

Religious and Philosophical Food Choices

Extracted from Food Technology October 1992

One of the most important aspects of being a good host is to recognize the customs and habits of the guest. The aim of this article is to assist you in understanding why our international students react as they do when presented with food choices with which they are not accustomed. Some time ago a club was hosting a group of international students and decided to have an old fashion southern pork barbecue. Many students only ate the slaw and chips either because they were vegetarians or their religious upbringing forbade the eating of pork.

Islam is a comprehensive religion guiding the lives of its followers through sets of rules governing the personal, social, and public aspects. Since food is an important part of the daily life, food laws carry a special significance. Whenever any permissible action of the believer is accompanied with good intention, this action then is an act of worship. It is also considered an act of piety to avoid doubtful actions.

Accordingly, all foods pure and clean are permitted by **Muslims except** the following:

- Swine, including by-products
- Animals slaughtered without the name of Allah on them
- Intoxicants including alcohol and drugs
- Animals with fangs (dogs, lions, etc.)
- Birds with sharp claws (birds of prey- they eat carrion)
- Land animals without ears (snakes, frogs, etc.)

Hinduism is a synthesis of diverse and competing faiths including monistic, monotheistic, polytheistic, animalistic, agnostic, and even atheistic beliefs. Therefore, it is a tolerant and hard to define religion. Food and drink serve as the glue that brings cohesiveness to this group. A pervasive dogma in every religion is the idea of pollution or defiling that can occur through many mechanisms, food being one such mechanism.

Vegetarianism is firmly rooted in the Indian culture and the term nonvegetarian is used to describe one who eats meats, eggs, fish and some cheeses. Most milk products including yogurts and cheeses are acceptable.

Barley and rice are the main cereals. Fruits and vegetables are the main variety in foods of the Hindu. Water is the beverage of choice both with meals and as a thirst quencher.

Buddhists are also predominantly vegetarians. Some meat is eaten, but it is considered by some that for every piece of flesh one eats he gives up a part of his own life. Stir-fry and steaming are the most common methods of food preparation.

Kosher is not limited to the Jewish community. Other consumers include Muslims, Seventh-Day Adventists, vegetarians, and the lactose intolerant. Many U.S. locations have passed regulations pertaining to kosher labeling. Sensitivity to separation of church and state requires that all such regulation be related to consumer protection.

There is available information in all locations on kosher and while you would not be expected to “keep Kosher”, be sure to avoid pork, shellfish, and the use of milk in meat preparation.