons of the business world and it has given the ordinary man a hunger and thirst to see parts of the world which 50 years ago would have been out of his reach.

The International Air Transport Association (I. A. T. A.) thought it necessary to lay down maximum standards of meals in both the tourist and economy classes, because of the vast increase in the number of customers. The standard of meals was obviously lowered in ratio with the smaller fare paid, and the sudden vast increase in numbers created demands the kitchens could not meet. The cabin crews had to serve more meals in the same time, and their numbers proved inadequate. The first catering seen on planes was virtually a packed lunch of assorted sandwiches and a thermos of tea, and it was a case of take it or leave it.

The International Air Transport Association lays down standards, for the scope of a meal rather than the price, since costs would obviously vary in two different countries thousands of kilometers apart. It is now recognized that where only short distances and flight times are involved then only snack type meals, open sandwiches and beverages are offered. Where longer distances are involved then the cabin staff and stewardesses have time to give a first class service of food and beverages, be it silver or gueridon service.

For the economy and tourist flights all meals must be of the same size and with all portions identical. The meals are arranged in silver foil individual tray, sealed, frozen and then stored until required. At times 4 tonnes of frozen food may be in cold storage waiting to be used. For the first class passenger, who would receive a food and beverage service equivalent to that of a first class hotel or restaurant, there would be no portion control. The service would be such that joints may be carved from a carving trolley as it moves up the central aisle, and served with the appropriate garnish and vegetables. This combined with the fine bone china, silver plate, fine glassware and cutlery used creates an atmosphere of content and well-being whilst the meal is being served. The economy or tourist class meal would be served on a plastic or melamine tray using disposable place mats, cutlery and serviettes and disposable glasses for any drinks required. Great use is made here of pre-portioned foods such as salt, peppers, mustards, sugar, cream, cheeses, dry biscuits, preserves etc. This aids portion control, cuts down on wastage and reduces washing up and breakages.

When all the food has been cooked the required quantities of each portion are placed in the dish by the 'servers'. Garnish would be added where appropriate. This dish may then be placed into hot cupboards and kept hot until being transported into the plane where they would be plugged into the aircraft's supply. An alternative to this would be that the meal is frozen, stored in the catering unit until required and when necessary reheated on board of the aircraft.

Conveyor belts are used for cold dishes made up of a variety of cold items, and the dishes pass down a slow moving belt and servers add the necessary items in their correct order. To help this process a color photograph of the dish concerned is used as a visual reminder to the servers as to what the end product should look like. The completed trays have to be stored in air-larders on shelves very close together because of the storage of space. Therefore there has to be a height limit for the contents of a dish - usually five centimeters (2"). We now have the hot food stored in hot cupboards and the cold food in air-larders.

We have said that under the one roof of the commissary we find everything needed for a flight. To complete the service to the passenger other items have to be provided apart from hot and cold food and beverages. These would include - Newspapers, Brochures, Toys, Crayons, Playing Cards, First

Aid Kits, Slipperettes, Toilet Requisites, Pens, Magazines, etc.

To cope with the demand for meals and beverages and the various requirements of the different airlines as much labor saving equipment as possible is used. This includes:

Washing Machine : Cleans, sterilizes and dries 12,000 pieces of equipment per hour.

Bread & Butter Machine : Producing 55 slices of buttered bread per minute.

Coffee Stills : Producing 54 liters (12 gallons) every 20 minutes.

Auto Ice Units : Making 1.5kg of ice cubes every minutes.

Each airline will supply its own equipment such as cutlery, china, glassware and so on. They will also provide certain foods from their own countries for the catering unit to incorporate in their particular menu's

All alcoholic beverages and cigarettes will be drawn from the bonded stores on the catering premises under the watchful eye of a representative of Customs & Excise.

When the aircraft is in the air it is the well trained cabin crew who provide the service to the passengers. Their job at times is very difficult especially when the time for a trip is very short, i.e., 45 - 60 minutes in which a meal has to be served. No cooking is done on a flight apart from some ancillary items such as toast, making beverages and so on. High speed circulation ovens heat 48 meals in 20 minutes. The tray with the meal on its sits on a pull-out table. In between meals tea, coffee, biscuits and cakes are served together with cold drinks. If special dishes are required for vegetarians, children or invalids this will be done. The menus and wine lists are presented in a colorful and decorative fashion. An example of these menu's and wine lists would be as follows:

DINNER

Tourist Class

Smoked Salmon
Roast Saddle of English Lamb
Broccoli Spears New Potatoes
Fruit Gateaux
Cheese & Biscuits
Coffee

First Class

Cream of New Carrots
Consomme Yvette
Fillet of Dover Sole Breval
Roast Loin of English Lamb; Mint Sauce
Buttered French Beans Chateau Potatoes
Cold Buffet; Tossed Green Salad
Vinaigrette or Roquefort Dressing
English & Continental Cheeses
Cream Crackers
Fresh Fruit;
Café