



FOR RESTAURANTS

The complete planning guide to events, holidays and celebrations

Everything you need to know to succeed,
from New Year's to Summer Holidays



Everyone loves a celebration



Everyone loves a celebration, but for restaurants, they're extra special. Not only do they bring in both new and returning guests, but they're also a major source of revenue. Though the celebration type varies, people spend more on special occasions in restaurants. But in order to get people in the door on big days, savvy marketing is a must.

Events form an integral part of our yearly calendar, and hardly a month goes by without a celebration you can use to your advantage. In fact, practically every day is a special one that honours a specific food. Seriously. Take a look. The 9th of February is National Pizza Day, and the whole of January is dedicated to vegans.

Whether the celebration in question is universally recognised or virtually unknown, every event brings the same opportunity to launch creative promotions, increase revenue and get people's attention. Regardless of the time of year, don't miss the opportunity to grow your business.

Even the biggest holidays can sneak up on you. The best time to make any plans is beforehand. Since these events, holidays and celebrations happen all year round, start now and look ahead a month or two. Think about what's coming down the pipeline. This kind of advance planning and strategic thinking can help you manage your restaurant more efficiently, connect with new people, delight your regulars and VIPs and streamline service. Let's get started on your 12-month guide to making the most out of the opportunities all the different events, holidays and celebrations bring.

Table of contents

- 04 Be the early bird
- 06 It's go time
- 07 What next now the date has passed?
- 08 Fire up the vibe for Valentine's
- 10 Get your green on for St. Patrick's
- 11 Honour mums, dads and keep kids happy
- 12 Embrace egg-y fun for Easter
- 13 Offer options for summer holidays
- 14 Don't forget the bank holidays
- 15 Get into the spirit of Halloween
- 16 Set November off with a bang
- 17 Be festive, creative, and inclusive at Christmas
- 18 More is more come New Year's
- 19 Pie and bacon and fries, oh my! Food holidays to make your own

Be the early bird

Ideally, any planning should take place long before the special day, so you can dial in your strategy. These tips are most helpful when an event is one to two months in the future.



Adjust reservation availability

It can be beneficial to rethink how you approach your reservation book for special days. Start by reviewing last year's setup and sales to understand what worked well and what lessons you can apply this year. For specific celebrations, consider customising party size offerings. On Valentine's Day, for example, remove large table availability and add more two-tops. On Mother's Day, it is just the opposite – plenty of seating for larger groups is the way to go. You also may need to adjust your turn times or want to create set seatings with [turn controls](#) to make sure you're maximising your dining room.

In general, you'll want to be taking reservations at least two weeks in advance. And for the most in-demand occasions, start doing so further out because people tend to make dining plans further in advance. When people begin their search for events, holidays and celebration reservations at a specific date, time, and party size, you want to be easy to find.

When reservations begin rolling in, use Direct Messaging to keep in touch. With [Direct Messaging](#) you can confirm reservations details, remind guests of upcoming reservations and answer any questions that come up.

Review the menu with fresh eyes

Before finalising menus, take another look at your regular food and beverage menus. Now might be a good moment to reassess prices and take stock of how any price adjustments impact bill averages or menu item popularity. Make sure your menus are [up to date on OpenTable](#).

Get the word out

With food and drink specials in place, now is the time to spread the news about them. Take crave-worthy photos of these items, and don't be shy about shouting them out on social media. Remember to add these pics to your website, [OpenTable](#), and anywhere else online people may be searching for a place to celebrate.

Reach out to your list

It's always worthwhile to let your regulars know what you're up to for special days throughout the year with [targeted and automated email campaigns](#). These personalised messages help bring people through the door while making your regulars feel extra special.



Brainstorm Experiences

Holidays and Experiences go together like turkey and gravy. Guests are looking for a night that will become a cherished memory, and Experiences automatically stand out from other options.

A creative experience that includes things such as a prix fixe menu, live music or other entertainment or special wine pairings will attract those people who are looking for something beyond a standard restaurant meal.

Promote private dining

Many guests will want to host a gathering at your restaurant, so make sure they know what kind of event spaces are available. Drawing attention to private dining options well in advance of any celebration is a great way to help guests craft the special event of their dreams while bringing in revenue upfront.

Think about takeaway

Keep in mind some people aren't keen on getting dressed up and having a night out for special events. Some love nothing more than a cosy celebration at home with a takeaway from their favourite spot. If possible, offer the same themed specials to go for those curled up on the sofa.

Highlight gift cards

Don't forget to talk up your gift cards in the run-up, whether it's Easter, Mother's Day or New Year. You may want to promote them via a bill insert or with signage at the restaurant. Gift cards are great for generating additional revenue and keeping you top of mind for lucky recipients when they're planning their next meal out.



It's go time

Best case scenario, by the time a special celebration rolls around, you are more than ready to go. Still, there are a couple of things to consider to ensure the day runs as smoothly as possible.

Read the pre-shift report

Take the opportunity to get to know your guests before they arrive by reading over the pre-shift report. It will alert you to incoming regulars and VIPs. Guest profiles and tags provide information that lets you deliver a more personalised service and build great relationships with each visit.

Test a table

No matter how much you've done to prepare for guests, you might still be running around like crazy before it starts. One good technique to ensure the day goes as planned is to sit down at a table to test how the dining room looks and feels from a guest's point of view. Doing this will give you time to make final adjustments to the decor, the thermostat, the room layout and the music volume to ensure every detail is just right.

Use a reservation waitlist

Restaurants often find themselves fully booked for special occasions, be it Valentine's or Christmas. So it's helpful to offer a reservation waitlist for those guests who want a reservation when you're high in demand. Instead of turning guests away outright, you can engage them with the option to add their names and details to the reservation waitlist for a possible spot that opens up in the future. Guests can also sign up for availability alerts on OpenTable when your restaurant is fully booked and receive a text message if their requested spot opens up.



What next now the date has passed?

When the last guest has sauntered out the door, the team deserves a round of applause, but your work isn't quite done. Note your learnings for future reference and take action to keep the relationships with guests going strong.



Reflect and recap

Go over the service with the team as soon as possible after it happens. This is an opportunity to take stock of everything that went well and identify potential areas of improvement for next time. Check out your staff performance reports so you can hand out gold stars to your top performers and know how to get others on your team up to speed. Because each event only happens once a year (apart from bank holidays, but more on that shortly), it's key to capture these valuable insights while they are still fresh. Take good notes so when it's time to do it all over again you'll have a strategy in place to make next year even better.

Read and respond to reviews

Now is also the time to check on any guest reviews and send a post-dining survey. Add this feedback to your notes for next year, and include positive comments as well as notes about what could have gone better. If possible, engage with any less than delighted diners to make things better with them or simply acknowledge that you're listening and open to improvement.

Say thank you

When possible, send a sincere follow-up email or direct message thanking guests, too. Appreciation can go a long way to cementing diner loyalty and earning new regulars. Guests have many choices for where to celebrate. When they spend these special days with you, show them how much you appreciate it.

Don't forget to say thanks or acknowledge guests who leave you glowing reviews – these could be your growing superfans.

Fire up the vibe for Valentine's

Valentine's Day is one of the most popular times of the year for restaurants. This couples-centric celebration is a major date for lovers including long-time partners and those who have recently started dating.

As couple-centric as it is, keep in mind that Valentine's Day isn't just about romance anymore. Recent years have seen the rise of "Galentine's Day" often celebrated on the 13th of February. This informal celebration is all about groups and friendship. If possible, make your floor plan flexible enough to accommodate a few large groups in addition to those cosy two-tops.

Embrace love

Offer guests a glass of bubbly when they arrive to set the mood. Don't be afraid to go all-in with heart-shaped food and decor.

Consider an Experience

Valentine's is the perfect day for creating a prepaid Experience – selling a prepaid set menu dinner in advance, bringing in revenue upfront and solving many of the bugaboos on the day. Prepaid experiences eliminate the problem of no-shows, help cut down on food waste and optimise planning for food and staff.

Play up the romance on the menu with aphrodisiacs like oysters, chocolate, figs, artichokes, strawberries and spicy hot peppers.





Partner up for twice the romance

Valentine's Day is an opportunity to partner with a local flower shop, chocolatier or winery to create an even more special night that you can cross-promote for double the buzz.

Prep for proposals

Many marriage proposals happen on Valentine's Day, so get ready to play a supporting role. Go over the pre-shift report to review any special requests. If you have advance notice, participate in the plan to minimise surprises. But in general, have a plan for this possibility.

Make room for more

Not everyone plans in advance for Valentine's Day, with some waiting until the day. To accommodate this crowd, as well as possible walk-ins, use any open bar seating, communal tables and private dining rooms if you can.

Celebrate all week long

Valentine's Day may officially fall on one specific day, but it's common for people to celebrate all through the week, depending on their schedules. Consider offering any special promotions the weekend before and the weekend after the 14th of February.

Check out even more tips for [Valentine's Day from leading restaurant operators.](#)



Get your green on for St. Patrick's

The doldrums of March get shaken up by one big shamrock-themed, beer-fueled day in the middle. If you run an Irish pub, your task is clear – soldier forth. Other spots can get creative to draw in a crowd looking for an excuse to go out and celebrate the luck of the Irish.

Go green... within reason

Highlighting naturally green foods can be a fun nod to the holiday. All-green salads, asparagus or pea soup and green-frosted desserts are on-theme and delicious. When it comes to the green dye, think twice.

Beyond the Guinness

St Patrick's Day is synonymous with Guinness, and we don't doubt more than a few will be ordering a round or two. But it's not the only drink in town, so consider highlighting other options on your menu and perhaps offering special promotions on non-Guinness brews, such as Irish Whiskeys, Bloody Marys and non-alcoholic drinks.

Adjust your menu without cliché

Green foods, corned beef and cabbage, beer, and (Irish) whisky are classic things to highlight on a St Paddy's menu. Consider more authentic Irish foods, such as soda bread, lamb stew, and potato boxtys for a less clichéd take.

Whether a live band or a great Irish playlist, music will help set the scene for your celebration. Choose Irish folk tunes for a more subdued evening, The Pogues and beyond for a more raucous time.

[Find out how to celebrate St Patrick's Day in London](#)



Honour mums, dads and keep kids happy

Spring brings Mother's Day in March and Father's Day in June. These two occasions can be handled in similar ways, including being sensitive to guests around this time – you never know if they are celebrating at all. Some people struggle with a variety of emotions and just want to have a good meal out.

Brunch is popular with mums and dads alike. However, people do celebrate throughout the day. Consider offering different menus at brunch and dinner to ensure you have something for everyone. And remember, where there are mums or dads there will also be kids, and kids menus will be expected. Don't forget high chairs, colouring sheets and other family-friendly amenities.

Get creative with takeaway

Some families, especially those with small children, may prefer to celebrate at home, but that doesn't mean they expect the person they're honouring to cook on their special day.

Make parents feel special

If you can do it, consider celebrating parents and parental figures with a drink, dessert, or another little treat on the house. For both takeaway and dine-in, include a note from the restaurant's owner or team showing appreciation and thanking each party for choosing to dine with you.

Highlight gifts for mums and dads

Guests may want to add something extra to the dine-in experience or they want gifts to give when celebrating at home. So let people know about any gift cards, packed food items, or fun branded merchandise (like shirts or mugs) you offer.

Think about creative meal kits that double as fun-for-the-whole-family activities. You might offer a cookie decorating kit or a DIY pizza party, for example.



Embrace egg-y fun for Easter

This egg-centric springtime holiday also happens to be practically synonymous with brunch, so consider focusing any Experiences, specials or other offerings around this meal service – even if you don't typically serve it.

Those who celebrate Easter sometimes spend the six weeks beforehand (Lent) abstaining from some indulgences, often sweets, meat or alcohol, so guests may especially relish these splurges and treats on Easter Sunday.

Make it fancy

An upscale lunch buffet, replete with buttery pastries, a selection of eggs benedict, and a mimosa or Bloody Mary bar could be perfect for the occasion.



Think beyond brunch

There will be those who want a late lunch or early dinner, so consider a menu built around traditional Easter dishes such as glazed ham or roast lamb later in the day. Alternatively, an afternoon tea service with an assortment of sandwiches and sweets can be a fun way to celebrate.

Kids love Easter for its fun traditions and signature candies. Consider hosting an Easter egg hunt or providing themed colouring sheets and crayons.



Offer options for summer holidays

Ok, so the summer holidays aren't a specific special occasion. However, the kids are off school, and people look to spend more time outside the house. It's also the festival season, plus there are several sporting events, such as Wimbledon. All of these activities allow you to make the most of the summer and turn your spot into a place where memories are made during the warmer months.

Get people in the mood early

Father's Day is in June, and the school summer holidays spring into effect just one month later. As the weather turns warmer, get people in the mood for summer bookings by advertising special menus, such as light bites, and create a buzz around the season. Parents, in particular, will be looking for things to do with their kids. Advertise your spot as a family-friendly restaurant and let parents know it's a place where they can enjoy a meal with the kids.

Outdoor dining

It's the warmest time of year, and there's nothing people love more than soaking up some sun on the few occasions they get. If you have an outdoor dining space, make sure it's ready to entertain guests throughout the summer months. Promote your terraces, beer gardens and outside areas by letting diners know in advance that you have outdoor areas ready to be enjoyed over the summer months.

Host happy hours

The nights are lighter for longer, and we're all generally in a better mood in the summer. That means it's the perfect time for friends, families and colleagues to gather and enjoy a drink or two at your spot during happy hour. Consequently, you can speed up bookings at times in the day that tend to be slower than peak hours.



Don't forget the bank holidays

May through August is essentially the bank holiday season, which means long weekends and an eagerness to eat out. This year, in particular, there are even more bank holidays with the Queen's Jubilee meaning an extra day off in June. People like to make the most of long weekends, so ensure your restaurant is ready to capitalise on the increased demand.

Promote your takeaway options

When people are in vacation mode, they can go one of two ways – go out and make the most of the extra time off or relax at home. Cater to both mindsets by letting people know what you offer with your takeaway menus.

Be active on social media

Let people know that you're ready for the bank holiday weekends by promoting your restaurant across social media. Lots of potential diners are looking for things to do, so keep your restaurant fresh in their minds with enticing pictures of your restaurants and captions about how you can't wait to see guests during the bank holiday.



Celebrate special occasions

The Queen's Jubilee takes place on Sunday the 5th of June, with the following day a bank holiday. It offers an opportunity to capitalise on bookings by going big on the day and offering a Jubilee Lunch to diners who want to celebrate in style.

Get into the spirit of Halloween

Plenty of people would rather have dinner at a restaurant than post up by the door with a bucket of sugar on Halloween. And everyone wants to enjoy the spooky season all month long. Planning some fun seasonal events and promotions can help attract diners during this time of year.

Reward spooky

To help create a fun Halloween environment, give a discounted or free drink to anyone who comes in costume.

Bring to life dinner and a movie

Scary movies are definitely one of the most fun parts of Halloween. If possible, host a screening of a horror classic and pair it with a special menu.

Involve your team

Encourage employees to wear their Halloween costumes if that would be fun for them. Or alternatively, let them dress for the day by wearing orange and black if that's appropriate to your concept.

Make a themed playlist

You might not think Halloween has its own theme music, but there are plenty of spooky songs to help set the tone. (Check out [this list](#) for inspiration).

Have waiting staff give mini confectionaries when they send out the bill. Tiny chocolate bars delight adults, too.



Set November off with a bang

Create unique menus around Bonfire Night and host a mini sparkler party if possible. November and December are also the lead up to Christmas, which means it's time to get festive. On top of that, the World Cup kicks off this month. Make it a jam-packed end to the year at your spot.

Light up your restaurant

Lots of families go out and see fireworks shows on the 5th of November before rounding the evening off with a meal out. It falls on a Saturday this year, so you can probably expect more demand than usual. Fill your seats by creating special Experiences for Guy Fawkes night and offer menus that cater to the occasion.

Celebrate Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is an American holiday, but an increasing number of restaurants in the UK have started celebrating the occasion over the years. Offering a Thanksgiving meal at your restaurant is great for local Americans who want to celebrate, as well as anyone else curious to experience this US holiday.

Score with the World Cup

A once-in-a-lifetime World Cup takes place in November and December, rather than the traditional months of June and July. If you have the capabilities, think about showing some of the games and hosting World Cup specific nights for guests who want to watch the matches and enjoy a meal.

Prepare for the festive rush

November is also a time to start preparing for the festive season. December is one of the busiest periods of the year for restaurants, and you should use this time to start getting diners ready for a month of eating out and celebrating through your marketing efforts. Send emails, be active on social media and promote Christmas in your restaurant, letting guests know about your festive menus and more.



Be festive, creative, and inclusive at Christmas

Whether it's Hanukkah or Christmas, December is a month of celebrating. It's a big one for restaurants, with friends, family and colleagues all eager to enjoy a festive meal out at some point during the month. That's why these tips are good for all of December and not just a few specific days on the calendar.

Be party central

The whole month of December is prime time for large gatherings. Ready your private dining spaces for corporate events and family gatherings all month long. And make room for those large parties in your dining room as well.

Think inclusive

Make everyone feel welcome – don't feel constrained by food and vibes associated with specific celebrations. When it comes to decor, a sparkly silver and gold colour scheme or extra candlelight can welcome all. You don't need Santa or a menorah, or even a tree, to make it feel special.

Be a gift resource

If you make or sell retail products of any kind, create a small area of the restaurant that functions as a mini gift shop. If you can put a holiday spin on any of your wares, guests and shoppers will appreciate it.

Consider less traditional ways to celebrate. For example, an afternoon tea service or champagne toast happy hour are both fun celebrations that are a bit out of the ordinary.

Check out even more tips for marketing your holiday restaurants offerings.



More is more come New Year's

There's no better way to welcome a new year than with a restaurant full of joyful revellers clinking glasses as the clock strikes midnight. Offering a New Year's Eve celebration, prix fixe menu or specials are time-tested options diners love. The celebrations don't end with New Year's Eve, though. New Year's Day also brings an opportunity to host a different kind of crowd.

Make it sparkle

When it comes to New Year's, the more dazzling your restaurant can be, the better. Think glitter, sparkles, and gleaming streamers. More is more.

Start planning early! The best time to begin marketing your New Year's offerings and events is in November.

Look to last year

When in the planning stages, check out last year's reports to learn which hours were busiest and which were slower. If there were times when guests weren't seated promptly, make a plan to keep seatings running on time. Take a look at your sales figures before menu planning; it can be helpful to refresh your memory about which dishes were best-sellers and which were less popular with guests.

Create an Experience

You know your guests best. Create an [Experience](#) that will resonate with them. If your spot has a busy bar with fun energy, a New Year's Eve party with passed food and drink specials may be perfect. On the other hand, a luxurious New Year's Day brunch spread may work better in a fine-dining atmosphere.

Pour a non-alcoholic option

Most diners will want to toast with sparkling wine, a cocktail, or beer. But it's always good hospitality to have something festive to offer those who aren't partaking of alcohol for whatever reason. Try a special mocktail or local kombucha.

As you can see, there's no shortage of red-letter days on the calendar throughout the year. All these occasions can inspire events, Experiences, and ways to connect with your diners and build trust and loyalty with them. Return to this guide regularly to help fuel your creativity, menu and event planning, and marketing efforts all year long.

Pie and bacon and fries, oh my!

Food holidays to make your own—

The fun doesn't stop there. Here's a sample of some of the lesser-known food days, weeks and months that restaurants may want to adopt and have fun with



JANUARY	01-31	Veganuary	MAY	07-15	National Doughnut Week	JULY	01-31	Ice Cream Month	SEPTEMBER	20	World Paella Day
	05	Sausage Day		14	World Fairtrade Day		07	World Chocolate Day		26	World Dumpling Day
FEBRUARY	09	National Pizza Day	JUNE	16-22	National Vegetarian Week	AUGUST	29	International Chicken Wing Day	OCTOBER	14	World Egg Day
	22	National Margarita Day		30-June 05	National BBQ Week		30	International Cheesecake Day		01	World Vegan Day
MARCH	01	Pancake Day	JULY	04	National Cheese Day	AUGUST	13	National Prosecco Day	NOVEMBER	02	English Brakefast Day
	27	International Whisky Day		11	World Gin Day		19	National Potato Day		05	National Pig in Blankets Day
APRIL	11	Cheese Fondue Day	AUGUST	15	National Beer Day	SEPTEMBER	25	National Burger Day	OCTOBER	02	English Brakefast Day
	21	National Tea Day		24	National Cream Tea Day		30	International Cheesecake Day		14	World Egg Day

Run a better business with a reliable, easy-to-use restaurant management platform.

Get started with OpenTable
restaurant.opentable.co.uk

