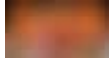


# In a Covid-19 world, what's next for deluxe, all-you-can-eat buffets?

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 [cnn.com/travel/article/buffets-vegas-cruise-ships-covid-19/index.html](https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/buffets-vegas-cruise-ships-covid-19/index.html)

Todd Leopold, Special to CNN • Published 24th September 2020



*(CNN)* — David Yeskel remembers the days of yore with packed shows and c

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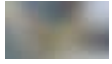


But it was a Vegas casino manager, Herb McDonald, who took the idea to its American extreme. In 1945, McDonald's El Rancho casino opened a 24-hour buffet and charged visitors a single dollar to partake. Naturally the opportunity for endless food drew a

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"It's all part of a larger web," says Haley, who specializes in trade issues. She says that buffets, in general, have been on a downward trend for more than two decades now -- more than a fifth have closed since the 1990s -- so for the style to survive, it will have to reinvent itself.

Blau, the restaurateur, agrees.



Elbow-to-elbow, serve-yourself buffets are unlikely to resurface anytime soon.

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"The tiny silver lining in this absolute catastrophe is that we'll have to do things smarter and better," she says. Vegas already has high sanitary standards, she says -- it has to, given the mix of foods and preparation protocols. Now the hospitality community will have to find a way to accommodate the biggest unknown: the guests.

The cruise ship business, too, will have to make adjustments.

Chiron counters the image of the ships as "floating petri dishes" by noting that they already have strong hygiene protocols that come into play for outbreaks of illness, such as increased cleaning, reduced interaction between guests and no self-service at the buffets. Liners will likely use these protocols when they resume service, he says.

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In Vegas, one of the few buffets that's reopened successfully is the Wicked Spoon at The Cosmopolitan, which has long differed from its competitors by individually plating most of its dishes. According to an article in the Las Vegas Review-Tribune, its primary change is in serving: instead of the guest taking the plate, servers hand them over individually. (Another reopened buffet, the South Point Casino's Garden Buffet, also has staff serve guests.)



The buffet restaurant at the Wynn Las Vegas is currently closed.

Barbara Kraft/Wynn Las Vegas

Temple's Lu says American-style buffets can take a lesson from their counterparts in China, where high-end buffets are a place for sophisticated social outings -- the kind of venue you'd go on a nice date, with fine cuisine and great visual appeal (if smaller portions).

"In China, most of the places are back to normal," says Lu, a native of the country who still has many contacts there. "I don't think human nature will be that different by nationality, so we should look at the countries who are ahead of the curve."

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Similarly Doug Parker, who runs cruiseradio.net, a website and podcast for cruise news, says he's watching Europe and Asia "with a close eye to see what is working. Table capacity is limited and also spread out, with the six feet of separation between each table."

Cruise fans are a devoted bunch, and Parker and Chiron say patrons can't wait to get back aboard. Parker says up to 85% of his emails ask when cruising will resume. "They can't wait to get back," he says.

And Yeskel is confident that Las Vegas -- and its eateries -- will rise again, even though there will be starts and stops in the short term. After all, what better place to be creative than an unlikely amusement park-like city carved out of the desert?

"I like to think that Vegas has always been the most innovative tourist destination on Earth, and it will find a way back -- probably before other sectors of the industry," he says. "It will lead the way."

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