

# Culinary Career Paths

**Y**OUR PERSONALITY should play a role in determining where culinary arts training takes you. For example, an extremely creative and outgoing person would likely struggle with the limitations and restrictions of food preparation in a nursing home. He or she may find more job satisfaction in creating one-of-a-kind cakes for birthdays, weddings, and other celebrations. Outside the kitchen, ambitious people may decide to become salespeople. There are multiple paths from which to choose in this industry.



## Objective:



Describe the variety of available career paths in culinary arts.

## Key Terms:



career paths  
dietitians  
executive chefs  
food stylists

garde-mangers  
institutional catering  
line cooks  
pastry chefs

prep cooks  
sous-chefs

## Understanding Career Paths in Culinary Arts

**Career paths** are ways to advance to a desired position within a field. For example, a baker has a career. However, his or her career path may have started as a baker's helper. The next step on the career path for a baker may be a pastry chef, followed by a sous-chef, and then an executive chef position.

## TRAVEL INDUSTRY

The travel industry has a need for people trained and/or experienced in culinary arts to work in kitchens for cruise lines, resorts, and hotels. An employee may begin in the front of the "house" by working as a host or server. He or she may decide to work as a prep cook, then a

line cook, and eventually progress to executive chef. Additional education may be required, depending on the establishment.

## Cruise Lines

If you are an adventurous person who enjoys traveling and meeting new people, working for a cruise line can be extremely rewarding. Carnival, Royal Caribbean International, Princess Cruises, and Disney are some of the most popular cruise lines. Typically, the wait staff is assigned to a certain group for the duration of the cruise, allowing the employees and guests to become well acquainted. On some ships, the chef prepares certain meals tableside.

## Resorts

Employment in a resort can enable you to live in some very desirable locations. Resorts are located across the globe, and some are more luxurious than others. Therefore, the demands will vary, depending on the clientele. High-end resorts may require more patience, perfection, and perseverance in the kitchen and elsewhere.



**FIGURE 1.** Resorts, such as this one in the Maldives, can provide employees with opportunities to meet people from around the globe.

## Hotels

Hotels with restaurants are found in most cities. Obviously, larger cities will have a much wider selection of accommodations for travelers, corporate conferences, and special occasions. As a result, it may be easier to find a job in a major city. However, there may be more competition for jobs.

## RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

The restaurant industry is a major U.S. industry offering a wide range of positions. You may have to accept an entry-level position to begin at a certain restaurant, as some places require you to work your way up. The pay scale will vary because of these factors and as a result of experience and education.

## Fine-Dining Establishments

Fine-dining establishments have people working in a variety of specialized positions.

- ♦ **Executive chefs** are the people in charge of tasks such as working with vendors, creating the menu, preparing food, managing employees, and interacting with customers.

They need to be organized and hardworking. In addition, they must have people skills, be creative, and possess a sensitive palate.

- ◆ **Sous-chefs** are the people who are second in command in a kitchen. They may assist line cooks, and they fill in when the executive chef is unavailable. *Sous* is pronounced “soo.”
- ◆ **Line cooks** are the people who work in certain stations (e.g., appetizers, side dishes, and meat).
- ◆ **Pastry chefs** are the people who create certain dishes, make specialty desserts, and often coordinate events.
- ◆ **Prep cooks** are the people who assemble, decorate, and garnish prepared food.
- ◆ **Garde-mangers** are the people responsible for producing or supervising the production of cold food items (e.g., sandwiches, garnishes, salads, and dressings). *Garde-manger* is pronounced “gARd-mahN-zhey.”



**FIGURE 2.** Working in a fine-dining establishment can result in fast career advancement.

## Chain Restaurants

Chain restaurants basically have a set menu, with a variance in “specials of the day.” Seasonal items may also appear on the menu, such as strawberry shortcake in the summer months. Creativity is not as mandatory for work in this setting. Yet being quick and paying attention are important to prevent accidents in the kitchen and to avoid burning dishes. Chain restaurants, such as T.G.I. Friday’s®, Applebee’s® Neighborhood Grill and Bar, Olive Garden®, Red Lobster, and LongHorn Steakhouse® will not have as many kitchen employees as fine-dining establishments. Yet these restaurants still have a need for trained culinary professionals.

## Fast-Food Restaurants

Fast-food restaurants often require no more than a high school diploma or GED for employment. However, listening, working quickly, paying attention to orders, and working well with others can help in advancing to the next level. You may begin your career path as a cashier, progress to line cook, transition to shift supervisor, and then enter management.

## Cafeterias

Schools, hospitals, and corporations have a need for chefs and other kitchen personnel. Such places may have certain stations (e.g., breakfast bar, salad bar, and grill) or might use

**institutional catering**, which is a single menu from which customers choose their selections usually while walking through a line with a tray.

## Other Establishments

- ◆ Diners are generally small dining establishments that serve food 24 hours a day 7 days a week, though this is not always the case. Also, diners are known for serving comfort food, such as grilled cheese, macaroni and cheese, biscuits and gravy, and other carbohydrate-laden foods that people should try to limit in their diets. Some serve breakfast all day.
- ◆ Banquet halls are used exclusively for special events, such as wedding receptions and corporate gatherings. Preparing meals for these places involves a lot of organization, time management, and facilitation of responsibilities among staff. In addition to the food being served in a timely manner, it must have an excellent appearance and taste. Also, the service must be professional. So the chef must coordinate with many people to make the event a success.
- ◆ Delicatessens (delis) typically serve sandwiches and chips. Traditionally, the sandwiches are simply cold cuts and cheese with a garnish. With more of a demand for food to carry out, now delis are offering more side dishes and salads.
- ◆ Grocery stores have their own deli areas. With the increased demand for on-the-go eating, selections have increased from cold cuts and cheese to items such as fried foods, roasted chicken, and side salads.

## Special Occasion Positions

Special occasion positions are jobs that require a high level of professionalism and attention to detail. These positions may be for catering facilities, for bakeries, or on the side as home businesses.

Caterers must be organized individuals who love and excel at planning. They create a menu based on the budget and desires of the client. In addition, they coordinate tablecloths, centerpieces, napkins, and more to make an event memorable.

Wedding cake bakers and decorators must be creative and must work well under pressure. These people have tight deadlines and only one chance to get things right.

## HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY

The healthcare industry has a need for chefs who are not “heavy handed” with spices, as food may need to be rather bland to meet the dietary restrictions of



**FIGURE 3.** Catering involves a lot of planning and organizational skills.



many recipients. Having experience in creating low-fat, reduced-sodium, and low-calorie items will assist in this job.

## **Dieticians**

**Dieticians** are people who plan nutritional programs to promote healthy choices and to, therefore, minimize diseases related to poor nutrition. They may work with the cafeteria chef, doctors who have patients with dietary restrictions, and patients in weight loss management programs.

## **Chefs in Hospital Cafeterias**

Chefs in hospital cafeterias often have a set menu for each day of the week. For example, every Monday may be lasagna with green beans, and every Tuesday may be meatloaf with mashed potatoes and peas. The food selections are traditional in most settings, leaving little room for creativity. However, time must be focused on feeding people quickly, as healthcare providers may have scheduled events, such as surgeries.

## **Chefs in Nursing Homes and Residential Care Facilities**

Chefs in nursing homes and residential care facilities must be sensitive to the special needs of their populations. For instance, tough items may be difficult to chew for residents with dentures. Also, spicy items may upset their stomachs. As a result, menus should typically include soft selections that are low in sugar, salt, fat, and spice.

## **MEDIA PERSONNEL**

- ◆ **Food stylists** are people who market food by arranging items in a manner that will photograph well for commercials, magazines, and videos.
- ◆ Food photographers are the people who shoot images of culinary creations for various media outlets. Knowledge of food as well as photography skills will assist tremendously in this position.
- ◆ Food writers are people who may create their own blogs, how-to books, or recipe books. These writers may find positions as restaurant reviewers for local or national publications.



**FIGURE 4.** A food stylist will prepare food to make it enticing in photographs.

## SALESPEOPLE

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Sales representatives are needed to sell professional kitchen equipment. Trained culinary arts students would have an advantage over other applicants for such jobs. Speaking skills, professionalism, and enthusiasm are important factors in sales positions. Traveling within a certain area is typically required.

## CONSULTANTS

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Consultants and design specialists work with owners of independent restaurants to discuss kitchen and dining room layout as well as décor. In addition, they help plan menus that coordinate with the themes of the establishments.

### Summary:

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The travel industry has a need for people trained and/or experienced in culinary arts to work in kitchens for cruise lines, resorts, and hotels. The restaurant industry is a major U.S. industry offering a wide range of positions. Jobs can be found in fine-dining establishments, chain restaurants, fast-food restaurants, diners, banquet halls, and more.

Special occasion positions include jobs such as caterers and wedding cake bakers and decorators. They require a high level of professionalism and attention to detail.

The healthcare industry has a need for dietitians, chefs in hospital cafeterias, and chefs in nursing home and residential care facilities. These employees must be sensitive to a variety of dietary restrictions.

Culinary arts students may decide to work as food stylists, food photographers, food writers, salespeople of culinary tools and equipment, and consultants or design specialists.

### Checking Your Knowledge:

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1. Name three industries where chefs may find jobs.
2. What is the role of a sous-chef?
3. What is institutional catering?
4. What is the role of a dietitian?
5. What does being a food stylist involve?

## Expanding Your Knowledge:

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Select one of the jobs mentioned, and research it thoroughly. Your research should include specific restaurants or companies that employ people in that job, the locations of those places, the salary range, and opportunities for advancement from such a position.

## Web Links:

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### **Cooks**

<http://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/35-1011.00>

### **Food Preparation Workers**

<http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos331.htm>

### **Jobs for Chef School Graduates**

<http://www.allculinaryschools.com/culinary-careers/guide/culinary-arts/jobs-for-chef-school-grads>