

The breakfast club

All-inclusive resorts have been quick to adapt to the new normal – but what does that mean for the classic breakfast buffet? Laura French reports

For many, the buffet breakfast is to an all-inclusive resort what Tom is to Jerry – you can't have one without the other. So what do you do when a pandemic comes along and the idea of sharing your serving spoon with a complete stranger suddenly loses its appeal?

You adapt, and fast. Which is what resorts across the board have been doing over the past few months, changing the way they serve food, upping their cleaning protocols, increasing their in-room offerings and cutting restaurant capacity to allow for social distancing – all while keeping the all-inclusive philosophy at heart.

To find out what's changed and where, we've canvassed the sector so you have the answer when a client asks you that crucial question, 'What about the buffet?'

BUFFET 2.0

Clients looking to fill up their plates in true all-you-can-eat style (and consume those 2,000 calories before the clock strikes 10am – it's a holiday, after all) needn't throw in the towel just yet. Some resorts are keeping their buffets, albeit with a few Covid-related modifications.

Riu Hotels, for example, has kept its buffet style but asks guests to wear face masks when going up to get their food, with a spread that features more packaged products, individual portions and live cooking stations on hand.

Marriott International is also keeping its buffet breakfasts at some all-inclusive resorts but has set out a series of regulations. They include using single-use plates and utensils where possible, sanitising ➤

Extra PRECAUTIONS

Reduced capacity:

Restaurants are capping numbers to reduce the number of people eating at the same time. Ikos Resorts has decreased the number of diners by 30% to allow for social distancing and two metres between each table, while Windjammer Landing has separated its dining areas.

Longer hours:

Tui, Club Med and Palladium have extended restaurant opening hours to spread out the numbers. Palladium's Desriviere says: "If the hotel has other venues that can be used for dining, these are being opened up to create more space. We have also established an appointment system to control access to these areas."

Outside dining:

Several resorts are putting the emphasis on outdoor seating. Sandals has expanded outdoor dining areas. Elite Island Resorts' Hammock Cove (pictured) in Antigua has ample open-air eateries. And Beachcomber Resorts' Boullé says: "All our restaurants are outdoor, so social distancing can be maximised."



non-disposable utensils every 30 minutes, regularly disinfecting buffet areas and ensuring social distancing when guests go up to get their food.

Aldemar Resorts also kept the emphasis on the classic buffet when the company's Crete and Skafidia properties opened over the summer (they're now closed until spring 2021), but added extra live cooking stations. "The breakfasts continued to be a buffet but anything cold was in individual bowls in different areas, plus guests had to queue two metres apart," says Mandy Kalliontzi, UK sales director. "There were also individual cooking stations with a chef cooking eggs to order, another cooking fresh pancakes, and so on. All staff wore masks and gloves, and all cooking stations and buffet areas were protected by a Plexiglass screen and sneeze guard."

GOODBYE TO SELF-SERVICE

Others have taken a different approach by getting rid of the self-service element altogether.

Among those leading the pack is Palladium Hotel Group. "We now have now more buffet staff to serve portions to the guests individually, rather than guests helping themselves," says Nacho Gozalbo, commercial director. "Extra emphasis is also being placed on our à la carte restaurants and personalised show-cooking options."

Club Med is offering a similar service. "Our guests are still free to browse the wide variety of food offered

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in our buffet restaurants; however, the dishes they select are plated and handed to them by a member of staff," says Estelle Giraud, managing director for the UK and northern Europe.

Tui Resorts says it has also reduced its self-service options, with masked staff serving buffet food from behind a plastic shield, while at Sandals and Beaches Resorts, breakfast buffets are likewise being served by team members from behind a sneeze guard (with plates, cups, cutlery and other utensils removed from the buffet serving area when not in use).

A LA CARTE

Those less into mixing their poached eggs with their pain au chocolat may be pleased to hear that several hotels are scrapping their buffets altogether in favour of an à la carte service.

Among those putting the emphasis on table service



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Riu Dunamar, Mexico; Schooner's, Sandals Barbados; Tui Blue Aura; Chang Thai, Grand Palladium Colonial Resort & Spa, Mexico; Club Med Bali PICTURES: Ben Queenborough/PinPep; David Crookes/Crookes and Jackson

are Beachcomber's properties in Mauritius. "Buffet service will still be available but only the live cooking stations will be operational," says managing director Mark Boullé. "All food will be plated by the hotel teams and delivered to guests' tables, making it more of an à la carte service than a buffet experience."

Ikos Resorts has completely replaced its buffets with à la carte menus. The same is the case with Lux Resorts & Hotels, although this may change, according to Dave Minten, corporate chef at The Lux Collective. "When the hotel occupancy reaches 60%, we will consider setting up a semi-buffet with counters served by the team to minimise touchpoints," he says.

Elegant Hotels' Waves Hotel & Spa in Barbados, meanwhile, will be offering its breakfast buffet options from a menu, with food brought to (and ordered from) your table. Jamaica-based Couples Resorts has also converted its buffet breakfasts

to table service, but it emphasises that this won't change the overall feel. "Reassure clients they'll still get the full dining experience," says Stefan Spath, Couples Resorts' corporate executive chef.

IN-ROOM DINING

All-inclusives don't always have to mean mingling in the public restaurant, of course. For those who'd rather keep their distance (and privacy), resorts are upping their room-service offerings.

Windjammer Landing Villa Beach Resort in Saint Lucia has expanded its in-room menu and offers contactless delivery for extra reassurance. "Our villa accommodation allows us to offer our guests more private dining opportunities," says food and beverage director Shawn Desriviere.

Atmosphere Hotels and Resorts says it has likewise introduced more in-villa dining options, while Beachcomber has expanded its room-service menu with more "local

delights" on offer, plus contactless room delivery on request.

Ikos has always offered 24-hour room service but is now bringing à la carte menus from the restaurant to guests' private gardens or terraces.

Sandals is also highlighting its in-room offering with extra cleaning protocols in place. "Room service procedures have been enhanced, with all equipment being sanitised at each change of shift," says Karl Thompson, managing director of Unique Caribbean Holidays, the UK representative for Sandals. "Servers wear gloves to collect door hanger menus and food trays; room service deliveries are set outside guest rooms; and all doors, handles and high-contact surfaces are sanitised at least once an hour."

So guests can be reassured of their safety as they indulge from the comfort of their private patio while overlooking ocean views, swaying palms and sandy shores – every cloud has its silver lining, right? **TW**

DESTINATIONS

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GOING DIGITAL

Look out for enhanced digital offerings to replace physical menus and reduce the number of touchpoints. Ikos Resorts has upgraded its app to offer digital menus as well as an online reservations system, while Palladium's app also offers menus, restaurant reservations and contactless check-in and check-out. Aldemar will be using digital menus across its portfolio, and Indian Ocean brands Atmosphere and Lux are using barcode technology so visitors can access menus on their phones by scanning QR codes.

BOOK IT

Room rates for the new **Ikos Andalusia**, due to open in Spain in April 2021, start from around £360 per night based on two sharing a double room. ikosresorts.com

Seven nights' all-inclusive at **Shandran Beachcomber Resort & Spa** (pictured), Mauritius, starts at £1,616 per person based on two sharing a Superior Room in June 2021, including British Airways flights and transfers. beachcombertours.uk

