



Pop Up Restaurants

Pop Up Restaurant: A temporary dining location or facility, which may or may not be otherwise used for meal preparation or meal consumption. There are many variations on this idea. Internet searches will provide a wealth of information and experiences. Our purpose here is to usher in the possibility, and give you a solid foundation from which to start. Where you eventually end up depends on your imagination, creativity and availability of the venue.

A Pop-Up Restaurant (PUR) can be for a single evening, or may be in place for months. Generally, a PUR is only active for a very short period. You may find articles about PUR's being around for months - this situation is vastly different from what we're proposing. A venue with its doors open for an extended period is a trial restaurant, and not a unique cool one-time experience. Your objective is to build a base of followers who will come to your PUR for the food adventure or experience and the known wonderful food. A small group starts, they tell their friends, etc. – before too long, provided a good dining experience was enjoyed by all, you'll have a nice and loyal following.

The basics:

- ❖ Know when to say when. You should not have a goal of feeding 200 people tonight. More like 10-30.
- ❖ You set the menu - this is what you're making tonight. If you've made fish, there won't be any chicken served tonight!
- ❖ Don't over-do on ambience. Followers are not coming because of the artwork. However the place can't be a dump either. Find a balance. Appropriate lighting, ease of access, rest room availability, etc.
- ❖ Plan where you want to do the actual cooking. If your venue has a commercial kitchen and you are allowed full use, then we suggest taking advantage of that. If no commercial kitchen exists or is available at your venue, you'll be cooking off-site (in a commercial kitchen), and transporting food in an approved manner. The hassle factor really kicks in with this option. If preparing off-site, will you plate on-site? If you can, do. This requires the set-up of warming stations and the ability to keep all things hot, hot, and all things cool, cool. This is not a buffet - this is a dining experience which requires plated, served meals.
- ❖ Pricing - the general rule is that people will pay a premium for this truly unique experience, and of course, excellent food. You are creating a similar situation to that of a famous or sought-after chef has. People will await the next opportunity to dine amongst a select few - the chosen few - the inner circle. Your mix of venues adds the unique twist and overall experience.



Pop Up Restaurants

What you need to have, or have access to:

❖ Table clothes, cloth napkins, flatware, plates, glasses, etc. Wherever your PUR is located, the table

presentation needs to be top notch, professional looking, clean, well set and inviting. Small centerpieces are a good idea, and can be as simple as a candle with a decorative base. Fresh flowers work as well (but not too tall).

❖ Helpers - kitchen or "food" help, plus assistant servers. Remember, you are the chef plus you are the host – and you are a big reason why people are following you. Plan to be highly visible. Welcome your guests. Make them feel extra special. Give a short, interesting overview of what is in store for them tonight. And plan to be very active in the actual serving of the main course. Try to appear at each table at least once. Make light chitchat, but keep it short and keep moving. Everyone needs to eat at the same time - you don't want 4 tables done while the other 4 tables are still having food served. Your "helpers" are casual labor, not employees. Each needs to look the part - well dressed in either black, or with a matching jacket or apron - your visible help need to look like a team. Other areas of the training manual cover casual labor; where to find them, what to pay them, what to expect from them, how to plan your back-ups, etc.

❖ Insurance. Make certain your policy covers the event(s) you're planning. The venue owner will almost certainly want to be listed as an additional insured, with a certificate of insurance provided well ahead of the event.

❖ You'll need a full complement of cooking essentials and ancillary items, plus clean-up items.

If your venue is well suited for a solo or maybe a three-piece combo for background music, go ahead. Just be careful not to let your overhead stop you from making a very nice profit.

Frequency:

We've found a PUR offering one (or two nights consecutive) of dining a month is plenty. Don't try to do this once a week - even your most die-hard followers will fall off, plus you'll fall into a rut which in turn will turn-off your followers. Don't wait three months between events - people will forget. Your hardest task is the first event, because in reality you will be planning TWO events. One for now, and the one you'll announce at or right after your initial event. From then on it is a continuous cycle of planning a menu, locating your venue, arranging help, and most importantly, staying in touch with your base



Pop Up Restaurants

Venues:

A change of venue is not a requirement. A constant venue allows people to build a routine of sorts, unless they don't like the place. A change of venue is more work for you, and more work to educate your followers on where you'll be next. Change is more of a hassle, but can bring a new spark to each event. Make sure followers have enough heads-up so that they can block a date. Make sure you have an RSVP time frame that allows you to scrub the event if only 2 people respond!

Don't:

Don't expand your menu for the night. Nothing eats into profit faster than prepared food that was wasted. Unless you have a method to effectively and safely use leftover food items, don't allow yourself to get into that situation to begin with. Do plan a 10% overage - you need to be able to replace a plated meal that is dropped, ruined, etc. But if you're dropping more than 5%-7% of your plates, you have bigger issues to address.

Don't do this without prepayment. One fixed price, with a few menu variables (iced tea, water, coffee and maybe a choice from two different desserts). Even if someone fails to show, they are paid, which means your hard cost is covered. Apply that payment to the next event they sign up for. Don't set event dates that conflict with holidays, annual events or a period when history shows you'll have dreadful weather. Even if you have a killer themed event for a holiday, too many people have obligations, traditions or excuses why they can't or won't participate.

Don't serve or be responsible for alcohol. If alcohol is needed, hire a licensed server from a licensed company. Make this a situation where the guest goes to the bartender and makes a separate purchase. You don't buy the alcohol. This is a totally separate element. You cannot afford to be listed on a lawsuit should that situation arise.

Do:

Do listen to your customers and sincerely request feedback. If a venue is a turn-off, never go back. If a meal didn't knock their socks off, toss it from potentials. And when feedback gives high praise to a venue, the meal, the staff, etc. - plan to recycle that experience down the road. They get another great night, and you already have a fair amount of the work done - a win-win situation.

Do treat your casual labor well and with respect. You'll find it much easier to call on someone over and over who will provide good service, compared to constantly searching for help.

Do consider a weeknight event - Thursday is prime. Weekend schedules tend to get filled rapidly. A weeknight gives a break from routine, and it gives your patrons a chance to go to the office the next day and share their cool experience. (win-win!) Your event is not a late-night ordeal - ideally everyone is headed home by 8 pm. You and your staff should be finished and home by 10.



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Get your big toe wet:

The first time is always the hardest. A real learning experience. Consider the assembly of a real PUR experience, but invite neighbors, friends and family. Don't charge (but donations would be accepted). Run the drill at full speed. You'll have expenses, which are a business expense. You'll learn a LOT. Your guests will (or should) understand that they are part of a training exercise. Use volunteers for your casual labor. Don't make the most exotic meal on the planet. This exercise is a trial run. Be as real as possible, with as low of an overhead as possible. Make good notes - you are only going to have one or two shots at testing before the rubber meets the road. Even with your "test" event, plan to send out notices, send out your menu and require an RSVP. It may sound silly, but when this is the real deal, you'll want to know how to best organize from start to finish. No surprises.

If it helps, think of this as a dinner party where you're the host and chef. You are providing the place, the theme, the meal and maybe arranging the entertainment. If you are organized and relatively stress-free, with a smile on and truly enjoying the event, your guests will receive that message and be equally as pleased to be part of the special event. This is a team effort, and whether your guests know it or not, they are a big part of the team. Now get your paper and pencil out and start planning your first and future fun (and very profitable) events!