
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

The secret life of buffets



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Sam

And I'm Sam.

Neil

Have you ever been to an all-you-can-eat buffet, Sam? You know – a meal in a restaurant where you can eat as much food as you like.

Sam

Yes, I went to an Indian buffet once. I didn't eat all day before the meal, but I only managed to finish three or four plates...well, maybe five!

Neil

It sounds like your **eyes were bigger than your belly**, or stomach – a phrase describing someone who has taken more food than they can eat. In this programme we'll be discussing buffets – a feast of many different food dishes where diners are allowed to eat as much as they want – or as much as their stomachs will allow. And, of course, we'll be learning some new vocabulary as well.

Sam

The popularity of buffets is booming, especially in Middle Eastern and Asian countries where the variety of foods means there's something for everyone. But feasts are big and boastful - usually too much is cooked, and buffets have been criticised for waste.

Neil

We'll hear more soon, but first I have a question for you, Sam. The word 'buffet' originated from the French name for the table on which food was served, but buffets themselves don't come from France. So in which country did buffets begin?

- a) The United States of America
- b) Sweden
- c) China

Sam

Well, the US is famous for supersizing food so I'll guess a) America.

Neil

OK, Sam. We'll find out the answer later in the programme. John Wood, owner of cooking company Kitchen Cut, knows a lot about buffets – he used to run a one thousand seat breakfast buffet at the five-star Jumeirah Beach Hotel in Dubai. Here John shares his observations on human buffet behaviour with BBC World Service programme, The Food Chain.

John Wood

There are different people that treat buffets in different ways. Some people think this is a great opportunity to try little bits and lots of everything, and we come back as many times as I like. And other people just - whether they don't like getting up and down, which is understandable from their table - just want to **pile** it high, and people they want to get value for money. So, if you're paying \$100, \$200 a head for a buffet, you're gonna pile it up high and take the most expensive things you can you know, and **get your money's worth**.

Sam

John says buffet diners want to **get their money's worth** – get good value for the money they spend, so they often **pile up** food on their plate. If you **pile something up**, you gather a large amount of it into one place to build what's called a **pile**.

Neil

But buffets are not just about eating until you explode - they're also an opportunity to show off to your friends. Weddings are big in India, and usually include a buffet. The richer the people getting married, the bigger the buffet, sometimes inviting as many as five thousand guests. If each guest eats around six dishes, we're taking about a seriously big buffet!

Sam

Sandeep Sreedharan is a wedding **caterer** from Goa in South India – he owns a company which provides the food and drink for special social occasions. Here he talks with Ruth Alexander, presenter of BBC World Service, The Food Programme, about organising an Indian wedding buffet:

Sandeep Sreedharan

It's a very **vicious circle**, I think, right? Everybody wants to overwhelm everybody around you.

Ruth Alexander

OK. That's the aim. They are out to impress - they want to 'wow' the guests - **knock their socks off**.

Sandeep Sreedharan

Hain... knock their socks off. They should just go back saying, 'I couldn't eat even half of it!', you know. Some people just come for eating. They don't even worry about who's wedding is it... They know that... 'Who's the **caterer**? Ah, these guys are catering. Oh my God, this is gonna be great.

Sam

Wedding buffets are designed to amaze and overwhelm the guests with their huge displays of food. They need to 'wow' the guests, or **knock their socks off** – an idiom meaning to amaze and impress someone.

Neil

The problem is that no matter how extravagant and expensive one buffet is, the next one has to be even more impressive, something Sandeep calls a **vicious circle** – a difficult situation which has the effect of creating new problems which then make the original situation even worse.

Sam

It seems the secret to enjoying a buffet is trying a little bit of everything, without stuffing yourself until you can't move – although in the past, I think, that was exactly the idea.

Neil

OK, it's time to reveal the answer to my question - where did the buffets originally come from?

Sam

I guessed it was from the United States. Was I right?

Neil

That was... the wrong answer, I'm afraid, Sam. In fact buffets are thought to have come from Sweden in the Middle Ages.

Sam

OK, let's recap the vocabulary we've learned, starting with the expression, **eyes bigger than your belly**, or eyes bigger than your stomach, used when someone has taken more food than they can eat.

Neil

If you **pile up** your plate, you gather a large quantity of food together into a **pile**.

Sam

The phrase to **get your money's worth** means to get good value for the money you have spent .

Neil

A **vicious circle** is a problematic situation, having the effect of creating new problems which then make the first situation even worse.

Sam

The idiom to **knock your socks off** means to wow, amaze or impress someone.

Neil

And finally, a **caterer** is a person or company which provides food and drink for special social occasions. Once again, our six minutes are up. Bye for now!

Sam

Bye!

VOCABULARY

eyes bigger than your belly

(idiom) used when someone has taken more food than they can eat

pile up

gather a large quantity of something into a one place to form a pile

get your money's worth

get good value for the money you have spent

vicious circle

problem or difficult situation which has the effect of creating new problems which then make the original situation even worse

knock your socks off!

(idiom) amaze and impress someone

caterer

person or company which provides food and drink for special social occasions