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Foodies: Changing how we eat?

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Food. It's taken on new life. While it is one of our basic necessities as defined in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the gastronomic industry has cultivated new roles both in the air and on the ground. Before heading to a new destination, savvy travelers check out menus online to find palate friendly options that are unique to the destination. Heading to Maine in the summer – where's the best place to get lobster? Do you want a seaside environment or an upscale dining experience? The choice is yours; the lobsters originate from the same waters but the experience itself is the differentiator.

Are the Millennials driving this craze or is it empty-nested Baby Boomers with extra spending money? It appears to be a blend across generations – and is being defined by "foodies" who are taking back control of their health and taste buds. Why dine out when you can create a wholesome meal at home? Travel and new experiences are the answer. Travel forces us to expand our tastes. Whether one travels in the States or abroad – our taste buds can explore new territory.

While visiting Ithaca, NY, recently for a sporting event, we found a local barbecue restaurant that knows its stuff. On their website they describe themselves as a restaurant that fits this new trend. It is "owned and operated by two local culinary entrepreneurs who want the area to be able to experience a different flavor and taste. They take both pride and care in the preparation of their dishes so you are the recipient of their best offering!"

And they delivered on their words. Fancy it was not. However, it gave new meaning to the words "finger lickin' good."

Another must-have in the food world these days – liquid nitrogen. Why? It freezes food with in seconds and it is environmentally friendly as it leaves no trace once evaporated. If you doubt it, just check out the growing number of liquid nitrogen ice cream parlors and coffee shops that are popping up around the country – and at catered events.

Have you ever taken a bite of food and sprayed smoke from your nostrils after your first bite? At a recent event in Columbia, the chefs exhibited this dining trend and told visitors that it's a great way to break the proverbial ice at those awkward networking events. Plus it makes for great videos to send back to friends at home.

Farm-to-table restaurants are in vogue these days – and we are healthier for it. Gone are the days of eating out and feeling like a slug afterward. Fresh ingredients turned into dining experiences abound.

How do you experience it all? The 1970s trend of in-home progressive dinners has taken to dining out. Urban dwellers, start with appetizers at your first stop, then head down the street for your next course. If you need a break before you enjoy that final course, why not walk a few more blocks to find the perfect dessert – liquid nitrogen ice cream, shaved snow (another twist on ice cream) or a sweet slice of classic cheesecake. Make it a quest to discover the best in your city.

Challenge yourself to try the same dessert in the different cities you frequent. This winter faced with a lot of travel, a friend who hates frosty temperatures decided to find the best hot chocolate across her cold weather destinations. It made the cold much more palatable – and she met some interesting people who helped her find new hot chocolate joints. As we enter the summer months, shall we make it our mission to explore ice cream desserts across our travels?

Airlines have definitely joined the game. The current trend is to partner with a celebrity chef and roll out seasonal menus – much like the farm-to-table restaurants. Airlines with a geographic hub often focus on foods or drinks from their region. According to Maarit Keranen, head of in-flight service Finnair, "The importance of high-quality meals in conjunction with the overall passenger experience on our flights cannot be overstated. Food might not be the first reason to select an airline but we hope in a few years Finnair will be remembered for great food."

Wherever you find yourself – near your own home, or on a trip – take advantage of the food culture available to you. It doesn't take much work and you may meet some interesting people along the way who share your passion and taste for food in its newest form.

By Elizabeth Atkinson