Food and drink around the world

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Over the centuries, food and drinks have been a fundamental part of our lives. Since the beginning, humans have explored their territory, learnt how to use natural resources, explored cooking techniques, and gathered to share and celebrate. Besides keeping us healthy, it reflects our histories and defines our cultural identity. Ingredients, flavours, smells, techniques, tools, and traditional celebrations are part of everyone’s family memories.

Its relationship with ancestors has proximity to rituals practised by different cultures worldwide, uniting the theme with religion and beliefs. This trail features 15 items that record everyday gastronomic practices, whether enjoyed by the living or offered to the dead.

Explore more about the stories, imagine how cultures worldwide relate to them and discover the symbolism around food.
Café culture has long been associated with music. In the 19th century, the long-necked Iranian lute, known as the tar, was used as one of the main musical instruments in Middle East countries’ cafés, where only men could visit for rest, enjoyment of free time, play chess, and listen to music.

Magic bowls with Islamic verses of the Quran with the 99 names of God engraved on their inner surface are used to treat scared children and adults. When filled, the vessel transfers curative aspects to the liquid. By drinking it, they begin to feel better.

Grinding-stone tools aim to reduce materials into particles or powder. Analysing residue from these stones provides insight into the relationships between people and plants. Skeletons of people who used these tools have signs of injuries, stress, and deformation.

This polychrome tomb painting represents Nebemun, his wife and daughter, while he is standing in a boat catching fowl and fish. Ancient Egyptians excelled in preserving fish and fruit. Ancient Egyptians scissored in preserving fish, drying, and salting. They passed down these techniques through the generations.

Food offerings such as pomegranates in a bowl were common in a funerary context in Egypt. They were essential for the magical evocation of food supplies needed for the afterlife. Societies like the Egyptians believed that earthly life was just one stage of a long journey.

Archaeological season in ancient Egypt was vital to the economy. They daily consumed food made from grains, such as bread. To cut the grain stalks, they used flint blades like this fitted into wooden handles. While harvesting, farmers chanted songs and shared stories.

Egyptians used Nile silt pottery to make this cooking pot found in Naqada. Similar pots, filled with ashes taken from a funerary feast, were placed in graves to magically provide a home-cooked meal for the dead in the afterlife. This jar is older than the pyramids.

Ritual practices of the Kerma culture demonstrate the importance of food and drinks in the afterlife. It is typical to place in burials sacrificed young sheep, goats, and similar wheel-made bottles to contain drinks.

This porcelain fish and chips by Japanese artist Hosono Hitomi reflects how food such as potatoes crossed territorial boundaries worldwide. On its surface, applied overglaze decoration narrates a story of the 21st-century image of London that every foreigner coming here carries.