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Treat Your Customers to Trending Global Flavors

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U.S. consumers’ interest in global flavors has grown in recent years—36% say they like to try [regional varieties of mainstream ethnic cuisines to sample new foods and tastes](#); and 32% are willing to pay more for authentic ethnic dishes.

With 44% of Americans still [hesitant to make international trips](#), a number of consumers probably won’t get an opportunity to sample new food and restaurants abroad this year—something [47% say they already miss](#).

However, by offering globally inspired menu items, foodservice operators can cater to consumers who are craving a chance to travel via their taste buds.

Trending Flavor Inspiration

Research indicates globally-inspired flavors resonate well with younger generations. More than a third of the Gen Z expressed [interest in eating at Indian restaurants](#) (36%). Using ingredients such as garam masala, which *The New York Times* calls “[the most common spice blend in the country](#) and a cornerstone of the cuisines of South Asia” to season items ranging from pies to bread may entice Gen Z patrons.

Similarly, 38% of the age group is interested in Middle Eastern restaurant fare. Serving dishes containing items such as harissa—a [Tunisian chili pepper paste](#) that’s been [one of the fastest growing savory ingredients](#) in the last few years and [can be used in cocktails](#)—or ras el hanout, a [Moroccan spice blend](#) made with cardamom and anise and used in desserts like [cake](#)— draw business from younger generations.

Millennials are also gravitating toward taste exploration, according to Sarah Hickey, senior director, insights and market research for Dawn Foods.

“Millennials are especially interested in exploring Asian and Latino cuisine, with foods like chocolate sesame cake and churro-flavored donuts becoming increasingly popular,” Hickey told *Food Business News*.

“Dedicating time to making treats such as cake sushi, churro whoopie pies or even wasabi cupcakes are proving to be effective ways of bringing new taste experiences to customers.”

Worldwide Appeal

Millennial and Gen Z diners aren’t the only ones who order dishes featuring ingredients that were initially popularized in other countries. Kerry’s [2021 Taste Trends North America report](#) includes “taste exploration” as a top trend, stating that consumers “Seek authentic yet accessible cuisines from distinct countries, regions and localities, whether locally sourced or internationally inspired.”

[Research indicates](#) that 18% of consumers favor flavors associated with comfort foods in certain cultural cuisines. Approximately 14%, for instance, say flavors from mainland Asia, such as red curry coconut and Himalayan salt, are their favorite. Chile crisp, a garlic-and-chile-pepper-flake-infused condiment—which can be [used in peanut brittle, cupcakes](#) and even [on ice cream](#)—has also become more sought-after in recent years. Consumer interest has been so strong that one retail version that originates from China saw a [227% sales gain](#) in 2020.

More than a quarter of consumers (26%) have a preference for flavors from Latin America. Mexican cuisine is the most frequently consumed variety from the region, according to [Mintel](#)—which notes utilizing authentic ingredients and flavors in dishes is a must to satisfy both Hispanic and non-Hispanic consumers, who are seeking realistic and convenient ways to experience Latin foods and flavors through foodservice and other channels.

Creating an Inviting Menu

Americans seem to have an appetite for more adventurous tastes this year; 32% say they want new, spicy and bold flavors. And this extends to globally-inspired desserts — two-thirds of Americans expressed interest in spicy and sweet combinations, like honey sriracha and mango habanero, according to [Flavorchem’s Flavor & Trend Forecast 2021](#).

Somewhat unfamiliar culinary elements, though, may receive a better reception in certain settings. Consumers are more likely to experiment with flavors when getting takeout or dining in at a restaurant, for instance, than when ordering delivery.

Incorporating novel international tastes into familiar, classic foods can also help make them a less intimidating option. Featuring flavors like matcha, lychee, yuzu, and chai in baked goods could appeal to consumers who are “looking for internationally inspired options while travel is limited,” according to a [2021 food and beverage trend report](#) from Japan-based flavor producer T. Hasegawa.

Consumers may respond well to a twist on a traditional treat, for example—such as [churro bites made with TWIX® Cookie Bars](#)—or an item that includes regional ingredients, like the dulce de leche in [these cookies made with M&M’S® Chocolate Candies and DOVE® Dark Chocolate](#).

With global flavors here to stay, offering items that contain emerging global tastes could potentially pique interest in your menu—and, by offering consumers a chance to journey to distant destinations without having to leave home, potentially help expand both your customer base and overall sales.

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