

# LESSON 2

## FOOD CUSTOMS AND DINING ETIQUETTE

- IN THIS LESSON YOU WILL LEARN ABOUT THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF PREPARING AND EATING FOODS ACROSS CULTURES.

### Before You Read

Work in pairs or small groups. Draw from your own experience to answer the following questions:

1. In which countries would these foods most likely be eaten? Have you tried any of them? How was it prepared? If you have not tried any, would you like to?

a. frog legs	b. durian	c. blue cheese
d. horse meat	e. pig's stomach	f. dog meat
g. whale meat	h. snails	i. bee larvae

2. What are some foods that are taboo in Taiwan, but eaten in other countries?
3. What Taiwanese foods are probably challenging for Westerners to try?

## Reading

### Food Customs and Taboos

There are a few striking differences between most Asian and Western restaurants. Entering a Chinese restaurant, you will hear people chatting and laughing loudly with occasional **clinks** of their glasses to **toast** each other. The dishes are brought to the table and eaten family style. Thus, it is not surprising to see a table with all sorts of dishes being shared: cold with

5 hot, sweet with salty, or even plates of fruit along with meat dishes; it is easy to sample a great variety of foods. The scene is very different in a Western restaurant. The most obvious difference, aside from the **utensils** and the food itself, is that dishes are served individually to each diner. In most Western restaurants people order their own dish and do not share, so two

10 people can order exactly the same thing, or a party of six might order six different things but they can only sample what's on their own plate.

In addition, the foods that are eaten in Western and Asian restaurants are very different. This is often due to local **taboos**—meaning that something is unacceptable for cultural reasons. For example, **Jewish** people and **Muslims** do not eat pork because pigs are considered unclean, while **Hindus** do not eat beef because cows are considered **sacred**. Certain parts of commonly

15 eaten animals are also considered **off limits** by many people. For example, although animal organs—the heart, kidney, stomach and brain—are delicacies in many countries, they are far less common in the United States, where such items are likely to be enjoyed by either the rural poor or rich gourmets. The exotic names of some dishes also turn non-native eaters off before they even see the dish. For example, Chinese pig's blood cake has been voted by Britons as one

20 of the most “terrifying” foods in the world, just because of its name. However, a similar kind of food, called “black pudding,” which is a kind of sausage made of cooked pig or cattle blood and meat, is served as part of traditional full breakfast in the United Kingdom and Ireland. In fact, it is quite popular among foreign visitors to the UK, just because the name is not as shocking.

25 Finally, some foods are not eaten outside of their traditional cultures because their appearance, smell or taste is **associated with** something disgusting that is usually avoided. This is why **durian**, blue cheese and stinky tofu are usually an **acquired** taste and non-native eaters find these foods either exotic and tasty or unbearably **repugnant**.

## After You Read

Scan through the reading or rely on your own experience and answer the following questions.

1. What two religious groups do not eat pork? What may be the reason for this custom?
2. What religious group does not eat beef? What may be the reason for this custom?
3. Why do many Americans not eat animal organs?
4. Why are durian and blue cheese difficult for many people to eat?
5. What non-Asian cuisines have you tried? What was the food like? Did you enjoy it?
6. Introduce some strange or disgusting foods that you know about.
7. Introduce some other taboos related to food or eating customs.

## Vocabulary Comprehension

### ESP Vocabulary

*This vocabulary is commonly used in the field of tourism and hospitality.*

banquet	<i>n</i>	a formal meal prepared for a large number of people on an important occasion
clink	<i>n</i>	a short high sound that glass or metal objects make when they hit each other
durian	<i>n</i>	large tropical fruit from Thailand, known for its distinctive odor and size
etiquette	<i>n</i>	the set of rules or customs which control accepted behavior in particular social/cultural groups or social situations
tipping	<i>n</i>	the act of giving someone a small amount of money for a service in addition to what you owe
toasting	<i>n</i>	when people all drink together and raise their glasses in order to express admiration or good wishes
utensils	<i>n</i>	something that you use to cook or eat with

### General Vocabulary

*This vocabulary is used for general purposes.*

acquired	<i>adj</i>	learned or obtained
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be associated with	<i>phr</i> be connected with in some way
Hindu	<i>n</i> someone whose religion is Hinduism
Jewish person	<i>n</i> someone whose religion is Judaism
Muslim	<i>n</i> someone whose religion is Islam
repugnant	<i>adj</i> extremely unpleasant or offensive
off limits	<i>phr</i> if something/a place/an act is off-limits, you are not allowed to use it/go there/do that
sacred	<i>adj</i> considered to be holy or connected with a deity/god
taboo	<i>n</i> something that is not allowed in a particular culture, but which may be acceptable in another

### Exercise

Fill in the blanks with the words from the box. Make changes if necessary. Some of the words are not used.

repugnant    utensil    etiquette    toasting    taboo  
tipping    banquet    acquired

- \_\_\_\_\_ is a courtesy to show your gratitude for a service, but it should not turn into a requirement regardless of service quality.
- Following a ban on plastic bags, the Environmental Protection Administration imposed another ban on providing disposable \_\_\_\_\_ in school cafeterias and restaurants. More and more people bring their own chopsticks when dining out.
- Regardless of where you travel, you had better have some basic knowledge of travel \_\_\_\_\_, because there may be striking differences in traditions and customs from what you are used to back home.
- Because of the \_\_\_\_\_ odor of stinky tofu, many foreign travelers can't stand it and rank it at the top of their list of weird Chinese food.
- The annual environmental conference will end with a dinner \_\_\_\_\_, a gathering of all participants to raise money for the wetlands.

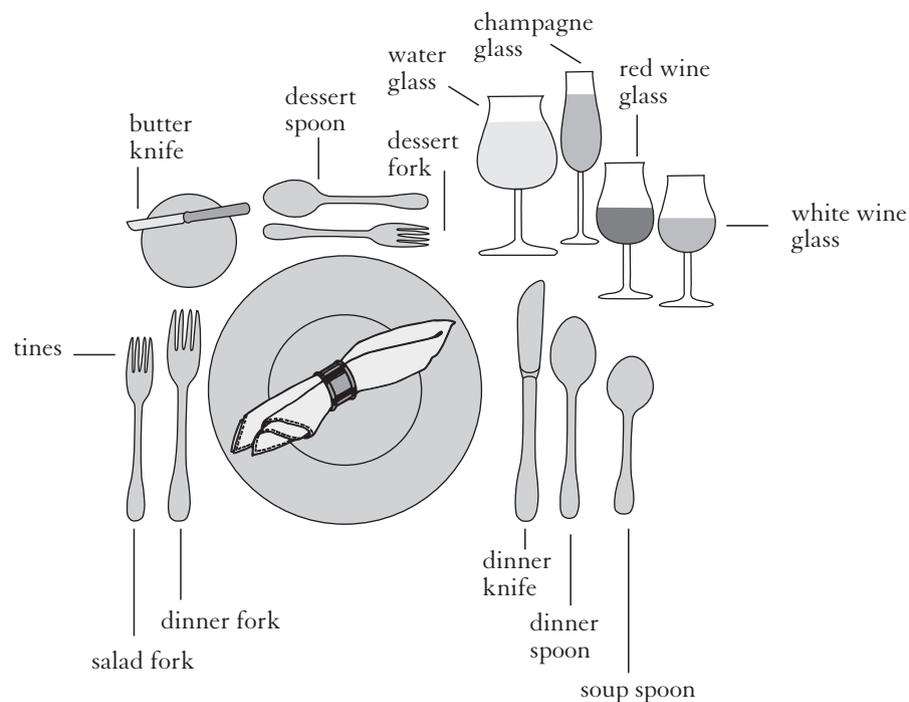
## Tasks

### I ESP Focus: Dining etiquette

Dining **etiquette** is important knowledge for everyone, especially for social meetings, **banquets** or dining at an upscale restaurant. Being familiar with table manners and dining etiquette lets you feel more comfortable and confident when encountering these social situations. Like food taboos, there are also differences between Western and Eastern etiquette. Some things you should be aware of when dining, related to seating, using utensils, etc. are covered below.

#### Dining Utensils

When sitting down at a table in a fancy Western restaurant, you may be overwhelmed by the various forks, spoons, knives and glasses in different shapes and sizes. Look at the picture below. What should you use first?



The answer is that you should work from the outside in, and so in the picture the first fork (on the left) is the salad fork and the first spoon (on the right) is the soup spoon.

- **Knife and fork**

When you eat with a knife and fork, you may choose the Continental/European style of holding and using these utensils or the American style. When cutting something in the American style, you hold your fork with your left hand (tines down) and your knife with your right. After cutting a manageable piece of food, you have to put down your knife and switch your fork to the right hand (tines up) to bring the bite to your mouth. Remember to cut only one bite at a time. The Continental style is quite similar, but you do not have to put your knife down and switch your fork to the other hand to take a bite. You can raise the food on the fork (tines down) with your left hand and put it in your mouth. When you finish eating, the handle of your knife and fork should be placed on the edge of your plate with the tines and blade in the middle of the plate pointing to 11:00.

- **Chopsticks**

In Asian countries like China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea and Vietnam, chopsticks are the main eating utensils. You have to use chopsticks to eat almost everything on your plate, and that is the most challenging task for Westerners when they go to these restaurants. Dropping chopsticks is considered bad luck. In addition, chopsticks should never be used to beat the table or bowls, as only beggars do this when asking for food or money. And never wave your chopsticks around when talking or point them at someone. Last but not least, never stick your chopsticks vertically into the rice in your bowl; this position is for offering rice to the dead.

- **Hands**

People eat food with their hands in countries like India, Nepal and Pakistan. The right hand is the only socially acceptable hand used for eating. Never use your left hand to handle something important. The left hand is used for cleaning oneself up after going to the bathroom.

- **Square table (or long table)**

In Western culture, a dining table is usually rectangular. At a formal dinner party the host sits at the head of the table, and the hostess sits at the opposite end. A male guest of honor would be seated at the hostess's right, and a female guest of honor would be seated at the host's right.

- **Round table**

In contrast, Asian meals are often served on round tables, and the seat of honor is in the seat directly, facing the doorway. People with the highest status at the **banquet** sit in this position. The seats on the left hand side of the seat of honor are second, fourth, sixth, etc. in status, while those on the right are third, fifth, seventh, until they meet at the other side. The host is usually seated opposite the guest of honor, with their back to the door.

## Exercise

## Group work 1

Mr. Wang Li-wen is going to plan the seating arrangements for tonight's banquet to celebrate his parents' 40th wedding anniversary. Here is the guest list with some background information.

Mr. Wang Tao: 67 years old; Li-wen's father

Mrs. Wang Lin Mei: 66 years old; Li-wen's mother

Mr. and Mrs. Lin Ru-Yang: both in their 60s, Mr. Wang Tao's old friends

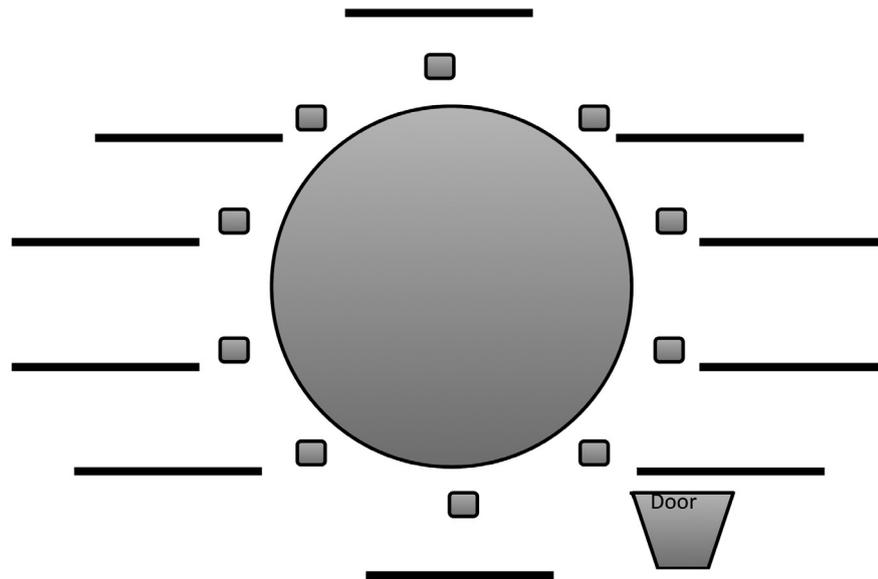
Mr. Yen Da-Min: about 50 years old; Li-wen's uncle; the younger brother of Mrs. Wang Tao

Mr. Tien Liang-Tong: about 60 years old; Mr. Wang Tao's business partner

Ms. Wang Xiang-Yun and Mr. Guo Lin-Yu: Li-wen's elder sister and her husband who live in the US and have come back to Taiwan for this special occasion

Ling-Chen: Li-wen's wife

Form a group and discuss how Li-wen should arrange the seating for the guests. Place their names in the seating chart below and explain your reasons for their positions.



### Group work 2

Form a small group and make notes on the etiquette for toasting, **tipping** and paying the bill in Taiwan. For example, when toasting, do you have to finish your drink all at once? Do you have to tip the server? Who should pay the bill? Then find some information online about etiquette in Japan and the USA.

Etiquette	Taiwan	Japan	USA
Toasting			
Tipping			
Paying the Bill			

### II Writing Practice: The food culture of your hometown

To promote local tourism, the Tourism Association of Taiwan is planning to publish a booklet introducing the food culture of Taiwan. Although Taiwan is a small island, it has many different foods that are associated with particular areas. The Tourism Association would like to hear your thoughts on the food culture of your hometown. Here are some questions to consider with your partner(s) before you start writing. Is your hometown associated with any special dishes, fruit, drinks or other food? What ingredients are used in the local specialties from question one? Do you have any very good restaurants in your hometown that tourists should visit?

**The Food Culture of .....**

### III Speaking Practice: Talking about dietary preferences

#### Dialog

Mrs. Jackson is planning to invite her friends to her home for her husband's birthday party. She would like to make sure that the food she serves will be acceptable to all of her guests.

<b>Mrs. Jackson</b>	Next Saturday is my husband's birthday. We are going to have a dinner party at our home. Are you available?
<b>Jason</b>	Definitely, I will be there. Karen will come, too.
<b>Steve</b>	Sure, I'm in.
<b>Mrs. Jackson</b>	I'm glad that all of you will attend. However, I'm struggling to decide what to serve. Would you mind telling me if there's anything that you don't eat?
<b>Jason</b>	Well, I'm a vegetarian, but dairy products and eggs are fine for me. Just make sure there are enough vegetables for me.
<b>Mrs. Jackson</b>	I see. That's easy. What about you, Steve?
<b>Steve</b>	I can eat pretty much anything apart from beef.
<b>Ms. Jackson</b>	Why not, you're not Hindu, are you?
<b>Steve</b>	I don't eat beef because my family have always been farmers, and oxen were hard workers in the field, so they were always taboo for us.
<b>Mrs. Jackson</b>	Wow! I never knew that before. I thought people didn't eat beef only for health or religious reasons. Okay, I'll make sure that we have several kinds of meat. Anything else?
<b>Jason</b>	Yes. Karen is allergic to nuts.
<b>Mrs. Jackson</b>	I see. No problem. Thanks for letting me know. I think it is time for me to sit down and plan the menu. See you next Saturday night.

#### Exercise

##### Pair work

Work in pairs. Interview your partner about dietary preferences. Is there anything you don't eat? Why? Share your reasons.

### Case study

#### Scenario

Randy Morrison, a computer engineer at an American IT company from the US, has been sent to Taiwan with a number of other co-workers for a one-year project. In order to help them get to know the local culture, the company is planning an orientation event that will introduce what and how to eat in the area, so that they can quickly enjoy local food.

### Exercise

#### Group work

1. Form a small group. Gather information about the following aspects of eating in Taiwan.
  - a. what foods Taiwanese people regularly eat for breakfast, lunch and dinner
  - b. paying and eating customs in a restaurant
  - c. social customs when eating with Taiwanese people
  - d. what to do when invited to a Taiwanese home for dinner
  - e. when formal banquets are usually held, how to dress, what will be eaten, and how to behave
  - f. taboos and symbolic meanings associated with certain Chinese and Taiwanese foods
2. Discuss answers and organize the information into lists of Do's and Don'ts
3. Present your results to the class and invite questions from your audience about any parts they do not understand or want more information about.

#### Dining Dos and Don'ts in Taiwan

Dos	Don'ts