

TOUR CATERER

They say an army travels on its stomach and the same can be said for a rock n roll tour and today it is common to hear crew say that they put on weight during a tour a opposed to losing it thanks to the high quality and generous portions of fresh home cooked food provided by the tour caterers, none of your frozen and packet fast food here and everything is made from scratch except bread.

Tour catering crew are normally employed (or engaged if self employed) by a specialist tour catering company and many consider it to be the hardest job on a tour, feeding the touring party with three meals a day including vegetarian options and special diets. The catering team is an integral part of the tour. Being made to feel a part of the whole team and sharing in the excitement is something that keeps them coming back for more. There is a huge amount of travelling involved and caterers will live with the rest of the touring crew on a tour bus although a hotel is usually provided on days off that occur about once a week but can quite often turn into travel days on an extensive tour. Caterers will report to the Production or Tour Manager.

All the catering equipment has to be carried with all the other equipment on the trucks as most venues do not have suitable or sufficient catering facilities. Catering conditions in some venues leave a lot to be desired but can still be made more homely, with tablecloths, flowers and, at dinner, candles on all the tables.

The equipment will consist of LPG gas cookers, ranges, servery equipment, tea urns, bain-marie's, fridges, dry goods and various other catering related stuff such as cups, saucers, pans, plates, bowls, cutlery, water boilers and even a kitchen sink all of which has to be securely flight cased to help prevent (reduce) damage in transit, you have to be able to set up a kitchen anywhere back stage or in a tent at a festival yet still maintain perfect hygiene conditions, nobody will employ you if you give the lead vocalist food poisoning during a multi million pound world tour. In a festival situation power and water supplies as well as waste disposal must be considered and planned. Menus are planned as a team effort a few days in advance and no dishes are repeated throughout a tour, bands are often careful about what they eat.

After loading into the venue each morning one of the "runners" from the local crew is sent off shopping for items such as milk, bread and all the day's newspapers (crew like their favourite newspaper each morning) while breakfast is prepared. One member of the local crew will have the role of assisting with the washing up for the day.

Breakfast will usually run from 8am to 1pm as the crew have to eat in shifts, for instance, the lighting crew will have breakfast while the rigging crew are working, they will then swoop. Fruit juices, cereal and the traditional English breakfast are

favourite but options such as kippers, kedgeree, cold meats and cheeses together with tea, coffee (at least three kinds of coffee), breads, toast, jams, marmalade fruit, yoghurt and croissants are available, in fact the same range as you find in a quality hotel.

About mid morning one of the catering crew go with the local crew runner to do the shopping for the day at a cash and carry or supermarket, not just your average family shop but several hundred pounds worth of fruit, vegetables, meat, fish, bread and even flowers for the dinner table and band dressing rooms, tight budgets must be adhered to and detailed accounts and books kept throughout the tour.

Lunch (1pm – 3pm) is usually buffet style with soup, at least one hot dish and various cold meats, fish, quiches, salads and cakes, fruit and sandwich fillers. Tea, coffee, and soft drinks are available on a “help yourself” basis all day as are items such as bread (and a toaster), crumpets, spreads, cheese, fruit, cakes, snacks and nibbles.

Dinner (6pm) will consist of a choice of 2 starters, 3 main courses (including vegetarian) and a pudding, dinner and breakfast is served at table on china plates with metal cutlery not paper and plastic. The traditional Sunday roast is also a firm favourite.

The catering crew will also provide the artists “hospitality rider” in the dressing rooms, normally tea and coffee, deli trays, fruit, nuts, sweets, chocolates, sandwiches and a whole range of beers, wines and sprits, soft drinks, glasses, ice etc.

Finally, the tour buses have fridges that need to be stocked with beers and soft drinks for after the show along with the crews post show snacks, known as “load out” sandwiches.

Having unloaded, set up, shopped, cooked and washed up it just remains to pack all the cases and reload them all back into the trucks.

A very tough job for which a cheerful disposition is a prerequisite. "You can't be a miserable person or you'll be gone". Tour caterers do it with a smile and are always around for people wanting something not on the daily menu. You can be sure of a Birthday Cake if your on tour on your Birthday, they're worth their weight in gold.

Core Skills

A very broad experience of cooking and catering.

The ability to plan menus within budgets.

The ability to be creative and adaptable.

Ability to perform simple calculations.
Keeping of simple books and accounts.
Basic Numeracy and Literacy.
Ability to understand and interpret written material incl. menus, diagrams, plans, schedules and risk assessments.
Must be able to get on with people easily and have good communication skills.

Qualifications

Formal catering qualifications are not necessarily required provided adequate experience can be demonstrated.
Certificate in Food Hygiene essential.

Underpinning Knowledge

An understanding of Health and Safety practice including Manual Handling, Fire Safety, Electrical Safety and Safety with LPG gas.

Insurance

Self employed caterer will require their own Public Liability Insurance, Employers Liability Insurance will be required if caterers instruct local crew or other members of the catering crew.

STAGESAFE