

Gourmet Salts: Implementation and Utilisation in the current trends in the culinary world

Higher National Diploma in Food Preparations and
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Abstract

The follow research is a long essay set out to find if gourmet salts are a current trend amongst hotels and restaurant in Malta.

The author interviewed experienced chefs who currently work in Malta in order to carry out this research.

The findings are that gourmet salts are not being used on a big scale and there is a lack of awareness among clients. It was found that chefs are finding clients uninterested in ordering dishes which were prepared using different salts.

These suggest that gourmet salts are in fact not a current trend. Never less, research shows that it will probably be one in the future.

In conclusion, the author suggests a further research, focusing on clients and their opinions on gourmet salts. This is so there will be an understanding why clients are not open to this trend.

To my family, Nancy, Ronnie, Joseph, Charlene and Courtney for their constant support.

I would like to acknowledge my tutor James Attard and Christopher Cilia for playing a role in my academic accomplishments.

Thank you for teaching me that the sky is the limit.

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“Salt is born of the purest of parents; the sun and the sea.”
- Pythagoras

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Subject Area

The subject area which the author intends to explore is Gourmet Salts.

A holistic description of such salts is; high quality and unrefined types of salt used in the culinary industry to intensify the flavour and to give a unique taste to the food being cooked and served

1.2 Relevance to subject

The relevance this subject has to the authors studies (Higher National Diploma in Food Preparation and Production Operations) is that salt is the most basic and common ingredient in the kitchen and in her opinion, it is taken for granted and unappreciated. The process of salt is an art, the origin of salts, the process of development during the passage of time, and the impact of salts on past and present culinary usage.

Studies about salt goes back centuries and it has always evolved with times, thus making it an exciting area to research and study. Understanding this basic ingredient will help the author in her career in the kitchen as it will lead to a better understanding of the basic ingredients used and the evolution of food progress along the years.

This area of study may also have relevance to the Maltese tourism industry. Malta, although limited because of its size, is a supplier of salt. Moving with current trends in the culinary industry, consumers search for fresh and local produce, salt being one of them.

1.3 Long Essay Structure

The first part of this long essay will be about understanding salt itself. There are many different types of salts available, some are natural made for example the Himalayan pink salt, as some are manmade like the smoked sea salt, thus making the possibilists of different salts endless.

Although part of the research will be based on the usage of gourmet salts in the culinary industry in Malta, the long essay will not be limited to Malta alone regarding gourmet salt usage, but international as well.

The research will explore whether people and chefs are aware that these different salts are available on the market and if they are willing/ already using said salts. For this research to be carried out, the author will speak to different chefs in the industry to get a better understanding of current trends and usage

The relevance this study might have towards culinary studies is by exploring the future possibilities of the use of salt in professional kitchens.

This shall be done by discussing and highlight the attributes and implications of gourmet salts when added to food, particularly in relation to texture and flavours that may potentially take place when used. An example of such attribute and implication relates to the effect of hickory smoked sea salt when used to cure ham, rather than using plain salt.

The purpose of this research is to explore and identify the implementation and usage of gourmet salts by professional chefs

The intention of the proposal is to identify the current trend of the use of gourmet salts, which has gained increasingly popularity among chefs and consumers during the past few years.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 A brief history of salt

The history of salt is very complex and lengthy. Its use dates back to 2700 B.C. and since then it has interwoven into numerous cultures. Even today, the history of salt leaves an ingrained mark on societies across the globe.

Salt had a critical role during history for a number of reasons, an example being during the Neolithic age, when it was vitally needed to preserve and cure meat and fish, making dyes, tanning hides to make leather, and also used to make medicine.

During the years, salt works were important as it provided jobs. In a port in Tyre (Lebanon), a strong trading network was built by the Phoenicians in 2750 B.C. Their main trade was saltworks and it was linked to Egypt, Turkey, Sicily, Crete and Tunisia.

Salt also made its way into religions. A comprehensive supply of rock salt was easily accessible in ancient India. Poets sang about a scripture from 'Hindu lore', about a certain salt rock called Kala Namak. (Bitterman, 2010) Today, this gourmet salt is an icon in northern Indian cuisine and is also used in vegan cooking due to its similar taste to egg, owing to its strong sulfuric flavour.

In Eastern Africa, the production of salt has been ongoing for millennia. Salt used to be obtained by boiling sand in marshes or picked from mud. At this time, salt was mined and transported in order to be traded for gold.

In the year 1286, the salt industry was introduced to tax on salt. The gabelle tax was a direct salt tax, ordered by the King Louis IX. This tax enforced a monopoly over the selling of salt, which left citizens enforced to buy a measured bulk of salt each week at an established price. Since it was a monopoly, the prices reached sky high and it was calculated that in a year the average family spend a month's wage purely on salt. (Kurlansky, 2002)

By the seventeenth century, this led to brutal protests which left the tax agents murdered. As this went on, the smuggling of salt with lower tax became popular. This had serious consequences, as anyone caught smuggling salt while armed was

sentenced to death. It is estimated that during the year that the gabelle tax was enforced, over 5,000 men and woman were sent to prison for holding smuggled salt.

In the 1930, the British government had full control over the making and selling of salt in India. The British took all profit made and enforced a tax on the salt which was harvested by Indians from along the coast of the country. Mahatma Gandhi strongly opposed to the tax on salt and in protest against the British rule over India, he led a protest of 23 days towards a village called Dandi. He ended the protest by disobeyed the law by scalding salty mud. After the march was over, Indians in protest began producing salt on their own. This protest played a key factor for the Indian independence. (Freeman, e.d.)

This protest is remembered as ‘The Salt March to Dandi’.

2.2 A New perspective

With time, the understanding of salt grew substantially and today there is no limit to what one can do with different kinds of gourmet salts. For example, fluer de sel caramels are very popular and are found in almost every gourmet store in the West of the world. The trend of adding salt to caramel started in Brittany France, where fluer de sel salt is a speciality to the region. The locals started to sprinkle salt on the caramel. This started a new perspective of salt, as it wasn’t added to the mixture to season the caramel, but instead it was sprinkled on top, making sure it doesn’t dissolve in order to appreciate its taste even more.

Salt can be split into two main categories; rock salt and evaporative salt.

2.2.1 Evaporated salt

Evaporated salts go through a process called winning, meaning they are evaporated, crystallized and harvested outdoors or in a greenhouse. Climate is the most vital element in the evaporation process as it can vary widely; ranging from five days in a dry Australian climate to as long as forty days in the damp France climate.

In certain climates where natural evaporation is impossible, fire is used to aid the evaporation process. An example of salt made this way is shio salt, made and mastered in Japan. The process of how to evaporate salt has remained almost the same throughout time, with only a few changes having been made. For instance, the filtering of seawater for hygiene reasons. It is said that this fine grain salt has one of the most tactical methods of evaporation as it needs to be stirred carefully and continuously in a stainless steel basin over a mild fire over a period of two days. (Bitterman, 2010)

Among solar salts we find Fluer de sel, known also as 'Flower of Salt', which is considered to be the finest and purists of salts. It is harvested from the Brittany coast and it has been harvested by hand since 868, this is done to preserve the finest of the salt. Sel gris (bay salt) is coarser and needs to be ground up.

2.2.2 Rock Salt

Way back when people were still hunters, acquiring salt from mines was an unpleasant and risky job, so much so that miners use to carve detailed chapels in the mines in order to protect them. This is why most salt is obtained by the evaporation of spring water, as well as the fact that this back breaking work only provided little salt for the locals.

The first rock gourmet salt to be discovered, was the Himalayan salt in 326 BCE. This salt is found in distinctive colours of white, red and pink. The first mine to be harvested is situated in Punjab, in the Pakistan district. This mine starts from Jhelum, and goes all the way to the Indus Rivers, which is about 322 kilometres from the Himalayas. (Bitterman, 2010) The largest mine that stores the biggest supplier of this salt is Khewra, which yields over 362 million kilos of salt each year.

2.3 Gourmet Salts

Gourmet Salts can be described as unrefined salts of high quality. They contain high levels of minerals and can be mixed with herbs, spices or any other flavours.

Flavouring your dish with a gourmet salt, either natural or man-flavoured, will change the taste of the dish tremendously. When working with such salts, experience is key. Every salt has a distinctive water content which effects the texture and the effect it has on the food. (Works, e.d.) With hundreds of salts available, its best to experiment and taste to get the desired outcome. Most salts are best used as finishing salts in order to retain its full flavour. If added at the beginning, the taste may end up being too over powering at the end and unpleasant. These salts have a strong flavour, so when using them, one should make sure to add a small amount and taste.

Example; sprinkling Alaea (Hawaiian Red Salt) on a cooked rib-eye or on a pork loin, which that salt will give the meat an earthy kick

Certain salts can be added when the meat is still raw and used as a dry rub, when doing so, it is important to cook with unsalted butter as to not add more salt to the dish and avoiding over salting.

Example; Rubbing a tuna steak with smoked sea salt before roasting or searing, this will give the tuna a unique taste and touch.

2.4 The Global Salt Market

The gourmet salt market has its highest demand from Europe, mostly from Spain and France, while the second largest demand comes from North America and the Asia Pacific. Fluer de sel is believed to be the most used gourmet salt. North America is estimated to have the biggest growth in gourmet salt demand over the next five years; 2019-2024.

A study done by 'Global Market Insights' (Insights, 2019) shows that the market in 2016 was at USD 1 billion and by 2024 will be at USD 1.5 billion.

Apart from North America, gourmet salts are expected to growth immensely in demand globally. A factor which is affecting this demand is that consumers are becoming more aware of what they should and shouldn't be eating. This is because they are being influenced by social media and are becoming aware of the benefits of such salts. Consumers are seeking a more luxury way of living and so are dining

at fine dining restaurants which will have more use of gourmet salts, thus raising the demand. (Sankrityayan, 2019)

Never the less, the demand will still be limited as gourmet salts are high in prices when compared to conventional salt.

2.5 Health

Salt is made up of sodium chloride and an individual should consume between 1.5 grams to 2.3 grams daily. If a person consumes less than 3 grams daily, there may be negative health issues such as heart disease. (Walle, 2018)

Salt is highly associated with health problems, such as high blood pressure. A person suffering from high blood pressure should not consume more than 7 grams of sodium daily. Because of this association, it is being avoided. A study done by Mark Zoske (Zoske, 2006), shows that natural and unrefined salt is good for a person's health and can only be harmful when it is processed as its natural minerals are lost. Sodium is important for muscle functions and fluid balance in the body (Walle, 2018). If a sea salt is naturally evaporated without adding anything artificial such as additives, the salt maintains all the natural minerals. This will also give different salts a particular taste, colour and crystalizing structure. In this study, Zoske stated that salt is not only healthy but essential as it helps the nutrients to enter the body cells.

A study done by Feieresien (Feiereisen, 2015) supports the same statement. While agreeing that an excessive amount of salt can lead to several complications, consuming the right natural salt has benefits. The most common problem with salt is that the most commonly used salt, known as table salt, has a high amount of sodium chloride added which leads to high blood pressure. Salt which is dried unnaturally, losses all the nutrients while a naturally dried salt will not lose any natural nutrients.

Natural gourmet salts have high levels of trace minerals (micronutrients). They also help with the digestive system and aid in the absorption of nutrients. A deficiency of salt in the diet can lead to heartburn, vomiting and stomach pains. (Axe, 2018)

2.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, not only have we seen the long and complex history of salt, but the author has also found studies to support the fact that salts have important health benefits and can be used in many different ways to create unique and specific flavours. This literature review has also supported the fact that the gourmet salt market is expected to grow immensely in the upcoming years.

A list of different gourmet salts and their uses can be found in the appendices

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Qualitative research focuses on an individual's culture, communication and experience. This gives the research a humanistic approach (Pathak, 2013). It is set to find out 'why' alternately then 'what', which is why the interviews are classified as semi structured interviews.

3.2 Research Design

The research which will be conducted is a qualitative type of research as the author will conduct a one to one interview with chefs working in the catering industry in Malta. This means that it's a primary source of information. This type of research will not give a numeric outcome, for example how many people said no and how many people said yes. Answers would be detailed which will give a more extensive approach to the research being conducted. The number of interviews conducted will be a small number (DeFranzo, 2011) and interviewees are selected carefully. A set of questions were prepared beforehand and all chefs were asked the same questions (Dudovskiy, 2018). Never less, during the interview, additional questions were asked by the interviewer in order to get a more detailed answer and to expand certain answers. The interview will focus on the utilization of gourmet salts in professional kitchens in Malta. Chefs will be asked if they are aware of the availability of these salts on the market and if they have used them during their career in professional kitchens. The interview will highlight the personal opinions of the chefs interviewed. The main finding will be to have a clear view of where the gourmet salt market stands currently in Malta.

3.3 Research Methodology

For the research, the author will interview five chefs in the industry who have a Chef de Partie, Souse chef or Head chef position who work in either high class restaurants or five-star hotels. Restaurants will have more exposure to local clients while hotels will have more exposure to foreign clients. This targeted section was chosen to ensure that they have enough experience in professional kitchens to answer the questions correctly. Since they have had years of experience, there is a big chance they have worked in different professional kitchens and therefore the

answers gathered will be more informative. The questions asked during the interview will be open-ended questions as no pre-constructed answers are prepared (Anon., 2018). The answers will be personal, and the interviewee will be free to express what he/she wants. The finding will be presented using graphs to show the answers that were prepared beforehand. A discussion will also be added to discuss the recommendations and personal opinions of the chefs interviewed, and also to highlight any added information that was gathered during the interview.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

An interview disclaimer form will be handed out to every participant before the interview begins. This will ensure the participant that the information gathered will be handled ethically and will only be used for the long essay. This shall also inform the participations that they will answer the questions out of their own will and can stop the interview at any time if they please.

A copy of the interview disclaimer can be found in the appendix

4.0 Research Findings

4.1 Introduction

This research was done in order to explore more on gourmet salts in relation to the title of the dissertation; ‘Gourmet Salts: Implementation and utilisation in the current trends in the culinary world’.

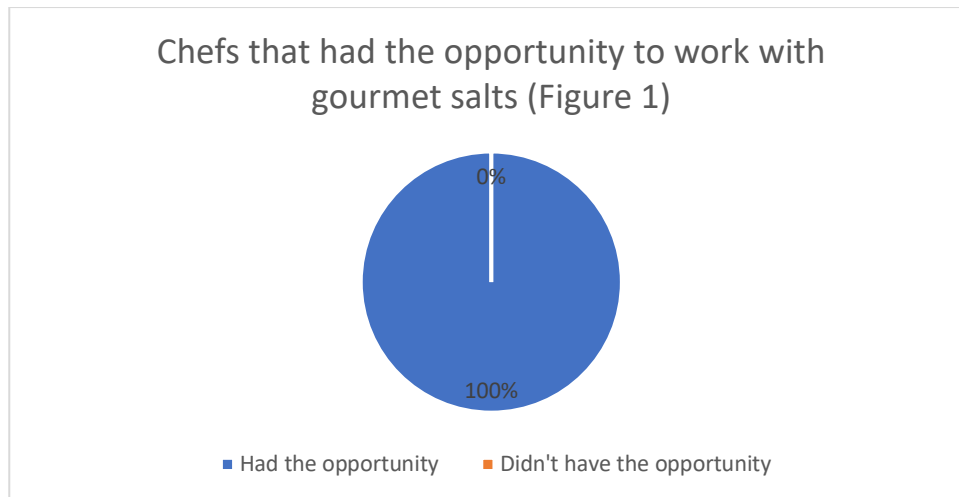
The research was carried out from the point of view and opinions of professional chefs working in the industry with an average of eight and a half years of experience in professional kitchens.

4.2 Awareness of different salts

All the participants interviewed were aware of the vast selection of salts available, although they do not know a lot of these salts by name. The most common known salts amongst them were Himalayan pink salt and Maldon salt. Certain exotic salts like smoked sea salt and Persian blue salt were also mentioned.

4.3 Opportunity

All participants had the opportunity to work with a few different salts (Figure 1). Some chefs even experimented with creating new flavoured salts at the place of work. Others have explained how they made caramel chocolate bars sprinkled with Maldon sea salt. Himalayan salt was found to be used widely along with sea salt, Maldon salt and fleur de sel. This shows that when given the chance, chefs can be very creative and original when adding and using different gourmet salts to their dishes.

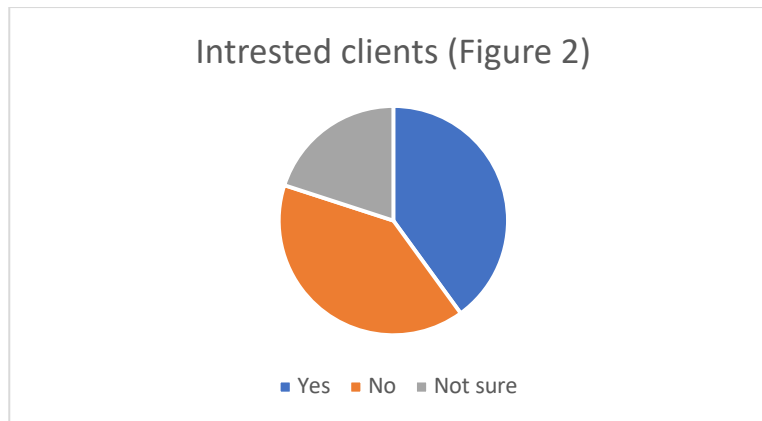


4.4 Interested Clients

When asked if clients would be interested in ordering dishes prepared with a special type of salt, the answers were diverse. To make the question clearer, they were questioned; a rib eye seasoned with Hawaiian Red Salt.

This question was stated to all participants. Stated hereunder are examples of the participants comments;

- Participant one explained that there isn't a demand for such salts in Malta and a client would prefer a good sauce on the side instead.
- Participant one, two and five have all agreed that clients may be interested but it will not be a popular dish on the menu as salt is just considered as a seasoning and clients do not realise the big potential the type of salt used can have on a dish.
- Participant one supported the statement by explained how the participant tried using espresso salt and clients, although curious, were not willing to order such a dish.
- Participants three and participant four argued that now a day's clients are curios, and, in their opinion, such dishes would sell.



4.5 The gourmet salt market

The gourmet salt market is estimated to have the biggest growth in demand over the next five years. The market currently stands at a worth of USD 1 billion and it is estimated to grow to USD 1.5 billion as researched by Sankrityayan and (Sankrityayan, 2019) and ‘Future market insights’ (Anon., 2019)

All the participants agreed that such a growth doesn’t seem likely. They discussed how although they agree that the market will grow, it will take longer than five years, especially in Malta as Maltese clients aren’t willing to pay extra for a dish prepared with a gourmet salt.

Never less, all chefs are looking forward for such a trend to hit the market and talked about how they intend to invest in this market in the future. They also expressed that this trend would be enjoyable for chefs as it opens many new possibilities to different tastes, textures and presentation.

Over all, chefs are more than happy to add gourmet salts to their menu, but they are convinced it will be over five years before they can see a reasonable growth in the gourmet salt market.

4.6 Health

Recent studies have shown that using natural salts have beneficial value for a person’s health. The participants where asked that since clients are becoming more

health conscious, if they think that clients will turn to these natural salts or if they will they continue using the common table salt since it is much cheaper.

Participants explained that clients are interested and willing to try natural salts, but a big percentage will probably keep using the common table salt. This is because two main reasons;

Price; clients got use to salt being a cheap ingredient and to change this culture, it will take time. Even if clients are willing to try different salts, not everyone can afford them, e.g. an average family will see it as an extra cost which they can live without.

Health and awareness; salt is considered a taboo and is considered very bad to a person's health. As explained in the literature review, production salt which has a high amount of sodium chloride added is bad for one's health, but this is not the case with natural evaporated salt. Since there is such a taboo on salt, clients find this hard to believe. The participants expressed how there needs to be much more awareness on gourmet salts and their benefit on a person's health. If clients become aware of this, the gourmet salt market will increase.

4.7 Gourmet Salts in professional Kitchens

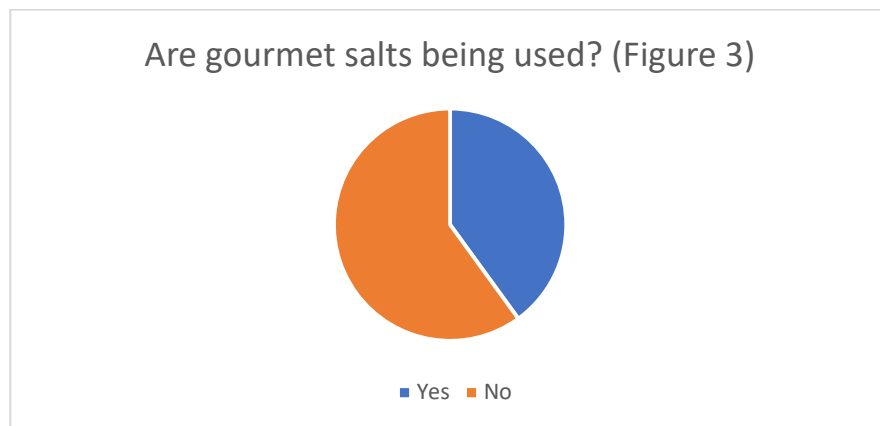
The participants were asked if different types of salts are being used in professional kitchens in Malta (Figure 3).

From talking to the participants, the author has seen that chefs in Malta are more than willing to work and create dishes using gourmet salts. Participant one explained that chefs in Malta are open to using new and different ingredients. It also depends on the taste of the head chef and he/she is in charge of creating the menu.

The problem the participants encounter, is that clients don't look for such salts and therefor sales are not high. The few kitchens which are using gourmet salts are fine dining restaurant and brasseries as they have a higher demand for different and uncommon ingredients.

Some well known salts like Himalayan salt and Maldon salt are used extensively over the island and therefore some participants argued that gourmet salts are indeed being used.

To conclude, the use of gourmet salts in professional kitchens in Malta is still very scarce. The reason that such salts aren't being used is because clients will not be interested in ordering such dishes even though the chefs would like to experiment adding gourmet salts to their dishes.



4.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen that chefs are looking forward for the growth of the gourmet salt market and it will open many opportunities to create new dishes and tastes. In spite of that, participants are convinced that such a growth will take a much longer time to happen than the estimated five years. We have also seen that clients will not believe that salt can be beneficial to their health and will not be willing to pay a higher price for salt. (Anon., 2018)

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 Research objectives

To conclude this dissertation, we go back the title used; ‘Gourmet Salts: Implementation and Utilisation in the current trends in the culinary world’. This researched is aimed to identify if gourmet salts are being used and implemented in Maltese kitchens.

The conclusive evidence shows that gourmet salts are barely being implemented in professional Maltese kitchens, the few salts that are being used are Himalayan, Maldon and rock salt. Supplies and shops do not market gourmet salts.

It shows that gourmet salts are not a current trend due to lack of interest from clients. Never less, chefs in the industry hope to see and believe that there will be an increase of demand in the future years.

5.2 Recommendations

The author recommends that more information and awareness on gourmet salts needs to be available. This is important as clients will not change their minds about salt easily. If clients start to use such salts instead of common table salt, it can also increase their health and thus a better quality of life.

Besides having benefits to health (Revelant, 2019), if the gourmet salt market rises as expected (Hegde, 2019), it will be an open door to many new and exciting tastes and flavours. This is will also give chefs new opportunities to experiment and create new dishes using these different salts.

A second recommendation is that further research is conducted which focuses on the client’s point of view. The research done was focused on chefs and their opinion, hence, from this research we have seen that chefs are willing to follow such a trend, but the clients are not willing to partake. Therefore, a follow up research focusing on the clients and their opinions is strongly recommended, which will aid to identify the factors why clients aren’t as willing to explore this trend.

5.3 Conclusion

To conclude, in this dissertation we have seen that salt has a great and rich history. Its importance continued during the years as we have seen in the literature review. We have witnessed how the salt market has developed through the years and how it always had a big importance. Finally, we have seen where the gourmet salt market stands today, at a market value of one billion USD (Hegde, 2017), and is expected to be at a value of one billion and five-hundred million USD by 2024.

The concluding factors indicate that the salt market is always growing, and such a growth will not stop. Although, from this research, it was found that gourmet salts are not a trend in this moment in time in Malta, it will certainly be in the future. (McCombes, 2019)

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7.0 Appendices

7.1 A list of different gourmet salts and their uses

Gourmets salts and their uses			
Salt Name	Known As	Information	Uses
Sea Salt		Sea salt has a coarser grain than common table salt. It contains many minerals such as iron, zinc and potassium. This salt is found in salt pans after natural evaporation of seawater. (Hansen, 2018)	It can be used with any type of food and the same as table salt
Kala Namak	<i>Indian Black Salt</i>	This is an unrefined type of salt which contains many minerals. It has a grey pink colour and a strong sulphur flavour. Used mostly in Indian dishes and to give an egg flavour to vegan dishes. (Parsons, 2019)	Used in Indian dishes, tofu scrambled eggs and chutneys
Himalayan Pink Salt	<i>Pink crystal salt</i>	This salt is harvested from Khewra (a salt mine in Pakistan). It is found in the Mountains of Himalayan which is where this salt got its name. It has a mild flavour which doesn't overpower the dish but gives a particular flavour. It contains eighty-four minerals. (DiSanti, 2018)	Used as a finishing salt for pasta, salads, soups and vegetables
Fleur de Sel	<i>Caviar of salts, Flower of salt</i>	Being one of the finest salts available, it is harvested by hand using wooden utensils and only once a year (during summer). It is only made in Gu��r��nde (France). (Bowers, e.d.)	Perfect to finish a salad and other light dishes such as fish

Hawaiian Sea Salt	<i>Black Hawaiian Salt</i>	This salt is used to create a diversity of colours as this salt is either red or black. It gives a dish an earthy flavour.	Finishing salt or as a rub for meat
Kosher Salt	<i>Coarse salt</i>	Kosher salt a very particular type of salt which has been certified by the Orthodox Union (OU). This salt has an absence of iodine and has larger crystals than other salts.	Used for everyday cooking by Jews
Smoked Sea Salt		This salt is man made by slow smoking salt for about two weeks. The type of wood used (e.g. oak, apple or hickory) will determine the taste of the salt. The colour of the salt alters from different shades of brown. It gives food a smoky wood taste. (Anon., e.d.)	Used to flavour meat and vegetables for an extra kick Also used in caramel desserts
<i>Celery Salt</i>		This salt is made by blending celery seed and sea salt. It gives a herbal and fresh touch to dishes. (Meyer, e.d.)	Used with dressings, soups and marinade Used in Bloody Marys for an extra kick

7.2 Questionnaire Disclaimer

I would like to sincerely thank you for allotting some of your time to participate in my interview, your contribution will greatly help my research. The information which will be collated by this questionnaire will be treated with the strictest confidentiality, considering, all the necessary ethical considerations. The information submitted, shall solely be used for compilation of my dissertation. This research has been approved by the Institute of Tourism Studies Board.

By signing this form, you understand that:

1. You are answering the questions voluntarily and you can stop the interview if you would like
2. You have read the information above

Participants Signature

Date

Students Signature

Date

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7.3 Interview Sample

- How long have you been working in the catering industry? What is your current working position in the kitchen?
- Are you aware of the different salts available on the market? If yes, can you name some salts you are familiar with?
- While working in professional kitchens, have you had the opportunity to work with these salts?
- Do you think clients would be interested in ordering dishes prepared with a special type of salt? For example, a rib eye seasoned with Hawaiian Red Salt.
- The gourmet salt market is estimated to have the biggest growth in demand over the next five years. What is your opinion on this statement?
- Recent studies have shown that using natural salts have beneficial value for a person's health. Since clients are becoming more health conscious, do you think that they will turn to these natural salts or will they continue using the common table salt since it is much cheaper?
- In your opinion, are different types of salts being used in professional kitchens in Malta, or is the use of such salts still very scarce?

7.4 Interview 1

- How long have you been working in the catering industry? What is your current working position in the kitchen?

12 years, Executive Sous chef of a five star hotel

- Are you aware of the different salts available on the market? If yes, can you name some salts you are familiar with?

Yes, Fleur de sel, Maldon sea salt, Himalayan pink salt, fine salt, local (Malta) sea salts, kosher salts, lavender salt

- While working in professional kitchens, have you had the opportunity to work with these salts?

I have used Fleur de sel and Maldon salt many times in the professional kitchens. Currently we make lavender salt ourselves and serve it alongside portioned butter

- Do you think clients would be interested in ordering dishes prepared with a special type of salt? For example, a rib eye seasoned with Hawaiian Red Salt.

There isn't much of a demand for it in Malta. Recently we have made espresso salt and used it as a rub for meat, although the clients liked the taste not many were willing and excited to try it. I strongly believe that a client would prefer a good sauce on the side, and to keep the natural flavour of the meat

- The gourmet salt market is estimated to have the biggest growth in demand over the next five years.

What is your opinion on this statement?

I am sure that this is not the case in Malta and it will take longer than five years to be a trend here. If it happens, I would invest in this trend

- Recent studies have shown that using natural salts have beneficial value for a person's health. Since clients are becoming more health conscious, do you think that they will turn to these natural salts or will they continue using the common table salt since it is much cheaper?

People have a strong believe that salt is very bad for your health, if there is more awareness on gourmet salts and how they are beneficial to their health I think people would be willing to buy and try these salts

- In your opinion, are different types of salts being used in professional kitchens in Malta, or is the use of such salts still very scarce?

The chefs in Malta are open minded and are open to using new and different ingredients. But I think that clients don't look for the use of gourmet salts and therefor they aren't being used often

7.5 Interview 2

- How long have you been working in the catering industry? What is your current working position in the kitchen?

8 years, Executive head chef at a 4 star restaurant

- Are you aware of the different salts available on the market? If yes, can you name some salts you are familiar with?

Yes, Maldon sea salt, Himalayan pink salt, smoked sea salt, Persian blue salt, fine salt, red wine salt

- While working in professional kitchens, have you had the opportunity to work with these salts?

Yes, I have worked with Himalayan pink salt and natural sea salts. I have prepared all kinds of food using these salts, such as caramel chocolate bars sprinkled with Maldon sea salt as a dessert

- Do you think clients would be interested in ordering dishes prepared with a special type of salt? For example, a rib eye seasoned with Hawaiian Red Salt.

I don't think clients will care what seasoning you would use, because they don't know there are different types of salts and for them salt is salt

- The gourmet salt market is estimated to have the biggest growth in demand over the next five years.

What is your opinion on this statement?

I don't think that this statement is true. I believe that the gourmet salt market will grow but it will take longer than five years, especially in Malta

- Recent studies have shown that using natural salts have beneficial value for a person's health. Since clients are becoming more health conscious, do you think that they will turn to these natural salts or will they continue using the common table salt since it is much cheaper?

I think that about 30% of the Maltese population will continue using cheap salts but about 70% will be willing to try natural salts. I believe that the biggest problem is that clients will not believe that it has health benefits.

- In your opinion, are different types of salts being used in professional kitchens in Malta, or is the use of such salts still very scarce?

Certain restaurants are using them but we (Maltese restaurants and hotels) are still lacking their use. The main restaurants that use these salts are fine dining restaurant and brasseries. It mainly depends on the head chef, as he creates the menu and it depends on his taste

7.6 Interview 3

- How long have you been working in the catering industry? What is your current working position in the kitchen?

7 years, pastry chef de Partie

- Are you aware of the different salts available on the market? If yes, can you name some salts you are familiar with?

Yes, Himalayan pink salt, Pele red Hawaiian salt, Fleur de Sal

- While working in professional kitchens, have you had the opportunity to work with these salts?

Yes

- Do you think clients would be interested in ordering dishes prepared with a special type of salt? For example, a rib eye seasoned with Hawaiian Red Salt.

Yes, because nowadays clients are curious and would like to try new food

- The gourmet salt market is estimated to have the biggest growth in demand over the next five years.

What is your opinion on this statement?

I don't think that the salt market will grow that much, since not many professional kitchens are using these salts. This is because they are expensive to buy and will raise the price of the dish which the client may not be willing to pay

- Recent studies have shown using natural salts have beneficial value for a person's health. Since clients are becoming more health conscious, do you think that they will turn to these natural salts or will they continue using the common table salt since it is much cheaper?

I believe that families which are middle class or low class will definitely continue using table salt, because Maltese people aren't willing to spend a lot of money on salt. I believe that there isn't enough awareness on this

- In your opinion, are different types of salts being used in professional kitchens in Malta, or is the use of such salts still very scarce?

I believe it is scarce because not all chefs are aware of these salts and that they are available

7.7 Interview 4

- How long have you been working in the catering industry? What is your current working position in the kitchen?

8 years, Head Chef of a restaurant in a 5 star hotel

- Are you aware of the different salts available on the market? If yes, can you name some salts you are familiar with?

Yes, I know sea salt, Himalayan pink salt, kosher salt and Hawaiian salt

- While working in professional kitchens, have you had the opportunity to work with these salts?

I was given Hawaiian salt by a friend and I have once used smoked salt. I have used Himalayan, kosher and sea salt at work often

- Do you think clients would be interested in ordering dishes prepared with a special type of salt? For example, a rib eye seasoned with Hawaiian Red Salt.

Of course, it would give the rib eye a unique Hawaiian taste and style. I think that clients would try the ribeye steak as now a days clients are interested in trying new tastes, not just the typical salt and pepper. It is also a trend.

- The gourmet salt market is estimated to have the biggest growth in demand over the next five years.

What is your opinion on this statement?

I think that such a growth would be good as many of us (chefs) are using and enjoy using different kinds of flavoured granules for cooking. I would be happy if such growth happens and I believe it will, as it will give many new taste possibilities

- Recent studies have shown that using natural salts have beneficial value for a person's health. Since clients are becoming more health conscious, do you think that they will turn to these natural salts or will they continue using the common table salt since it is much cheaper?

I hope that clients will start to appreciate more the taste of these salts. I think there needs to be more awareness, as clients are willing to try dishes with gourmet salt but it won't be very popular

- In your opinion, are different types of salts being used in professional kitchens in Malta, or is the use of such salts still very scarce?

Yes, where I'm working now, we are using different salts

7.8 Interview 5

- How long have you been working in the catering industry? What is your current working position in the kitchen?

7 years, Chef de Partie in a five star hotel

- Are you aware of the different salts available on the market? If yes, can you name some salts you are familiar with?

Himalayan salt, Maldon salt, Hawaiian salt and smoked salt

- While working in professional kitchens, have you had the opportunity to work with these salts?

I've worked with Himalayan pink salt and Maldon salt, but not frequently

- Do you think clients would be interested in ordering dishes prepared with a special type of salt? For example, a rib eye seasoned with Hawaiian Red Salt.

I think they would be interested in trying new tastes but for Maltese clients, salt is just salt and they might not care what type of salt is used

- The gourmet salt market is estimated to have the biggest growth in demand over the next five years.

What is your opinion on this statement?

I agree that the salt market will have a big growth but, in my opinion, it will take more than five years for such a growth

- Recent studies have shown that using natural salts have beneficial value for a person's health. Since clients are becoming more health conscious, do you think that they will turn to these natural salts or will they continue using the common table salt since it is much cheaper?

I think that certain people who can afford it will definitely turn to these salts. But an average family will not, as there is a big difference in the price. They will not pay five times the price for a different salt

- In your opinion, are different types of salts being used in professional kitchens in Malta, or is the use of such salts still very scarce?

Some basic and well known ones like Himalayan is being used, though more exotic ones like Hawaiian salt are still very scarce