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TRENDS IN F&B – GENERATIONAL DINING PREFERENCES

Trends In F&B – Generational Dining Preferences

Why do generational dining preferences matter in F&B?

While every customer is an individual, patterns emerge across generations that influence how people define value, quality and experience. Life stage, lifestyle and cultural reference points all shape expectations around dining, from how much time customers want to spend at the table to what they look for in menus, service and atmosphere.

For operators, this creates both complexity and opportunity. Businesses serve multiple generations within the same spaces and dayparts, while managing efficiency, staffing pressures and consistency of delivery. When used thoughtfully, generational trends offer a helpful lens to support better decision making to align offers with real guest behaviour.

Key Facts

64%

Of travellers say food and drink experiences influence their choice of accommodation.

Booking.com – Travel Predictions 2025

73%

Of hotel guests expect contactless or digital options, but 62% say personal interaction remains important during dining experiences.

Oracle Hospitality – Hospitality Technology Trends Report 2025

57%

Of travellers seek sustainable stays but less than half trust brand claims.

Deloitte, Sustainable Consumer 2025 Report

Generation	Traditionalist	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Millennials	Generation Z
Age Range 2026	81–98 (1928–1945)	62–80 (1946–1964)	46–61 (1965–1980)	30–45 (1981–1996)	14–29 (1997–2012)
Who	Value stability, tradition and familiarity, shaped by social and economic change. While many are retired, they remain engaged through family, community or advisory roles and favour reliability and consistency.	Often in later career or post-retirement life stages, travelling as couples or with friends and placing strong emphasis on experience, quality and trusted value.	Pragmatic and self-reliant, balancing career, family and personal time. Value efficiency and flexibility and are comfortable across both traditional and tech-enabled systems.	The largest workforce cohort, shaped by digital change and shifting social values. Prioritise purpose, experience and lifestyle alignment, often travelling as couples, friends or young families.	Fully digital-native and culturally fluid, valuing individuality, inclusivity and immediacy. Expect brands to feel current, ethical and socially aware.
Meal Preferences	Prefer familiar, well-prepared dishes such as traditional breakfasts, roasts and classic desserts, with an emphasis on quality and sensible portion sizes, with many favouring lighter dishes such as fish or soups and menus that avoid unnecessary excess or visible food waste.	Enjoy local and regional cuisine alongside well-executed classics, often complemented by thoughtful wine or beverage pairings, with growing interest in lighter, balanced and health-conscious options.	Prefer balanced menus combining recognisable classics such as steak, seafood, pasta or quality burgers with lighter contemporary options and are open to moderate spice but favour clarity over experimentation, particularly when dining for family or multi-generational occasions where flexibility and broad appeal matter.	Gravitate towards global flavours, brunch culture, health-forward menus and quality bean to cup coffee, with dining often viewed as a social and experiential activity.	Prefer snackable, shareable and flexible formats, bold flavours and strong non-alcoholic beverage options, with openness to global and fusion influences.
Service Types	Appreciate attentive, clearly structured table service with visible hosting and minimal reliance on self-service or digital interfaces.	Value professional, knowledgeable service that feels warm and attentive, and tends to disengage when service feels rushed or impersonal.	Appreciate efficient, low-friction service that respects their time while maintaining quality and genuine hospitality.	Prefer informal, friendly service and are comfortable with hybrid self-service or digital touchpoints when they feel intuitive and well designed.	Value fast, friendly interactions and low-friction, mobile-first ordering experiences that prioritise speed, autonomy and transparency.
Attitudes to Technology	Prefer minimal technology in dining settings and engage with digital tools only when they are simple, intuitive and clearly support personal service.	Comfortable with technology that adds convenience, such as reservations or loyalty programmes, provided it enhances rather than replaces human interaction.	Pragmatic in their use of technology, adopting digital tools when they improve efficiency, reliability and control without diminishing personal service.	Expect technology to be seamlessly integrated, supporting convenience, personalisation and discovery through mobile ordering, loyalty platforms and digital engagement.	View technology as a default layer of the experience, expecting fast, mobile-first and highly intuitive systems that enable autonomy, personal expression and social sharing.
What they Want from F&B	Comfort, ease and reassurance , delivered through dependable service standards and a dining experience that feels calm, respectful and well managed.	A balance of comfort and discovery, where quality, consistency and a sense of occasion reinforce perceived value and encourage repeat visits.	Reliable quality, flexible daypart options and convenience that feels intentional and well-executed, rather than rushed or secondary to other parts of the operation.	Dining that aligns with personal values such as sustainability, wellness and cultural relevance, expressed through cohesive design, clear storytelling and a clearly defined brand positioning.	Energy, relevance and cultural credibility , with dining experiences that feel social, expressive and locally connected .

Traditionalists

Born: 1928–1945

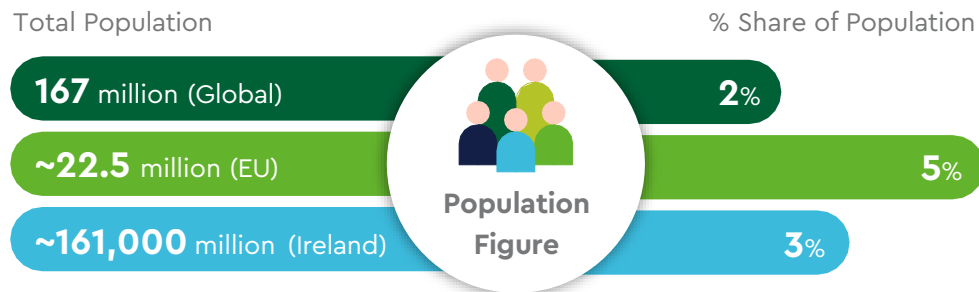
Age Range 2026: 81–98

Traditionalists represent a small but still influential segment within F&B, particularly in leisure, touring and multi-generational travel. Also known as the silent generation and shaped by periods of economic constraint and social change, they place high value on reliability, familiarity and clear standards of hospitality.

Dining is closely associated with comfort, trust and care rather than novelty, with strong expectations around service consistency, recognisable menus and calm, well-managed environments. Businesses that deliver dependable experiences, particularly at breakfast and dinner, tend to perform strongly with this group.

Key Traits

- ✓ Strong preference for consistency and predictability
- ✓ Associate quality with familiarity and craftsmanship
- ✓ High value placed on attentive, visible service
- ✓ Lower tolerance for friction, ambiguity or rapid change
- ✓ Loyal to hotels and dining venues they trust



Guest Perspective

When I choose a hotel, I'm also choosing peace of mind. I want comfort, care and craic, and a bus stop nearby. An ambience that reflects local events, personalities, and historical or cultural context would be a welcome touch.

Dining is a big part of that. A good breakfast, available until at least midday, sets the tone for the whole day. That means freshly prepared porridge or cereals, quality wholemeal breads, eggs and bacon cooked to order, and simple hot options served promptly and with care, rather than an overwhelming buffet. Familiar dishes, done well, help you feel comfortable and settled. Portion size matters too, with moderate, well-balanced plates that feel satisfying without being excessive or wasteful.

In the evening, I appreciate a calm dining room with a menu of local and national dishes, made with locally sourced ingredients, well cooked and thoughtfully presented. I'm not against trying something new, but I like it when it feels reassuring rather than challenging.

What really stays with me, though, is service. Staff who take time to explain the menu, remember your preferences, or simply check in at the right moment make all the difference.

I don't mind technology being part of the experience if it helps things run more smoothly, but I don't want it to replace people, or things like menus. I value being greeted and shown to my table, being looked after, and watching people in a space that feels full of life.

— P.M. Close, Retired (b. 1940)

Industry Inspiration – Park Hotel Kenmare

Park Hotel Kenmare is a respected benchmark for Irish hospitality and a strong reference for how F&B can meet Traditionalist expectations without feeling dated. Its dining experiences prioritise clarity, consistency and visible service, creating reassurance and trust from arrival through to departure.

Breakfast is a particular strength. Service is calm, well-paced and staff-led, with clear hosting and familiar formats delivered to a consistently high standard. For Traditionalist customers, this reinforces confidence early and sets expectations for overall quality.

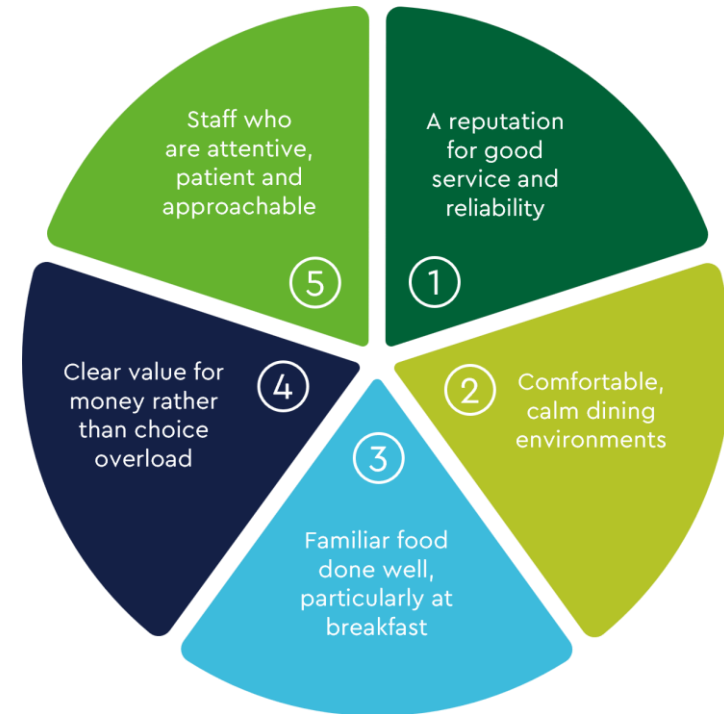
Across its dining spaces, menus remain recognisable and tangible, focusing on classic Irish dishes executed with care rather than trend-led experimentation. Seasonal refinement and the use of locally sourced produce is omnipresent, allowing the offer to feel current without challenging guest comfort. Portions and pricing feel measured, supporting perceptions of value and quality.



Older travellers place greater importance on service quality and comfort than on price or novelty, with dining experiences cited as a key contributor to overall satisfaction.

Skift Research – The Aging Traveler: Travel Trends 2025

Top 5 Things They Look for When Choosing a Hotel



Key Opportunities for Operators

- ✓ Run breakfast with visible staff and table service for drinks, prioritising calm pacing and consistent delivery over expanded choice
- ✓ Keep a core menu of familiar dishes and rotate change through daily or seasonal specials, rather than frequent full menu updates
- ✓ Ensure customers are greeted, seated and checked on during meals, particularly at breakfast and early evening service
- ✓ Provide printed menus alongside digital options, avoiding app-only or QR-only ordering in primary dining areas
- ✓ Design dining spaces for comfort and clarity, with good lighting, manageable noise levels and comfortable seating

Baby Boomers

Born: 1946–1964

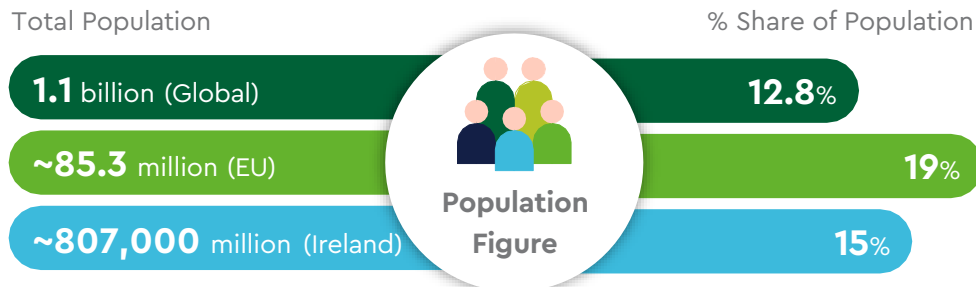
Age Range 2026: 62–80

Baby Boomers remain **one of the most commercially important segments for F&B**, particularly in leisure and occasion-led travel. Shaped by long careers and rising living standards, they place strong emphasis on quality, experience and value built through trust and familiarity.

Dining is viewed as central rather than a functional necessity. Boomers value well-executed food, knowledgeable service and environments that feel comfortable yet special. They are open to new flavours and ideas, but prefer innovation that feels evolutionary rather than disruptive, particularly when balanced with familiar formats.

Key Traits

- ✓ Strong appreciation for quality and service consistency
- ✓ Value experience and atmosphere alongside food
- ✓ Open to discovery when it feels reassuring and credible
- ✓ Place importance on provenance and storytelling
- ✓ Increasingly conscious of portion balance and food waste, valuing quality and thoughtful presentation over excess
- ✓ Tend to reward brands they trust with repeat visits



Guest Perspective

When I travel, I look for places that have a story, real character, and a strong sense of place. Great design isn't about high-end designers, but more about authenticity, atmosphere, and emotion.

For me, when I'm on holiday, the essentials are a comfortable bed and a great bar and restaurant. I love that 360-degree experience, where design, service, and energy all come together to create something memorable.

When I'm on business trips, my priorities shift slightly. I still value thoughtful experience design, but practicality becomes key: a comfortable workspace, reliable Wi-Fi, a well-designed chair, and spaces that transition naturally from work to rest to play.

The biggest bonus is when the restaurant or bar feels alive, part of the local community buzz, with a genuine warmth. Good food too—simple dishes done perfectly, using fresh, quality ingredients, with an overall sense of honest comfort.

Ultimately, it's the people who make it all come alive. Well-trained, knowledgeable, and approachable staff—the kind who make you feel both special and at ease—are the invisible thread that ties the whole experience together, the human touch behind great hospitality. Saying that, I do love digital check-out!

— Gabriel Murray, Creative Director (b. 1963)

Industry Inspiration – The Wyatt Hotel

The Wyatt Hotel is a well-established example of how F&B can successfully cater to Baby Boomer customers through experience-led dining, warmth and refinement rather than formality alone. Its restaurant and bar balance familiarity with a sense of occasion, making dining feel like an integral and enjoyable part of the stay rather than an add-on.

Menus focus on classic Irish and European dishes, executed with care and supported by strong provenance and seasonal influence. This approach resonates with Boomers' openness to discovery when it feels credible and reassuring, rather than experimental. Wine and beverage offerings are treated thoughtfully, reinforcing the idea of dining as a considered and social experience.

Service culture is central to the appeal. Staff are professional, knowledgeable and personable, with a clear emphasis on hospitality and guest recognition. Brunch and weekend dining are positioned as social occasions, often complemented by live music that enhances atmosphere without overwhelming conversation. This blend of food, familiarity and light entertainment supports multi-generational appeal, creating energy while preserving the warmth and human connection this group values.



44%

Of Baby Boomers say they are open to trying new cuisines when travelling, provided the experience feels familiar and well explained.

Eater & Vox Media – Food & Culture Survey 2025

Top 5 Things They Look for When Choosing a Hotel



Key Opportunities for Operators

- ✓ Create a sense of occasion by actively signposting dining, using visible menus, daily specials and staff recommendations throughout the customer journey
- ✓ Elevate familiar dishes through ingredients and presentation, rather than introducing entirely new or complex concepts
- ✓ Train teams to confidently describe dishes, ingredients and wine, helping customers make informed and comfortable choices
- ✓ Set up dining rooms for relaxed, longer meals, with comfortable seating, generous table spacing and service pacing that does not rush customers
- ✓ Use technology for bookings and payment, while keeping ordering and service led by people

Generation X

Born: 1965–1980

Age Range 2026: 46–61

Generation X represents **a highly influential but often understated segment** in F&B. Balancing career demands, family life and personal time, they bring a pragmatic mindset to dining decisions and value efficiency without sacrificing quality.

For Gen X, dining must work around real-life pressures. They favour flexible formats, dependable quality and environments that feel comfortable rather than performative. While open to global flavours and contemporary concepts, they prioritise substance, value and consistency over novelty.

Key Traits

- ✓ Pragmatic and value-driven
- ✓ Seek balance between convenience and quality
- ✓ Appreciate flexibility across dayparts, valuing menus and spaces that adapt from quick breakfasts and business lunches to family dinners and informal evening drinks
- ✓ Comfortable with technology and data-enabled personalisation when it saves time
- ✓ Less influenced by short-term dining trends and more by consistent quality and fair pricing

Total Population

% Share of Population

1.4 billion (Global)

16.7%

~94.3 million (EU)

21%

~1.08 million (Ireland)

20%

**Population
Figure**



Guest Perspective

When I stay in a hotel, I want dining to feel genuinely special. I'm not looking for theatrics or excess, but I do expect well-executed food, a thoughtfully designed space and service that feels assured and purposeful.

I value having options depending on the day. Some evenings call for a considered, sit-down dinner, while others suit something lighter, paired with a good glass of wine. Clear menus and a sense of flexibility matter, particularly when travelling for work or balancing time between business and family.

I'm happy to spend more when the quality and service justify it. Knowledgeable staff who understand the menu, answer questions with confidence, and offer measured, intelligent recommendations play a significant role in elevating the experience.

Technology is welcome when it genuinely enhances efficiency, but it should never intrude. Clear menus and well-trained teams who truly understand the offer are just as important. The best hotel dining experiences feel polished and composed, grounded in people who know their craft.

— Daniel Morgan, Partner (b.1973)

Industry Inspiration – Powerscourt Hotel Resort & Spa

Powerscourt Hotel performs well with Gen X guests by striking a balance between quality, comfort and efficiency, without leaning too heavily into formality or trend-led dining. Its F&B offer supports a range of needs across leisure breaks, family stays and blended business travel.

Menus across the hotel are clear, dependable and broad in appeal, combining familiar dishes with lighter, contemporary options and subtle global influences. This gives guests confidence in what they are ordering while still offering enough variety to feel current. Portioning, pricing and presentation communicate value without excess. Service is professional and efficient, with a focus on smooth delivery rather than ceremony.

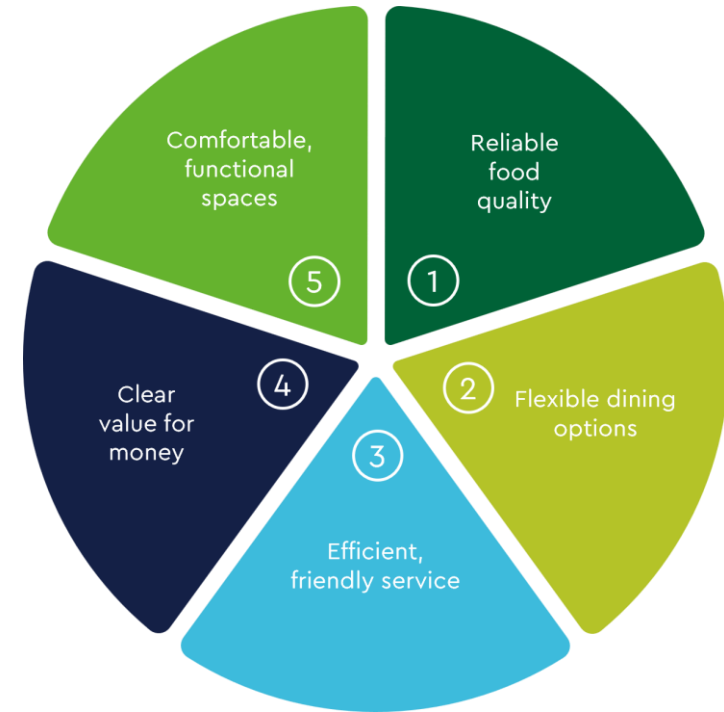
Dining spaces feel comfortable, well-designed and functional, supporting different occasions from relaxed dinners to informal meetings or family meals. The experience feels well considered rather than performative, which resonates strongly with this cohort.



Gen X prioritises value and quality over discounts, with willingness to pay linked to portion integrity and perceived substance.

Deloitte – Global Consumer Outlook: Food & Hospitality 2025

Top 5 Things They Look for When Choosing a Hotel



Key Opportunities for Operators

- ✓ Anchor menus in familiar favourites while complementing them with a select number of modern or international dishes
- ✓ Structure menus so customers can easily spot lighter options, quick dishes and fuller meals, helping them choose based on time and appetite
- ✓ Design wine and drinks list that work for different occasions, making it easy to choose whether guests are stopping for a glass, sharing a bottle or pairing with food
- ✓ Offer online bookings while keeping space for walk-ins, ensuring guests can dine easily whether they planned ahead or not
- ✓ Make value clear through portion size, ingredient quality and consistency, rather than relying on discounts or deals

Millennials

Born: 1981–1996

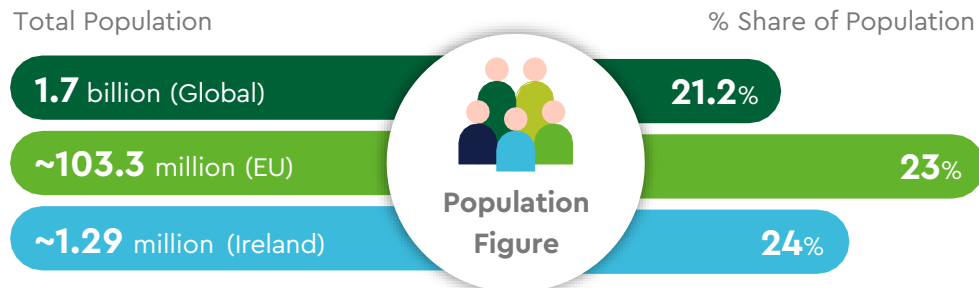
Age Range 2026: 30–45

Millennials are **now the dominant cohort in the workforce and a key driver of contemporary dining culture**. Shaped by digital transformation and shifting social values, they place high importance on experience, identity and lifestyle alignment.

For this group, F&B is an extension of personal values. Dining is social, expressive and often experience-led, with strong interest in design, storytelling and authenticity. Convenience matters, but not at the expense of quality or purpose.

Key Traits

- ✓ Experience-led and socially driven
- ✓ Value authenticity and transparency
- ✓ Strong interest in design and atmosphere
- ✓ Comfortable with digital-first engagement
- ✓ Expect sustainability to be embedded



Guest Perspective

Food plays a huge role in how I experience a destination. When I travel, I often eat outside the hotel, so choosing the in-house restaurant has to feel like a deliberate choice, not just a convenience. The concept really matters to me, along with the design, atmosphere, and overall energy of the space. Strong coffee throughout the day, a great brunch offering, and a sense that there's something happening all help make a venue feel worth spending time in.

When I'm travelling with friends, I naturally gravitate towards more relaxed, social spaces within the hotel, places that encourage sharing, whether that's through the menu or the way the venue is set up. Bar-led concepts with lighter, informal dishes work particularly well. I usually research a restaurant before I arrive, through the hotel's website or social channels, so it's important that what's promised there genuinely matches the experience on the ground.

I'm also drawn to menus that take thoughtful risks. I enjoy trying new things, especially when fusion dishes or unexpected flavour combinations feel intentional and aligned with the concept, rather than novelty for novelty's sake. And details matter — really good baked goods, a well-executed croissant or pastry in the morning, can genuinely define the experience for me.

— Samantha Toscano, Operations Manager (b. 1994)

Industry Inspiration – The Dean Central Dublin

The Dean Central Dublin is a clear reference point for how F&B can successfully engage Millennial guests by aligning dining with lifestyle, social culture and designed experience rather than traditional hotel formality. Its restaurants, bars and cafés are positioned as destinations in their own right, attracting both hotel guests and a strong local audience.

Food and beverage offers focus on casual, contemporary formats that suit social dining, from relaxed all-day menus to rooftop and late-night bar experiences. Menus lean into familiar favourites with a modern twist, global influences and strong beverage programs, supporting Millennials' preference for comfort blended with creativity rather than fine dining conventions.

Service style is informal and friendly, with a strong emphasis on atmosphere and pace. Technology is embedded seamlessly, supporting booking, ordering and social engagement without becoming intrusive. This digital fluency aligns with Millennials' expectation that convenience should feel intuitive and integrated.

Design and storytelling are central to the experience. Interiors are bold, expressive and Instagram-aware, while the overall tone feels current and culturally relevant. Dining is treated as key driver of identity, social energy and brand differentiation.



Over 70% of Millennials say food and beverage experiences influence their hotel choice, particularly where design and atmosphere are strong.

Booking.com – Travel Predictions 2025

Top 5 Things They Look for When Choosing a Hotel



Key Opportunities for Operators

- ✓ Align F&B branding and social channels with the hotel's lifestyle positioning, using clear storytelling and cohesion across menus, music and atmosphere
- ✓ Lead with standout offers, such as strong coffee, distinctive brunch, shareable plates and healthier options
- ✓ Use simple service cues to suit different moods, offering quieter or work-friendly seating by day and livelier areas for social groups
- ✓ Embed sustainability into everyday choices, including plant-forward dishes, waste reduction and transparent sourcing
- ✓ Make digital touchpoints seamless, covering menus, booking, payment and loyalty

Generation Z

Born: 1997–2012

Age Range 2026: 14–29

Generation Z is one of the **newest and most fluid guest segments in F&B, with expectations shaped by growing up in a highly connected, fast-moving cultural environment.** As digital natives, they are comfortable navigating technology and tend to be highly exposed to global trends, social media and influences that often cut across age groups rather than sitting neatly within generational lines.

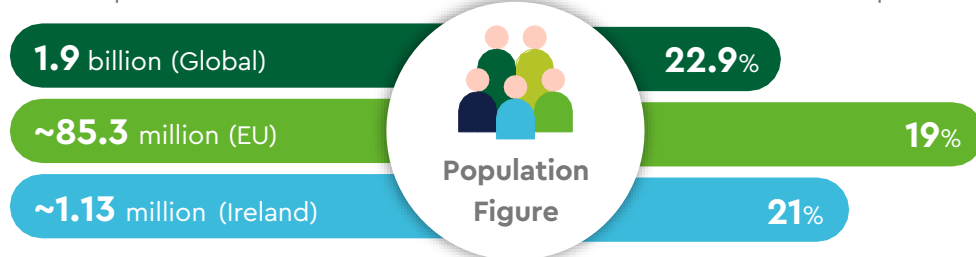
Their dining preferences generally lean towards informal and social experiences, with interest in flexible formats, approachable menus and spaces that feel relevant and easy to engage with. While technology is typically expected as part of the experience, it is valued most when it supports ease and autonomy rather than drawing attention to itself. Importantly, many of the behaviours associated with Gen Z are also influenced by broader lifestyle trends shared with Millennials and younger Gen X.

Key Traits

- ✓ Digital-first and visually driven
- ✓ Value individuality and inclusivity
- ✓ Expect ethical and transparent brands
- ✓ Drawn to social, informal dining formats
- ✓ Influenced by peers and online culture

Total Population

% Share of Population



Guest Perspective

When I eat somewhere, it's not just about the food. The space and the overall vibe really matter. I'm much more drawn to places that feel social and relaxed rather than formal or awkward.

I'm interested in trend-led things, whether that's a drink, a dessert or a dish, but only when it's done properly and fits the overall concept. I like menus that feel considered, with bold flavours, things you can share and good non-alcoholic options. It should feel fun and enjoyable, not like it's trying too hard.

I also like when there's something else happening in the space, whether that's music, DJs, or light entertainment that adds energy and makes it feel more social.

I'll usually have seen a place online before I go, so it's important that what's on social media actually matches the experience in real life. Being able to check the menu or order on your phone is useful too, but having a physical menu and staff who can explain things well can be helpful.

— Inez Powrie, Content Marketing Coordinator (b. 2001)

Industry Inspiration – The Dean Docklands

The Dean Docklands provides a useful example of how a full-service hotel can engage Gen Z guests without relying on a hostel model. Its F&B offer is positioned as part of a social, lifestyle-driven ecosystem, appealing to younger guests while still functioning within a conventional hotel operation. The hotel differentiates its range of F&B spaces, from a casual all-day dining restaurant at ground level to more elevated experiences such as Ryleigh's rooftop steakhouse, allowing it to cater to varying moods, occasions and price points within one cohesive offering.

Food and drink are informal and flexible, with a strong emphasis on bar-led dining, shareable formats and visually distinctive dishes that translate well across social media. Menus are approachable rather than experimental, balancing comfort with personality and presentation, which aligns with Gen Z's tendency to be influenced by both peer culture and broader dining trends.

Social energy is a defining feature. Spaces such as the rooftop bar and ground-floor venues are designed to feel open and active, attracting both guests and locals. Events, DJ sets and seasonal activations help keep the offer feeling fresh, while avoiding the need for constant reinvention.

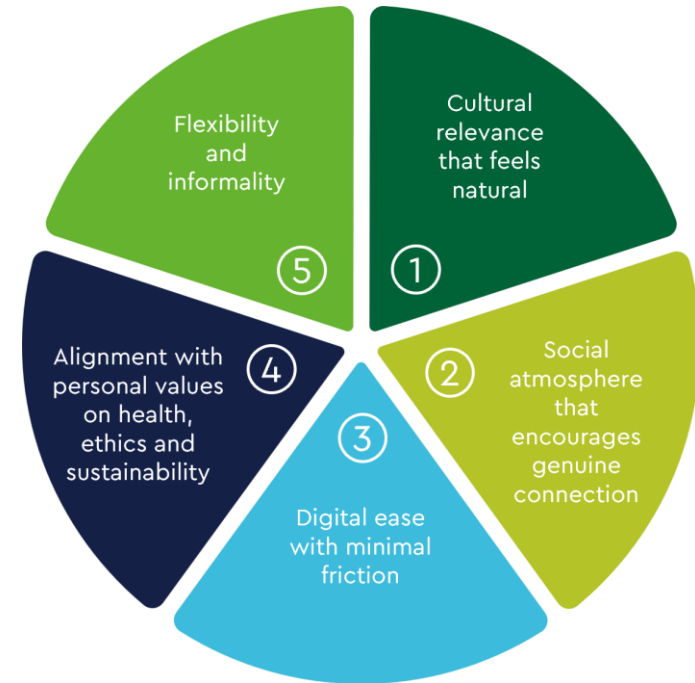
Technology is integrated in a way that supports ease and autonomy, from booking and discovery to payment, but does not replace human interaction. Social media plays a visible role in communicating the venue's atmosphere, dishes and events, effectively acting as a second menu and lifestyle channel.



92% of Gen Z say authenticity is a key factor in brand engagement, influencing how they respond to dining concepts and experiences.

EY – Gen Z Segmentation Study 2025

Top 5 Things They Look for When Choosing a Hotel



Key Opportunities for Operators

- ✓ Lead with visually distinctive food concepts, offering dishes that are bold, memorable and genuinely enjoyable to eat, as well as visually appealing
- ✓ Use social media as a live extension of the menu, showcasing dishes, drinks, atmosphere and day-to-day moments to communicate the offer and wider brand lifestyle
- ✓ Strengthen links between front of house, marketing and kitchen teams, using shared insight on trends to shape new dishes, limited-time offers and seasonal activations
- ✓ Support informal, social dining, using shared tables, bar seating or flexible layouts that encourage connection
- ✓ Offer strong low- and no-alcohol options alongside healthier, customisable dishes, supporting choice and inclusivity without overcomplicating the menu

Navigating Generational Dining Preferences in F&B

The Operator Check List

- ✓ Watch real order patterns across dayparts rather than relying on assumptions
- ✓ Listen closely to front-of-house teams, they often spot shifts before data does
- ✓ Ask guests for feedback in simple, human ways, not just through digital surveys
- ✓ Design menus and spaces to flex across occasions, not single demographics
- ✓ Test and adjust in small increments rather than making wholesale changes
- ✓ Train teams to read guests and adapt service style accordingly
- ✓ Use technology as a support tool, not a replacement for hospitality
- ✓ Focus on consistency of execution before introducing new concepts



Overlapping Trends Across Generations

Despite differences in age and life stage, several dining trends cut across all generations and align with broader F&B best practice.



Breakfast as a critical touchpoint

Breakfast consistently shapes satisfaction, value perception and return intent across all age groups.



Demand for clarity and ease

Guests increasingly value clear menus, intuitive layouts and frictionless service over excessive choice.



Flexible dining formats

Guests respond positively to formats that can adapt across dayparts, from casual breakfast to informal evening dining.



Quality over novelty

Well-executed, familiar dishes outperform trend-led concepts when consistency and value are clear.



Human service still matters

Even in digitally enabled environments, warmth, attentiveness and staff presence remain central to positive dining experiences.



Sustainability with consideration

Across generations, sustainable practices are most effective when embedded transparently through sourcing, portioning and waste reduction, rather than bold claims.

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Global population figures are based on United Nations World Population Prospects (2024 Revision) data, as referenced by Visual Capitalist (2024). Irish and EU generational shares were calculated by aligning the same generational age ranges to the most recent official age distribution data from the Central Statistics Office Ireland and Eurostat (2024), with EU figures referring to the EU-27 population. Where generational cut-offs did not directly correspond to published age bands, proportions were estimated by distributing age bands evenly across single years of age and aggregating accordingly. Percentages are rounded for reporting clarity.



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