

What to consider when booking the Christmas party to ensure EVERYONE is included

Are you fully inclusive when booking your Christmas party? It's a difficult task, so how do you manage it without offending any of your colleagues? I have put together some tips to help guide you through the FreeFrom maze and to ask the right questions for your guests and the venue to ensure ALL your guests have a safe and enjoyable event.

How can you ensure that the Christmas Works party you are organising is a positive dining experience for all who attend? The first hurdle is choosing where to go! Those of us who have allergies, coeliac disease or require a special diet due to medical or intolerances reason find dining out when we are not in control an anxiety nightmare. So, what can you do to help?

When organising a party, it's advisable to send out a circular email to all those invited asking for any special dietary requirements prior to booking. Why? Because some restaurants simply cannot cater for some special diets for example coeliacs struggle to eat in themed or ethnic restaurants where pizza, pasta or soy sauce is a key ingredient.

When deciding on a venue, ask those with the dietary requirements where they have eaten previously, get their recommendations and then check out the menu for the others within the group.

When reviewing options, do you know what questions to ask a venue to assess if it is suitable for all those with dietary requirements?

Request a copy of the allergy matrix for the full Christmas menu this will also help when deciding on the venue.

You may need to consider an extreme food allergy, nuts, milk or eggs, and understand for example, if nuts are handled within a kitchen. Try and get as much information from your colleague as possible, to understand the questions you need to ask the venue to ensure a safe dining experience.

Check and double check the venue – asking for written information as confirmation!

When a venue tells you 'we can provide for allergies' don't just take their word for it! Dig deeper

For example, Christmas dinner without gravy, without sausages and without stuffing is just dry meat and veg and not a pleasant experience. And because some one is Coeliac does not mean they are vegetarian!

When meals are adapted for allergies, find out what is provided and if replacements for starters and desserts are required, ask the venue to specify what is provided up front. The FreeFrom colleague pays the same why should they miss out?

For example: starters and desserts, often, drop off the radar for the FreeFrom customer, what is served is melon for starter and fruit salad for dessert. Be ready to warn them that 'fruit is NOT a dessert!' and your FreeFrom colleague would like a choice too!

If chips are part of the meal, ask if separate dedicated fryers are in, some venues may dip roast potatoes in the fryer to coat in oil before roasting so it is worth asking the question.

If you have someone with a nut allergy, request a menu excluding nuts in any format throughout the menu. In addition, ask how they manage nuts, and will any nut products be handled in the kitchen during service.

Note: Chestnuts are NOT classed as tree nuts, they are part of the latex family!

If petite fours and chocolates are served after the meal, ask the venue to supply ingredient information.

If they not suitable, source a small pack as appropriate and this will give your colleague a real surprise.

If a colleague has multiple allergies, once you have chosen where to go, allow the FreeFrom colleague to call the venue and discuss his/her options direct so it is clear if the venue is able to accommodate their requirements. Confirm in writing all options discussed so both you and the venue are aware of their obligations.