

# the dish

FALL / WINTER 2025

*Festive Flavors Forecast*

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# Harvest to Holiday:

## Celebrating The Season & Inspiring What's Next

As the days grow shorter and the air turns crisp, there's a special kind of energy that takes hold of our industry. It's a time when menus shift from light and bright to warm and comforting, when the aroma of cinnamon and cider drifts from kitchens, and when operators of all kinds from restaurants and caterers to campus dining teams gear up for one of the most exciting and profitable times of the year.

This issue of The Dish celebrates the journey from autumn's bounty to winter festivities, helping you seize every opportunity. "Harvest to Holiday" is more than a theme; it's your seasonal roadmap.

Inside, you'll discover how chefs and operators are reimagining classic cold-weather fare to meet today's trends, and how flavors like gingerbread, maple, spiced cider, and peppermint can spark both nostalgia and new excitement on your menu.

We're also shining a spotlight on innovation, from the latest seasonal product launches to insights from vendor partners pushing the boundaries of seasonal creativity. And don't miss the article where we go inside one operator's playbook for mastering the holiday rush, proof that with the right plan during the busiest time of year can also be the most rewarding.

Whether you're refreshing your fall offerings, designing a show-stopping holiday menu, or simply looking for new ways to delight your guests, this issue is packed with inspiration, ideas, and practical tools to help you succeed.

Here's to a season filled with creativity, collaboration, and plenty of reasons to celebrate from harvest to holiday and every delicious moment in between.

Warmly,



Patrick Day  
Vice President/General Manager

Follow me @chefdaymed or us @jordanosfoodservice



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# 7 Ways Restaurants Can Create Limited Time Offers That Customers Love

By Denise Prichard, Restaurant 365

Restaurants are fully embracing limited time offers, and it's easy to see why. In the past four years alone, the number of LTOs in the food service industry skyrocketed by 53%. Over just the last year, LTOs surged 46% at both quick-serve and full-service restaurants. These special offerings don't just bring in new customers - they also give your regulars an exciting reason to keep coming back. By refreshing your menu with unique, time-sensitive items, you keep things lively and ensure your restaurant stands out. But for LTOs to really hit the mark, they need to be rolled out just right.

As rising costs continue to put pressure on restaurants, LTOs are now a go-to strategy. While some places struggle to keep prices down without hurting their bottom line, others - especially chains - are thriving by creating buzz with these special offerings.

## What are Limited Time Offers?

Limited Time Offers (LTOs) are exactly what they sound like - special dishes or drinks that are available for a short, sweet window at your restaurant. These offers create a sense of urgency and excitement, tempting customers to try something new before it's gone.

If you think this is a new tactic, guess again. McDonald's has been playing the LTO game for years with cult favorites like the McRib and the Shamrock Shake. And who doesn't count down the days until the Pumpkin Spice Latte is back? Folks are rushing to Starbucks in early September - even while it's still blazing hot in some places - just to get their fall beverage fix.

With the cost of dining out rising and customer traffic becoming more unpredictable, LTOs have become a powerful tool for restaurants to keep people coming back. In a time when food inflation is cutting into profits, LTOs are the key to attracting crowds and keeping your restaurant on people's radar, even when times are tough.

## What are the benefits of limited time offers?

By rolling out new, exclusive items for a short period, you can create a sense of urgency that draws customers in, eager to try something fresh before it's gone. Not only does this spike sales during the promotion, but it also keeps your restaurant in the spotlight, making it a go-to destination for customers looking for the next big thing. LTOs can be a powerful way to attract attention, whether you're aiming to pull in new faces or give your regulars an exciting reason to return.



## Here's why LTOs are a must-have in your restaurant's playbook:

**They bring in more foot traffic:** *The thrill of a limited time offer can lure in customers who might not otherwise visit, filling seats and boosting business, especially during slower times.*

**They let you test the waters:** *Thinking about adding a new dish to your menu? LTOs give you the chance to experiment without making a long-term commitment. It's a low-risk way to see what sticks and what doesn't.*

**They keep your regulars coming back:** *Your loyal customers love variety, and LTOs are the perfect way to keep them excited about what's new at your restaurant. By constantly offering something different, you keep them engaged and eager for their next visit.*

**They help you connect with younger diners:** *Gen Z is all about trying the latest and greatest, and they're huge fans of LTOs. By crafting offers that appeal to this generation, you tap into their desire for new experiences and build a strong connection with the younger crowd.*

# 7 tips to make your limited time offers a hit

**1 Take advantage of the season**

Think of how the Pumpkin Spice Latte and Shamrock Shake became seasonal icons. Tap into seasonal trends by creating offers that highlight the flavors and themes of the time. When your menu mirrors the current season, it doesn't just feel relevant—it feels like a celebration. Your guests will be drawn to the freshness and excitement of what's new and timely, making each visit feel like a special occasion they'll want to share.

**3 Get your staff on-board**

Make your staff your biggest fans by giving them all the details about your special offers and encouraging them to share their excitement with customers. Adding a section on limited time offers to your employee training can help them present these deals confidently and clearly. When the team is genuinely excited and knows what they're talking about, their enthusiasm can turn a good offer into something irresistible, making the whole dining experience more memorable for your guests.

**5 Sweeten the deal for loyal customers**

Show your regulars some love by giving them exclusive deals or extra perks. Whether it's a special discount, a free dessert, or early access to new menu items, making your loyal guests feel appreciated can keep them coming back for more. Plus, their positive word-of-mouth can help bring new faces into your restaurant. It's all about turning regulars into brand advocates who spread the word and help grow your business.

**7 Offer something exclusive**

Keep a close eye on how your limited time offers are doing by gathering feedback and sales data. Restaurant management software can be a powerful tool in this process, giving you real-time insights into what's working and what's not. With this info at your fingertips, you can quickly see what's resonating with customers and what needs some work. This way, you can fine-tune your approach with each new offer, and the right tools will keep you on top of things, ensuring your promotions hit the mark every time.

**2 Create a sense of urgency**

Build excitement by letting your customers know your special offer is available for a limited time only. Make the most of social media, email blasts, and signage to keep that countdown front and center. By cranking up the urgency, your offer turns into a hot ticket, making guests feel they can't afford to miss out. This feeling of "now or never" transforms a limited time offer into a can't-miss opportunity, driving traffic and sales as guests rush to take advantage.

**4 Offer something exclusive**

Make your LTO special by offering something that can't be found anywhere else. Take the McDonald's McRib, for example—it's a fan favorite that's available only during certain times of the year. This limited availability makes people rush to McDonald's just to enjoy it before it's gone. By offering something truly unique and only available for a short period, customers will be more excited to visit and take advantage of the exclusive deal, boosting the overall success of the offer.

**6 Drive demand by limiting your supply**

Make your offer feel even more exclusive by limiting its availability. For example, let customers know that you're only serving 100 of your special item each day, so it's a "first come, first serve" situation. This kind of restriction makes the offer feel more special and can get people excited to come in and grab it before it's gone. By setting these limits and being clear about them, you can boost demand and make the offer even more appealing.

**LIMITED TIME OFFERS** can be a great way to boost sales and keep customers excited. By making them feel special and creating a bit of urgency, you can really catch people's attention. With the right tools to track how they're doing, you can refine your approach and make each offer even better. Nail these elements, and you'll see more customers and more success.



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# Swirled to Perfection The CVT Soft Serve Story



Sometimes, the best ideas are the simplest. For CVT Soft Serve, the idea began on the streets of Los Angeles with a single vintage ice cream truck, three classic flavors, and a commitment to doing things the right way.

Founded by Joe Nicchi in 2014, CVT Soft Serve wasn't about flashy toppings or gimmicks. It focused on perfecting what worked: rich, creamy soft serve ice cream in chocolate, vanilla, or the iconic twist. That commitment to quality struck a chord. Lines formed, social media posts went viral, and the brand quickly became a staple in LA's food scene.

## Simple But Memorable

In the beginning, things were simple but memorable. Joe's truck stood out from the flashy vehicles you see now. Its classic, vintage look matched the brand's focus on nostalgia and quality. People noticed the difference and kept coming back for a treat that brought back memories of summer as a kid - a simple pleasure, done right.

CVT's appeal lies in its genuine, playful spirit. A standout example of this came when Joe, tired of constant influencer requests for free ice cream, posted a handwritten sign on the truck that read, "Influencers Pay Double." The witty note quickly went viral, grabbing media attention and solidifying CVT's status as a trendsetting brand. This simple yet bold gesture perfectly reflected CVT's humor and authenticity.



As word spread, CVT's footprint began to grow. What started as a single truck expanded to major events, private parties, and even celebrity gatherings. The brand ventured into wholesale, expanding its reach beyond mobile services. Today, CVT Soft Serve products are available to restaurants, cafés, and foodservice operators, allowing fans to enjoy the same creamy, nostalgic



experience that started on the streets of Los Angeles. This transition from street-level icon to broader distribution didn't dilute the brand's ethos; instead, it amplified its reach while staying true to its core values: simplicity, quality, and connection with the customer.

## Soft Serve in a Pouch: Innovation Meets Nostalgia

In 2020, as the world slowed down, Joe saw an opportunity to bring CVT's signature soft serve to more people — without losing what made it special. The result? The CVT Soft Serve Pouch.



This innovative format delivers the same rich, creamy texture and signature flavor CVT is known for, now in a ready-to-use pouch. It's a simple idea with big impact — a way to make premium soft serve accessible anywhere, without the need for bulky equipment or complicated preparation.

As Joe shared on WISH-TV's Lifestyle Live, the pouch was born out of both necessity and creativity. During the pandemic, when food trucks were halted and events were canceled, he started experimenting with ways to package the brand's signature mix in a form that could reach fans directly - whether in restaurants, coffee shops, hotels, or even at home.

The CVT Soft Serve Pouch not only preserved the brand's legacy but also expanded its future. It combines convenience and consistency with the same nostalgia that made CVT famous — an innovation rooted in simplicity, just like the original truck.

## A Sweet Future Ahead

CVT's success story offers several lessons for anyone in the foodservice industry. First, simplicity can be a superpower. While other brands chase novelty or try to pack too many flavors into every menu, CVT focused on perfecting a few options and doing them exceptionally well. Second, authenticity resonates. Consumers today value transparency, honesty, and personality — and CVT has built a brand voice that's both memorable and approachable. Third, strategic growth matters. From humble beginnings as a single truck to a nationally recognized brand, CVT has expanded thoughtfully, ensuring that every new partnership, product, or event aligns with its mission and quality standards.

For us, partnering with CVT Soft Serve is about more than just carrying a product. It's about sharing a story of craftsmanship, authenticity, and growth. By distributing CVT products to restaurants, cafés, and venues nationwide, we're helping more operators bring this beloved soft serve to their customers. We're not just supplying a dessert — we're providing a connection to a brand story that customers know, trust, and love.

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# What's New This Season: Must Have Products from Our Partners

The holidays are rolling in, and so are the season's hottest new products from our trusted partners. From creative flavors to clever uses, these must-haves are ready to spark inspiration, elevate menus, and keep your customers coming back for more.



3575	Monin Pumpkin Spice Syrup Glass	12 / 750 ml
3579	Monin Peppermint Syrup Glass	12 / 750 ml
64268	Garniche Apple Dried Sliced 180 Ct	4 / 4 oz
41167	Cheesecake Factory Pumpkin Cheesecake 10" 14 Slice Frozen	2 / 80 OZ
41171	Cheesecake Factory Caramel Apple Crunch Cheesecake 10" 14 Slice	2 / 80 OZ
41176	Cheesecake Factory Chocolate Salted Cheesecake 10" 14 Slice	2 / 80 OZ
7809	Califia Farms Egg Nog Holiday Almond Milk	6 / 48 OZ
7810	Califia Farms Pumpkin Spice Barista Oatmilk	6 / 32 OZ
76411	Libbey Glass Flute 6 Oz Embassy	1 / 12 CT
78112	Cardinal Glass Cocktail/Martini 7.5 Oz Excalibur	1 / 12 CT

# Flavor Forecast 2025: Turning Holiday Classics into Menu Magic

The holiday season isn't just about tradition; it's a business opportunity wrapped in cinnamon and tied with a peppermint bow. As diners crave warmth, nostalgia, and a dash of indulgence, operators who lean into those seasonal signals can see spikes in foot traffic, social engagement, and sales.

This year's flavor forecast blends timeless favorites - gingerbread, maple, spiced cider, and peppermint - with inventive new takes that keep menus fresh and memorable. Here's how to harness the power of holiday flavor and turn it into profit-boosting experiences.

## Maple Nature's Golden Upgrade

### The Trend:

Maple has stepped beyond the breakfast table. With its layered sweetness and caramel-like depth, it's now a star ingredient in beverages, desserts, and even savory center-of-plate dishes.

### On the Menu:

- **Drinks:** Maple-bourbon old fashioned, nitro maple cold brews, or smoked maple hot toddies.
- **Entrées:** Maple-glazed salmon, roasted sweet potatoes with maple-chile butter.
- **Desserts:** Maple-pecan tart with sea salt, maple crème brûlée.

### Pro Tip:

"Pair maple with something unexpected - a hint of chili or citrus - to balance the sweetness and keep the palate intrigued."

*Chef Cesar Patino  
Executive Chef, Glen Annie Golf Club*

**Marketing Moment:** Launch a "Maple Week" in November with a prix fixe tasting menu or offer limited-time maple-inspired cocktails as a fall-into-holiday bridge promotion.

## Gingerbread Spice With Staying Power

### The Trend:

Gingerbread is timeless, but it's evolving. Chefs are playing with new spice blends, deconstructed presentations, and global influences that push the flavor beyond cookies and houses.

### On the Menu:

- **Drinks:** Gingerbread chai lattes, gingerbread-spiced espresso martinis, or a dark beer with gingerbread syrup.
- **Desserts:** Gingerbread tiramisu, gingerbread-rum trifle, or soft-serve with gingerbread crumble.
- **Savory:** Gingerbread-spiced glaze for duck or short ribs, or roasted root veggies with a ginger-miso dressing.

### Promotion Idea:

Offer a "Gingerbread Flight" — three mini desserts or drinks that showcase the spice's versatility. It's perfect for social sharing and upselling.

### Pro Tip:

"Think of gingerbread as a spice mix, not just a dessert. It plays beautifully with citrus, coffee, and even umami flavors."

*Chef Adriana Magdaleno, Affinity Group*

# Peppermint

## Fresh Meets Festive

### The Trend:

Peppermint's brisk brightness cuts through heavy holiday flavors, adding balance and freshness. It also taps into nostalgia like candy canes, hot cocoa, and winter wonderlands.

### On the Menu:

- **Drinks:** Peppermint espresso martinis, cold brew with peppermint foam, or peppermint hot chocolate flights.
- **Desserts:** Chocolate-peppermint lava cakes, peppermint semifreddo, or deconstructed candy-cane pavlova.
- **Unexpected:** A peppermint-parsley gremolata on roasted lamb or beef.

### Marketing Moment:

Launch a "Peppermint Passport" - guests who order multiple peppermint specials during the season earn a sweet reward (think a free dessert or exclusive holiday mug).

### Pro Tip:

"Use peppermint sparingly in savory applications - just enough to hint at the holidays without overwhelming the dish."

*Chef Nate Van Etten, Jordano's Culinary Specialist*

# Spiced Cider

## Comfort in a Cup

### The Trend:

Warm, cozy, and deeply nostalgic, spiced cider remains a seasonal bestseller. Today's twist? Using it as more than just a beverage base.

### On the Menu:

- **Beverages:** Cider-mimosa brunch flights, mulled cider punch bowls, or zero-proof cider spritzers.
- **Savory:** Cider-brined chicken with rosemary apples, pork tenderloin with cider-mustard jus.
- **Sweet:** Apple cider doughnuts, cider caramel panna cotta.

### Event Idea:

Host a "Cider Bar Pop-Up" - a DIY beverage station with toppings like cinnamon sticks, caramel drizzle, or whipped cream. Pair with small plates for a cozy, social-media-friendly activation.

### Pro Tip:

"Spiced cider pairs naturally with fall produce. Think squash, root vegetables, and cranberries — it elevates a dish without overpowering it."

*Chef Steve Smeets, Jordano's Culinary Specialist*

## Beyond the Plate

### Turning Flavor Into Revenue

Holiday flavors are powerful, but the magic happens when they're woven into the entire guest experience. A few ways to maximize impact:

- **Create Limited-Time Offers (LTOs):** Seasonal exclusives build urgency and repeat visits.
- **Bundle Menus with Experiences:** Pair a cider tasting with live music or a gingerbread dessert with a decorating workshop.
- **Tell the Story:** Highlight the origins, traditions, or chef inspirations behind seasonal dishes. Storytelling builds emotional connections.
- **Retail Tie-Ins:** Package peppermint syrup, maple granola, or gingerbread spice blends as take-home gifts.

## Final Course

### The Gift of Nostalgia

At the end of the day, holiday flavors are more than trends, they're emotional anchors. They remind diners of childhood memories, family traditions, and shared celebrations. By blending that nostalgia with creative culinary thinking, operators can turn simple ingredients into memorable experiences that bring guests back again and again.

So dust off the spice jars, fire up the cider press, and drizzle that maple syrup. The season of flavor and opportunity is here.

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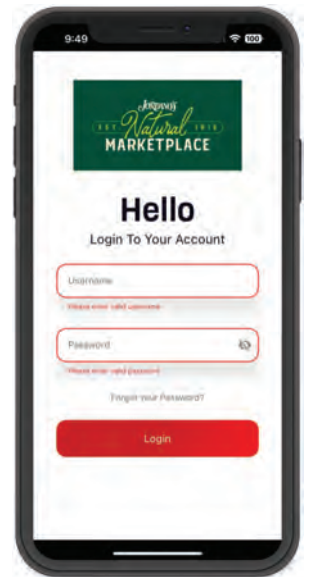
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# HOW CAMBRIA PINES LODGE TURNS HOLIDAY PRESSURE INTO PEAK PERFORMANCE



Each winter, the small Central Coast town of Cambria, California, undergoes a dramatic transformation. Tourists flood Highway 1, local shops bustle with holiday shoppers, and the air smells faintly of pine and mulled wine. At the heart of it all is Cambria Pines Lodge, a 152-room property known for its gardens, farm-to-table dining, and the beloved Cambria Christmas Market, an annual light festival that attracts tens of thousands of visitors between Thanksgiving and New Year's.

## SMALL-TOWN CHARM, BIG-TIME APPEAL

Cambria still holds on to its small-town charm with big-time attractions. The downtown corridor - lined with locally owned shops, art galleries, and cozy cafés - glows with festive lights and handmade holiday décor. The absence of chain stores adds to the town's genuine, home-grown atmosphere. It's an authenticity that defines the guest experience, and Cambria Pines Lodge plays a central role in making that magic happen.

## PLANNING FOR PEAK SEASON

For most operators, a holiday surge means logistical challenges. For Cambria Pines Lodge, it's a well-rehearsed performance that combines culinary storytelling, strategic staffing, and community collaboration into a proven seasonal success story.

The preparation begins months before the first strand of lights is hung. Management treats the six-week Christmas Market period as a signature event, aligning departments on forecasting, procurement, and service strategy well before autumn. Historical data on occupancy and sales helps the team anticipate demand and fine-tune staffing and menu planning.

"Using our data allows us to right-size staff at every level, avoid overstocking or understocking key menu items, and keep service flowing during high-stress periods," says Sydney Rodriguez of Cambria Pines Lodge. "It's all about balancing revenue with the guest experience."





### CULINARY STORYTELLING WITH LOCAL ROOTS

The Lodge's food and beverage program has become a defining element of the holiday season. Menus celebrate hyper-seasonal ingredients sourced from local farms and purveyors, including produce from the property's own organic gardens and seafood from nearby Morro Bay.

"I moved to SLO County almost ten years ago," says Rodriguez. "One of the best parts of the Central Coast is having access to so many local goods year-round. Supporting local vendors isn't just about great flavor - it's about keeping revenue within our community and building relationships that last."

Each dish reflects the season and the region—from hearty winter entrées and holiday-inspired desserts to thoughtful wine pairings from local vineyards. This approach doesn't just showcase what's fresh; it weaves a culinary narrative that connects guests to the Central Coast itself.

### STAFFING FOR VOLUME AND QUALITY

Handling the influx of holiday visitors requires careful staffing and strong leadership. Recruitment begins in late summer, followed by robust onboarding and cross-training to ensure every team member can pivot as needed. Back-of-house staff rotate through prep and line stations to maximize efficiency, while front-of-house employees receive training on menu knowledge and storytelling, ensuring service feels personal and confident.

"Martin has been a great mentor and asset to Cambria Pines Lodge," Rodriguez shares. "He taught me how to leverage vendors like Jordano's to our advantage ensuring we get the best ingredients and maintain consistent quality. The goal isn't just to fill shifts; it's to build a team that delivers excellent service even under pressure."

The Lodge also focuses on retention and development. Seasonal employees who return year after year are encouraged to grow into leadership roles, helping preserve institutional knowledge and reinforce a strong, supportive culture.

### COLLABORATION AS A COMPETITIVE EDGE

Partnerships with local producers, wineries, and artisans are key to Cambria Pines Lodge's holiday

success. "The Central Coast is known for its wines and local vendors," Rodriguez says. "Working with them is part of the experience - it creates a sense of family-like hospitality that guests can truly feel."

The Lodge's collaboration with the Cambria Christmas Market is especially impactful. Together, they plan and execute experiences that attract roughly 90,000 visitors each season. Joint lodging and dining packages encourage guests to stay multiple nights, turning what could be a one-evening visit into a multi-day holiday getaway. This alignment between event and hospitality not only drives occupancy and F&B revenue but also strengthens the entire local economy.

### FROM CHAOS TO OPPORTUNITY

Cambria Pines Lodge demonstrates how operational foresight, local sourcing, and intentional guest experiences can turn what many see as seasonal chaos into a period of growth and connection. The Christmas Market regularly delivers record-breaking occupancy and food-and-beverage revenue, but the true return lies in guest loyalty, many first-time visitors come back in quieter months, drawn by the same authenticity that made their December visit special.

"This is my sixth year working with the Christmas Market," says Rodriguez. "I learn something new every season - whether it's collaborating with a new local vendor or finding new ways to elevate the guest experience. The Market keeps raising the bar, and it's an experience you don't want to miss. I'm just grateful to be part of it."

For professionals across the food and hospitality industries, Cambria Pines Lodge offers a clear takeaway: the holiday rush doesn't have to be something to endure. With the right mix of strategic planning, vendor collaboration, and culinary vision, it can become the most profitable and most rewarding time of the year.



# How Restaurants Can Prepare for the HOLIDAY RUSH

Operators can take advantage of increased catering demand and large holiday party orders if they can craft festive meals and experiences despite high food costs and labor challenges.

By Danielle McLean, Restaurant Dive

As summer comes to a close, now is the time for restaurants to prepare for the holiday season rush, experts say.

The season can be busy, as families come together over a meal and businesses call on restaurants to feed their holiday parties and gatherings.

In 2024, more than two-thirds of consumers planned to celebrate part of the holiday season at a restaurant, according to a survey by Tock, a reservation and table management company. That survey found a similar level of engagement to the National Restaurant Association's 2023 projections, which showed that two-thirds of adults planned to eat out over the course of several weeks between Thanksgiving and New Year's, with 48% planning to order takeout or delivery.

To capture that traffic and revenue potential, restaurant owners need to start thinking about staffing, advertising, and navigating potential challenging economic conditions caused by tariffs with their suppliers.

Operators also need to start crafting festive seasonal menus that allow them to successfully cater to those large groups and parties. That includes holiday-themed meals, comfort food and celebratory dishes that can be made consistently for hundreds of people.

During the season, the "independent restaurants that focus on both the guest experience and operational preparedness will be best positioned to thrive," said Kevin Murphy, a professor of restaurant management at the Rosen College of Hospitality Management.

## STAFFING

It's important for restaurants to evaluate their staff early, comparing last year's holiday sales and guest counts with current projections to determine possible staffing gaps, Murphy said.

Pre-opening events can give restaurants time to assess their staffing schedules and plans, said Rick Camac, executive director of industry relations at the Institute of Culinary Education.

But finding additional staff to hire can be difficult, Camac said. Temp companies can help connect restaurants with experienced people who don't need to be added to payroll, he said.

There are also opportunities to temporarily hire college students, who often work at restaurants over the summer and during the holiday months — saving money on the hiring process, said Ryan Tuttle, a senior consultant at Euromonitor International.

Restaurants should "be in communication now with students that are returning to school to prime them for a return this winter when demand typically picks up," Tuttle said.



# CRAFTING MENUS

Holiday season menus need to balance festive offerings with operational feasibility, factoring in ingredient costs and price points that reflect both value for diners and profitability for operators, Murphy said.

Restaurants should also consider including menu items that have a higher demand during the season, such as celebratory foods like prime rib and lobster, festive holiday desserts such as yule logs and pecan bourbon pies, and comfort foods with elevated twists like short rib bourguignon and white truffle mac and cheese, he said.

Comfort dishes that most people enjoy — such as roast chicken, prime rib, filleted fish, or a vegetarian stew or pasta — tend to resonate with customers over the holiday season, Camac said.

Hot drinks also typically trend during the fall and winter, said Tuttle. Restaurants can keep their beverage offerings attractive and enticing by mixing in various seasonal garnishes, such as cranberries or spices, he said.

But offering exotic and complicated dishes can create pitfalls for busy restaurants, Camac said. Operators need to ensure they offer dishes that a large percentage of prospective consumers will enjoy and that the kitchen can execute well.

## PREPARING FOR ECONOMIC DISRUPTIONS

Demand over the holiday season could be softer due to a number of economic challenges. The tariffs implemented by the Trump administration are slowly having an impact on the economy, and the additional products stockpiled before the tariffs were enacted are starting to run low, Tuttle said.

Restaurant owners should keep an eye on tariff schedules as an increasing number of markets solidify trade relationships — providing some better confidence on pricing, said Tuttle. Failing to understand evolving the tariff rates can eat into profits and pose a major challenge to owners, he said.

Restaurant prices have risen sharply over the past five years due to general food inflation and recent tariffs, said Murphy. That inflation was caused by supply chain disruptions and labor shortages following the Covid-19 pandemic and extreme weather affecting crop supplies, he said.

It's crucial for restaurants to maintain good relationships with their suppliers and key contacts amid the current consumer pullback on spending, Tuttle said.

"I would be prepared for families to cut back on some eating out this year in response to higher prices and greater uncertainty," Tuttle said.

## PREPARING FOR LARGE HOLIDAY GATHERINGS & PARTIES

Many workers have returned to the office over the past year and a half, providing more opportunities for the catering arms of restaurants over the holidays, Tuttle said.

Restaurants have seen much of their business come from orders outside their brick and mortar premises in recent years. Roughly 75% of all restaurant traffic comes from off-premise dining — including takeout, delivery and drive-thru, according to a 2025 National Restaurant Association report.

"Work holiday parties and other events should be more valuable this year than in recent years," Tuttle said.

Menu items for holiday parties and large events are typically priced at least twice the amount the restaurant would normally charge, said Camac. But the total price depends on the time of the day and the day of the week, with a premium on the weeks just before Christmas, he said.

Menus for such gatherings should also be easy to execute and plate, and include no more than three to four components, said Camac. That requires considering the size of their plating areas since many restaurants do not have the space to plate 150 dishes at once, which is needed for private events, he said.

Overall, to manage the surge in orders, independent restaurants need to start planning well before Thanksgiving by forecasting demand based on prior years, monitoring reservations and ensuring their suppliers are able to meet increased orders, Murphy said.

Operators should also streamline operations by tightening their inventory management, clarifying holiday hours and setting clear communication channels with their staff and guests, Murphy said.

"Strategic planning, thoughtful staffing, and creative yet manageable menus are the cornerstones of a successful holiday season," he said.



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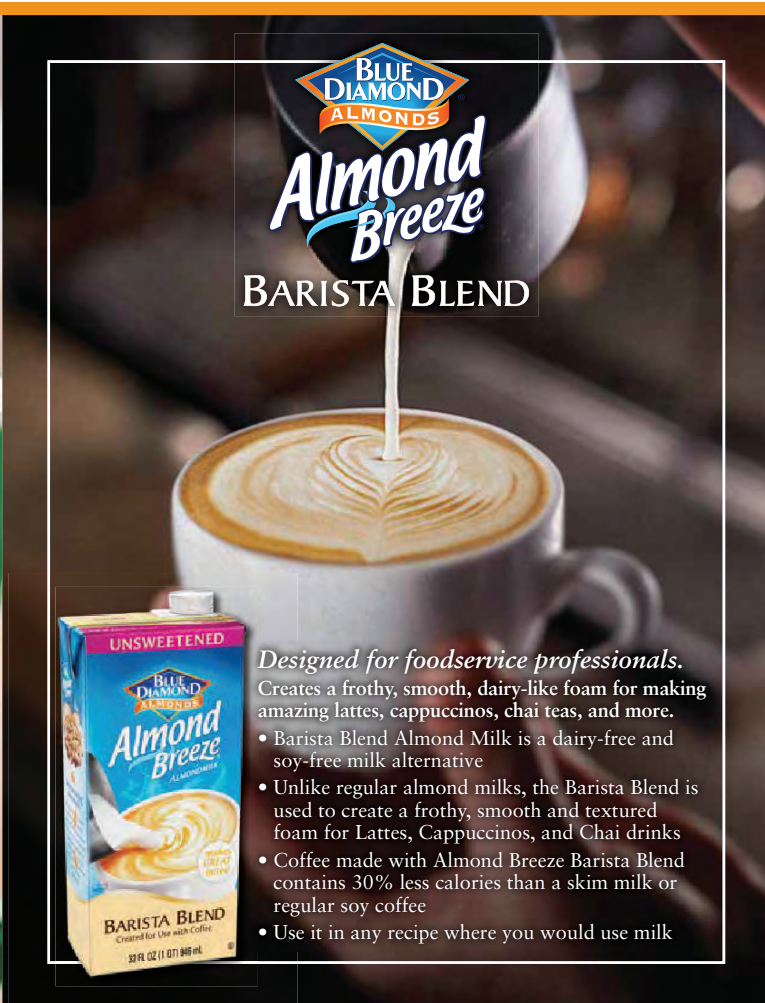
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# Comfort, Elevated:

Modern Twists on Cold-Weather Classics

As temperatures drop, diners crave the warmth of hearty soups, stews, and comfort entrees, but they're looking for something new. Modern palates want bold flavors, elevated presentation, and global influences. Here's how operators are reinventing classic cold-weather dishes to delight guests and maximize profitability.

## 1 LAYER GLOBAL FLAVORS

Classic dishes like beef stew or chicken soup can feel fresh again with globally inspired flavors. Think Korean gochujang in a short rib stew, Thai coconut broth for chicken and rice soup, or Moroccan spices in a lentil bowl. Small flavor additions or garnishes can add excitement without overhauling kitchen operations.

## 2 FOCUS ON TEXTURE & CONTRAST

Today's diners expect more than just rich and hearty - they want dimension. Add crunch with crispy shallots, toasted seeds, or fried herbs, and balance heavier elements with bright pickles or fresh greens. A simple textural upgrade can transform a familiar dish into a signature menu item.

## 3 MODERNIZE THE PRESENTATION

Comfort food doesn't have to be rustic. Serve soups in sleek bowls or handled mugs, plate braised meats over vibrant purees or grains, and use micro herbs or infused oils for color and polish. Elevated plating cues quality and can support premium pricing.

## 4 SIMPLIFY WITH SMART PREP

Many of these dishes are ideal for batch cooking and low-labor execution. Braised items, stews, and soups hold well and improve in flavor over time, making them cost-effective and operationally efficient. Consider using ready-to-use bases, premium sauces, or sous-vide proteins to maintain consistency during busy service hours.

## 5 TELL THE STORY

Guests connect with comfort food through nostalgia, but they also love knowing what makes it special. Call out local sourcing, chef inspiration, or a modern twist on your menu, for example, "*Slow-Braised Short Ribs with Miso-Red Wine Glaze and Brown Butter Carrots.*" Storytelling adds perceived value and differentiates your dish in a crowded market.

### ELEVATE YOUR COMFORT CLASSICS

#### UPGRADE INGREDIENTS

Swap canned or frozen vegetables for roasted or seasonal fresh produce.

#### PLAY WITH TEXTURE

Add crunch with roasted nuts, crisped breadcrumbs, or shaved vegetables.

#### GLOBAL FLAVORS

Introduce spice blends, sauces, or marinades inspired by Asia, North Africa, or Europe.

#### PRESENTATION MATTERS

Serve hearty dishes in individual bowls, small cast-iron skillets, or layered plating to increase perceived value.

#### PORTION OPTIONS

Offer half-portion soups or shared family-style platters for flexibility.



### FLAVOR PAIRING CHEAT SHEET

Classic Dish	Modern Twist	Flavor Enhancer
Chicken Noodle Soup	→ Turmeric & Ginger Broth	→ Cilantro & Lime
Beef Short Rib	→ Miso Glaze & Black Garlic	→ Crispy Rosemary
Mac & Cheese	→ Truffle & Wild Mushrooms	→ Panko & Herb Crust
Shepherd's Pie	→ Sweet Potato Mash Top	→ Roasted Garlic Aioli

# Miso & Black Garlic Braised Short Ribs

WITH BROWN BUTTER CARROTS AND FRIED ROSEMARY

This recipe combines the savory depth of classic red wine-braised beef with the umami-rich, salty-sweet flavors of miso and black garlic. The short ribs are first seared, then slowly braised until tender, and finished with a flavorful glaze that delivers a complex flavor profile. Garnish with brown butter baby carrots and fried rosemary for an elevated presentation.

## FOR THE BRAISED SHORT RIBS:

3-4 lbs Beef Chuck Tail Flap Short Ribs | 1 tbsp vegetable oil | 1 yellow onion, chopped  
3-4 carrots, chopped | 4-5 cloves Black garlic, chopped | 1 tbsp red miso paste  
1 cup dry red wine, such as Pinot Noir or Cabernet Sauvignon | 3 cups beef broth  
2 tsp soy sauce | 1 tbsp brown sugar or maple syrup | 1 bay leaf | Salt and black pepper, to taste

## FOR THE MISO GLAZE:

2 tbsp braising liquid, reserved from the pot | 1 tsp cornstarch (for thickening) | 2 tsp brown sugar | 1 tbsp red miso paste

## FOR GARNISH & SERVING:

½ cup Butter (unsalted) | 2-3 sprigs Rosemary | 5-6 baby carrots, cut in half | Mashed potatoes, parsnip puree, or polenta

## INSTRUCTIONS:

### 1. Sear the short ribs:

Preheat your oven to 350°F (175°C). Portion the beef chuck tail flap into 12oz portions trimming any excess fat or sinew. Season the short ribs generously with salt and black pepper. Heat the oil in a Dutch oven or heavy-bottomed pot over medium-high heat. Sear the short ribs on all sides until a deep brown crust forms. Remove the ribs and set them aside. Discard any excess fat from the pan.

**2. Sauté the aromatics:** Add the chopped onion and carrots to the same pot, scraping up any browned bits from the bottom. Sauté for about 5 minutes until softened.

**3. Deglaze & add miso and black garlic:** Pour in the red wine and use a wooden spoon to scrape up any remaining browned bits, known as the fond. Cook for about

3 minutes to allow the wine to reduce slightly. Stir in the miso paste and black garlic and cook for 1-2 more minutes.

**4. Braise the short ribs:** Pour in the beef broth, soy sauce, and brown sugar. Add the bay leaf and stir to combine. Return the seared short ribs to the pot, making sure they are nestled into the liquid. Bring the mixture to a boil.

**5. Cook until tender:** Cover the pot with a tight-fitting lid

and place it in the preheated oven. Braise for 2 to 2.5 hours, or until the meat is fork-tender.

**6. Fried rosemary:** While the short ribs braise, in a small sauce pan add ½ cup butter and melt over medium heat. Continue to cook the butter until it begins to brown and butter solids toast and become fragrant. Carefully add the rosemary sprigs and fry until bubbles subside. Remove rosemary from the butter and drain on a paper towel, season lightly with salt. Reserve brown butter for the baby carrots.

**7. Create the glaze:** When the ribs are finished cooking, remove them from the pot and set them aside. Carefully strain the braising liquid to separate the liquid from the solids, and return the liquid to the pot. Whisk together the glaze ingredients (reserved braising liquid, cornstarch, brown

sugar, and miso paste) in a small bowl until smooth.

**8. Reduce the sauce:** Bring the braising liquid to a simmer over medium-low heat. Whisk in the miso glaze mixture and continue simmering for about 15 minutes, or until the sauce has thickened and reduced by about half.

**9. Brown butter baby carrots:** while the sauce is reducing increase the oven temp to 400°F. Toss the Baby carrots in just enough brown butter to coat, ensuring they get some of the brown butter bits from the bottom, and season with salt and pepper. Place carrots on a sheet tray and roast in the oven for 10-15 mins or until just cooked through.

**10. Serve:** Serve the short ribs over mashed potatoes, parsnip puree, or polenta. Drizzle the rich red wine and miso glaze over the ribs and garnish with Brown butter baby carrots and fried rosemary.

*“Cold-weather classics are a canvas — with seasonal produce, global spices, and elevated plating, operators can offer familiar comfort with a wow factor.”*

Steve Smeets  
Culinary  
Consultant



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