



Fáilte Ireland
National Tourism Development Authority



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EFFICIENT BREAKFAST OPERATIONS

Efficient breakfast operations

This topic at a glance ...

With the move away from the self-service buffet for breakfast, this topic looks at various service models such as table service, manned buffet stations, room service and breakfast to go. There are tips on mise-en-place and table sanitisation, and support materials include a series of flowcharts to illustrate the different service models – table service from the buffet, table service from the kitchen, assisted service from the buffet, room service and grab and go. The support materials also include a **Sample Ordering Docket** to help streamline ordering and improve service standards and efficiency.

Delivering breakfast service and cost efficiencies

As any food and beverage manager will be aware, breakfast can be the busiest time of day for hotels. As guests make their way downstairs at their leisure, there is no real way of knowing when the restaurant will be busy.

Under the **COVID-19 Safety Charter Guidelines**, many hotels have introduced breakfast booking timelines and guests appear to be adapting well to the new practice of booking a time slot for breakfast – just as they do for dinner. This also allows you to have better control of staff scheduling where this is introduced, as your manager/supervisor can track bookings the evening before, to determine the hours the demand will peak. This may allow you to delay a shift start for a staff member or two by an hour and to allocate that hour to the next service preparation and mise-en-place. There are several low-cost technology options that can make this easy for hotels to operate.

Coupled with the fact that restaurant capacity is reduced by around 40% to allow for social distancing, the pressure on space can be alleviated by offering a good room service breakfast basket option or a 'breakfast to go' service. This is increasingly popular for corporate clients or those planning an early departure for an activity focused outdoors day.



Moving away from the self-service buffet

Saying goodbye to the self-service breakfast buffet has presented many challenges.

Hotels that previously offered a mix of cold breakfast buffet and table service for cook-to-order items have found the transition easier than others.

But the transition also presents opportunities such as reducing the vast offering usually available at breakfast, reviewing service options, reducing waste and improving quality.

Some hotels may wish to maintain the breakfast buffet, and there are ways that this can still be done. What is possible will very much depend on layout and space.

Whether the self-service buffet is gone for good or not, it's useful to look at different possibilities.

Doing so is a 'win-win' situation with improved efficiencies and satisfied customers.

1.

Full table service

2.

Served buffet station

3.

Breakfast display/ servery

4.

Room service

5.

Breakfast to go



Different occasions - different service options

The occasion or the motivation for a guest's stay will influence their choice. For example, a corporate guest may be more interested in a Breakfast Basket room service option or a take-away 'Breakfast to Go' or Breakfast Bag option. That same person, when travelling with their family, will be drawn to the dining room for a breakfast served to their table or, when away with their partner, they might prefer a room service Breakfast option, which can also be redefined to offer a more contemporary Breakfast basket option. A more contemporary Breakfast basket could include options such as organic Porridge with a fruit compote or organic yoghurt with homemade granola or wrapped warm Breakfast options like a Frittata or a Breakfast Burrito. Why not try a Breakfast basket instead of limiting your hot food offer to a Full Irish Breakfast menu as part of your room service menu. A Full Irish Breakfast menu can have a lower profit margin. It's worth considering the markets and segments you serve and your food costing, when you sit down to re-engineer your Restaurant Breakfast and Room Service menus.



Breakfast service flow in the dining room

Most hotels have adapted their offering from the self-service breakfast buffet to either full table service or a service staff led buffet. Whatever model you go with, the key to good breakfast service management and effective customer flow in the dining room is to have a dedicated host in place at the entrance to the restaurant/dining room.

Tasks of the breakfast host should ideally include:

- Welcoming the guest
- Taking guest's room number and checking off against the rooming list
- Seating the guest
- Presenting the breakfast menu
- Advising them who their waiter is
- Explaining the new order of service
- Setting the tone for the whole breakfast experience

It is also good practice to have a lectern and side table at the entrance with clear signage advising guests to "Please wait to be seated", in the event that guests arrive while the host is seating other guests. Having a large display of your breakfast menu available for guests as they wait for the host to seat them is useful, as it ensures customers are occupied with reading the menu and any breakfast daily specials. Familiarisation with the menu and the order of service ahead of being seated can also save time when guests are seated, as many may be ready to place their order sooner.

The majority of hotel restaurants in Ireland will only have one entrance which will need to be shared with guests exiting after breakfast. A designated access flow from arrival to seating and thereafter from table to exit must be established, communicated and adhered to, in order to eliminate customer crossover. Directional signage/stickers placed strategically on the floor or walkways with directional arrows will assist in delivering the message.

Take a look at the supporting materials to this module which includes a **Flowchart for Table Service from the Kitchen**.



For breakfast efficiencies, consider designated service areas with staff dedicated to clearing empty tables, sanitising (tables, seating and condiments), resetting tables and marking tables as ready/sanitised for guests. Depending on business size, layout and space, it can be beneficial to assign dedicated staff to stillroom duties, to manage separate orders for drinks as well as breads, hot toast & warm pastries.



To experience breakfast as a guest, have members of your service and management team sit in the dining room to observe the new service flow and customer behaviour. This time and motion study will identify ways to improve efficiencies of order taking and service, as well as identify service pinch points and possible areas of food waste.



Served buffet stations

An alternative to full table service is to set up the buffet and service stations as in pre-COVID-19 times but with staff collating the guest order from the buffet and the guest remaining seated.

This way, guests will be able to see what's on offer (we eat with our eyes), and individual portions of most breakfast items can be displayed and easily served. The buffet counter can also display a wider variety of foods than a written menu will facilitate, such as cereal choices, the range of cheeses, charcuterie and fresh fruits of the day.

Both hot and cold food can be served from the station and there are two options for cooked food, both of which will reduce food waste:

1. All hot food is pre-cooked and served from the buffet to the table. An advantage here is the time reduction of service delivery as orders do not need to come from the kitchen, nor will food need to travel from kitchen to the table. In this option, the breakfast chef's role is to replenish food items to the buffet and a food 'runner' can deliver it to the buffet from where the server serves the guest.
2. Cold foods are served to order from the buffet to the table and a menu of cook to order food is offered with the order submitted and then served to the table from the kitchen. An advantage of this approach is that cold foods/continental breakfast items are plated to order, and hot food is only prepared as ordered, so there is minimal waste.

Take time to review the **Flowchart for Table Service from the Buffet**, from the supporting materials to this module.

Other considerations of maintaining a buffet element to your breakfast include:

- The served buffet would need to be carefully managed to comply with COVID-19 guidelines and to ensure queuing can accommodate social distancing and that guests feel comfortable and safe
- The buffet needs to be properly equipped with sneeze guards and perspex screens
- The buffet counter will need to be kept in pristine condition for the duration of breakfast
- It is paramount that all catering personnel working in the buffet vicinity strictly adhere to COVID-19 hygiene guidelines.



Breakfast display

Some buffet stations are not designed or cannot be adapted as a manned buffet station. If this is the case, it could potentially be used as a breakfast display so that your guest can still see the range of items on offer but will order from the table and all food will be brought to them.

It will need to be clearly signposted on your menu to your customers that breakfast will be served to their table and that this is for display purposes only. This situation would also need to be carefully managed to comply with COVID-19 guidelines and to ensure people don't gather in groups to view what's on offer.

Presentation plays a big part



Enhance the served breakfast buffet counter or display with an attractive layout and illustrative signage. Highlight local produce and provenance on little blackboards or tent cards – these don't have to be costly or elaborately designed, but make an effort to ensure they reflect the standard you want to convey (a piece of white paper or tent card with 'sausages' printed on it and stuck in front of the display does nothing to enhance the experience!).



Consider having information on display before or when guests enter the dining room, whether in the form of a (clearly) handwritten blackboard or a map showing the locations of your producers. This can communicate key messages as well as enhance the customer experience – and might give your guest something to look at if they do have to stand in a socially distanced queue. See the **Upselling and Communications** module of this toolkit for more tips on promoting breakfast.



Check out the **Flowchart for Assisted Buffet Service** from the supporting materials to this module.

Room service breakfast

Room service breakfast has been around for a long time, but COVID-19 regulations will see some guests wanting to avoid a dining room or restaurant setting, preferring to have breakfast in their room.

A simple but enticing menu

Serving a hot cooked breakfast to guest bedrooms can be cumbersome and all too often operationally inefficient.

How does your current room service breakfast offering score on customer satisfaction? Now is a good time to re-evaluate. Depending on your client base, could you say that cooked breakfast is only available in the dining room? Should you turn your room service breakfast experience into a great healthy/vitality/light experience instead of a full cooked breakfast? Only you and your team can make that decision – a decision that will involve analysing sales, customer satisfaction scores, and operational efficiencies (or inefficiencies) in your current offering.



1. As with your main breakfast menu, design a standard 'base' bag/ basket/box with some fixed core items, offering some choice and/or additions to customise. Base items could potentially be packed by night staff and be ready for kitchen staff to add optional/customised items into in the morning, once orders have been collected.
2. Create two or three menu concepts for your breakfast bag/ basket/box, as per the concepts we've looked at in Module 3 **Re-engineering your Breakfast Menu** (vitality breakfast; **Taste of Place** (add your local area name) breakfast etc).
3. Plan around cold and ambient items so that the bag can be hung on the door handle or presented in an inviting box/basket outside the door, for a zero-contact room service offering.
4. Check out the ideas in the **Breakfast Bag options** document supporting module 3.

Room service options:

- Breakfast in a bag
- Breakfast basket
- Breakfast box
- Breakfast tray

Advantages for hotel and guest

1. Guests feel extra safe with ample space to enjoy breakfast in the comfort of their bedroom.
2. Breakfast can be delivered in a timely manner and can be operationally excellent if planned and executed correctly.
3. Corporate guests can avoid the busy chatter of leisure guests and children in the dining room.
4. Corporate guests can catch up on emails or the morning news as it's easier to use a laptop in their room than in the dining room.



A new future for room service breakfast?

As well as (or perhaps instead of) offering your regular selection of breakfast items as a tray service to a guest's room, consider innovating with a simple breakfast bag, basket or box offering which can bring service efficiencies, while also offering something novel and convenient to your guest.

Using high quality items such as homemade granola, or porridge, with raw local honey; local natural yoghurt, fresh fruit salad (or seasonal fruits); carrot, orange and ginger juice could make for a lighter/healthier/ vitality breakfast offering and it travels and holds better than some traditional full Irish breakfast options. Also try updating your room service breakfast with more contemporary cooked to order options. Check out our module 3 on **Re-engineering your Breakfast Menu** for some inspiration!

Ordering room service breakfast

Some options to improve efficiency and guest experience could include:

- Could breakfast preferences be collected at check-in?
- Or through your website?
- Or available on an easy to use, intuitive app?
- Could a guest also order by phone?
- Or via a door handle menu collected by night staff?
- Or via a QR code for self-service ordering?

In all cases, the guest chooses a time slot and completes their order the night before, thereby providing the kitchen and restaurant staff with ample time to prepare the basket or box and deliver breakfast on time, every time. On-time delivery is essential for guest satisfaction, particularly for the corporate guest.

Take a look at the **Flowchart for Room Service** in the supporting materials to this module.

Delivering room service breakfast

Room service personnel knocks on the door and leaves breakfast outside for the guest to collect. Or, if served in a breakfast bag, it can be hung on the door handle.



Make it special

- Standard breakfast items - granola, yoghurt, cereal, pastries, fresh fruit or fruit salad, juices - will all work well for a breakfast bag or basket.
- The experience can be elevated by including items that are made in-house - maybe a nice homemade muffin or scone with homemade/ local jam or fruit compote rather than the ubiquitous croissant? Or items that are sourced locally (a bottle of local apple juice or pot of local yoghurt).
- Breakfast box options could include little platters like a fresh fruit selection, smoked salmon and brown bread, charcuterie and cheeses.

Packaged doesn't need to mean disposable.

If your **room service** breakfast is delivered in a bag, basket or box, items can be served in small glass flip top/lidded jars, glass bottles, and re-usable containers. A breakfast box/basket could be wooden, or other woven material, with little compartments to divide items (check out bento boxes www.monbento.com for ideas) or it could include small covered dishes.

On the other hand, using disposable items will help with operational efficiency and at the same time reduces the risk of cross contamination. Guests are far more conscious now of sustainable packaging and if everything is throw-away, it may lessen their satisfaction.

Admittedly, this will be more difficult for **take away** breakfast options, but try to source the most sustainable packaging you can.

If using disposable items, consider cardboard and paper wherever possible in preference to plastic and ensure they are recyclable. This will also make your breakfast delivery aesthetically more appealing.



Take-away/grab and go breakfast

Some guests will just want to grab a quick, express breakfast. Consider offering the option of a takeaway version of your breakfast bag/box delivered to the guest's room or available at a grab and go station in the lobby or at reception.

While the concept of takeaway was originally identified as reflecting the budget end of the food market, COVID-19 has seen high end businesses adapt their offering to suit this customer market preference.

- Similar concepts to the breakfast bag/box will work here but obviously will need packaging that you won't get the chance to re-use, and will need to include cutlery, napkins etc. depending on contents.
- If using a grab and go station, consider having the standard grab and go breakfast bag alongside additional items for upselling.
- Consider including a beverage voucher in the breakfast bag and a station where guests can collect their tea/coffee as they depart. Give the guest the choice to enjoy breakfast in their room or 'to go' with the hot beverage collected in the foyer or at reception as the guest leaves. Remember too that the quality of the beverage offering will usually be important to this customer and their preferred breakfast location will be influenced by where the best coffee is or tea menu choices or indeed freshly squeezed juice bar options.

Grab and go breakfast ideas

Standard grab and go	Optional additions to make a 'deluxe' grab and go
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh juice: orange, apple, cranberry • Granola bar • Pastries • Locally produced yoghurt, dairy and non- dairy • Fruit pot • Coffee/tea to go 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit leather (dehydrated fruit) – can be made in house • Charcuterie (prepared meats – often cured or smoked - served cold) • Protein bars/balls • Granola/muesli • Cheese portions • Overnight oats • Breakfast muffin • Breakfast burrito • Breakfast sandwich • Breakfast smoothie • Breakfast bagel • Kombucha  

Take a look at the **Flowchart for Grab and Go Breakfast Offering**, in the supporting materials to this module.



When choosing packaging/presentation items, options will include reusable, biodegradable, compostable and recyclable.

For your take-away packaging, try to use biodegradable where possible, otherwise go for compostable and if that's not an option, choose recyclable.



Breakfast restaurant mise-en-place

Best practice mise-en-place procedures and 'putting in place' tools and equipment for service will make breakfast as efficient as possible and ultimately lead to quality service, an improved customer experience and high satisfaction levels.

Providing training, so that your employees have the knowledge and skills to efficiently operate your systems and implement your standards, is key to success. Remember pivoting your experience and service model requires refreshed SOPs, supported by training to ensure they are applied consistently by all the team.

Restaurant mise-en-place has two interdependent components:

1. Table layout for breakfast

2. Mise-en-place preparation and stocking of service stations

Table layout for breakfast

The table layout should be simple and also accommodate all menu options. COVID-19 guidelines must take account of, for example, minimal handling of crockery, cutlery and glassware, cruet sets, food condiments and accompaniments.

Physical menus should not be used where possible, but where they are used, they should be single use and disposed of afterwards or else plastic coated so that they can be sanitised. A good alternative is an electronic menu accessed using a QR code or an app. Strategically positioned blackboards can also support daily changeable promotions and breakfast specials.

Mise en place of service stations

Working at a reduced (c. 60%) capacity due to social distancing means that good practice mise-en-place is now more important than ever. Service stations should have:

1. **Adequate additional cover settings** for the number of times tables are expected to turn over during service. These covers should consist of the table setting (as described above) with cutlery wrapped on each individual setting and placed on the side plate with the cup and saucer to hand. These extra cover settings should be stored on the work station in an organised manner.
2. **Accompaniments and condiments.** Everything else apart from the table layout should be served to the guest once they are seated and have ordered, such as:
 - Tea/coffee pots
 - Milk jugs (ensure adequate size for cereal orders and beverages)
 - Butter/spreads
 - Preserves
 - Sugar (bowl or sachets)
 - Sauces – ketchup, mustard, brown sauce etc.
(*individual portions or sachets recommended*).



Increased productivity

Being well organised is the key to success and the more mise-en-place executed prior to breakfast service, the more efficient and seamless service will become.

For a table for two the following layout is recommended:

- Table number
- 2 side plates
- 2 cups and saucers
- 2 disposable napkins
- 2 juice glasses
- 2 side knives
- 2 table forks
- 2 table knives
- 2 teaspoons
- 2 dessert spoons
- Cruet sets

Notice that the table is sanitised.

Notice that Menu App or QR code for menu selection and/or self-service online ordering is available.

Table Sanitisation

It is vitally important for every guest and breakfast waiting staff that best practice levels of sanitisation and hygiene are employed following the use of every table. There must be a check list of sanitisation procedures and validation of same before the next guest can be seated. Once the table is ready, it should be physically labelled as sanitised and ready for use. The following standards should be observed:

Area	Action	Additional controls
Arrival	Guest informed of necessity to use antibacterial gel prior to being seated.	Ensure hand sanitiser gels are well stocked (minimum 60% alcohol content).
Guest journey to/ from table	Appropriate social distance should be maintained when walking about.	Vigilance by all waiting staff.
Table top	Disinfect with sanitiser and clean with disposable paper towels. Single use gloves should be used by staff member.	Needs to be completed after each table departure.
Seating	Disinfect with sanitiser and clean with disposable paper towels. Single use gloves should be used by staff member.	Needs to be completed after each table departure.
Cold and hot buffet counters	Disinfect with sanitiser and clean with disposable paper towels. Single use gloves should be used by staff member.	Should be completed throughout breakfast service.
Floor area	The floor space under tables and chairs should be kept crumb free during service	Action as required.
Service stations	Kept clean and tidy during service.	Checked by a member of staff throughout service.
Trays	All trays should be disinfected with sanitiser and cleaned with disposable paper towels. Single use gloves should be used by staff member.	Careful inspection of each tray before use.



Service Station layout for room service breakfast

The equipment required for room service will depend on what the guest has ordered, particularly if you introduce a breakfast bag or breakfast basket as discussed earlier.

Room service personnel have a distance to travel to the guest bedroom and if anything is missing, the guest will be dissatisfied which is not a good use of staff time.

Staff in the room service department will be required to clean and prepare the equipment needed for room service. Such equipment can include:

- Food Baskets, Boxes or Food trays
- Food warmers (as relevant to style or service and menu offering)
- Disposable tray covers and napkins
- Cutlery
- Crockery
- Glassware
- Cruets
- Tea and coffee pots
- Breakfast item wrapping to insulate heat (in the case of products like breakfast sandwiches, wraps burritos or breakfast quesadillas)
- Bread, pastry & toast baskets/warming holders

3 top tips

1. Innovate your room service breakfast offering with the primary focus on guest safety, current food trends and operational efficiencies in terms of preparations, delivery, time and cost.
2. Continually measure the success of breakfast service and cost efficiencies achieved against KPIs for which both kitchen teams and service personnel are accountable.
3. Don't do things just because they have always been done that way. Now is the time to question everything. Ask yourself: Is this working for us? Is it working for our guests?



For a hot cooked breakfast, the room service breakfast tray set up for two guests will include:

- Breakfast Basket, Box or tray with sanitised tray liner
- Coffee/tea pot
- Paper napkins
- 2 juice glasses
- 2 side plates
- 2 cups and saucers
- 2 side knives
- 2 table forks
- 2 table knives
- 2 dessert spoons
- 2 teaspoons
- Cruet sets
- Preserves and butter portions or holders
- Large milk jug (or closed small refillable bottle)
- Breadbasket and toast warming rack
- Sugar bowl/sachets