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FEASTS

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Produced by TSVP Productions & ARTE France

6x26'

SYNOPSIS

In every society, meals reveal aspects of our history, our values, and the way we live together. Hosted by anthropologist Anne-Sylvie Malbrancke, Feasts takes us to six countries to discover a grand traditional banquet.

Each episode features a feast serving as the thread that weaves together an immersive journey into the heart of a culture. By following those who prepare the dishes, farm the animals, grow the produce, or serve the guests, Anne-Sylvie takes us to get a glimpse of the traditions and imagination hidden behind every plate.

In Kyrgyzstan, feasts reveal the subtle codes of hospitality and hierarchy inherited from the nomadic world. In Iceland, they showcase the memory of a people who have learned to transform the challenges of an extreme environment into culinary traditions. In Bolivia, they celebrate sharing and solidarity by bringing the community together around a common cause. In India, Georgia, and Indonesia, other shared meals, in turn, reveal worldviews and relationships to the sacred, to family, to the community, and to ancestors.

From preparing dishes to sharing them, each episode shows how feasts are much more than just moments of togetherness. They are occasions where an entire people’s founding narratives are reenacted, where a sense of belonging is reinforced, and where collective values are passed down.



NOTE OF INTENT

In this series, we explore a people and a community through a traditional feast, viewing the meal as a complete ritual. It is a marker that relates to identity, otherness, culture, art, and religion. As Lévi-Strauss wrote, “We always and first of all eat symbols”: each food carries within it rules and prohibitions, positions us culturally, and places us within a social order.

The series will combine sensory pleasures with insights into and exploration of world cultures across six different countries: Iceland, Kyrgyzstan, Bolivia, India, Georgia, and Indonesia. Each episode will center on three dishes, beverages, or foods and their preparation, which will ultimately be shared by all our characters during the feast. In each episode, Anne-Sylvie will lift the veil on what goes on behind the scenes of a grand traditional meal—chosen not for its folklore but for what it reveals about the locals and their history.

THE EPISODES

KYRGYZSTAN

The Codes of Hospitality are Found in the Dish

In Kyrgyzstan, a land of steppes and mountains shaped by a long nomadic history, hospitality is much more than just a moral virtue. It is a true social system, governed by specific rules that structure relationships between individuals, families, and communities. Anne-Sylvie is invited to attend a pivotal event: the official meeting between two families prior to a wedding. Through this feast, she discovers how food becomes a language in which every gesture, every drink, and every piece of meat conveys something about each person’s place in the community.

In many societies, feasts serve to foster a sense of community. In Kyrgyzstan, they do even more: they classify, establish hierarchies, honor, and pacify relationships. The banquet serves to highlight the bonds that unite individuals: the respect due to elders, relationships between men and women, family authority, obligations of hospitality, and alliances between families.



ICELAND

The Resilience of a People, Served on a Plate

Every winter, during Þorrablót, the major traditional Icelandic festival, guests enjoy foods that often leave foreign visitors astonished: fermented shark, ram testicles preserved in whey, sheep's heads, and black bread baked using geothermal heat from underground.

These dishes are more than just culinary oddities. They tell a story: that of a people who had to learn to live in one of Europe's most hostile environments. Anne-Sylvie Malbrancke sets out to meet the people who carry on these culinary traditions, to understand what they reveal about Icelandic identity today.

Þorrablót thus appears as a vast mechanism of memory. A modern society, largely free from the hardships that gave rise to it, continues to reenact the rituals, tastes, and trials of its past to remind itself of who it is. By sharing these foods, Icelanders do more than simply celebrate their history: each year, they reaffirm an identity built on the ability to turn scarcity into abundance, distaste into tradition, and survival into culture.





BOLIVIA

Eating to Bring The Community Together

Apthapi is an ancestral communal meal of the Aymara people of Bolivia. The concept is simple: everyone brings food to share. Reciprocity is at the heart of this feast.

Everyone arrives with a portion of their harvest. The food is placed on the awayo—a long traditional cloth spread directly on the ground—which gradually forms a communal table. Here, no one feeds the group alone. The rule is that everyone brings what they can but helps themselves until they are full, and if there is any food left over, it is distributed to everyone to be eaten later. As the foods are mixed together, they erase hierarchies and serve as a reminder that community is built through collective action and sharing.

More than just a meal, apthapi is a celebration of collective strength and seals everyone’s commitment to a common cause. The meal is also an opportunity to discuss and debate in an open and relaxed atmosphere, without social distinctions. Seated around the awayo, everyone has the right to eat, debate, and have fun.

INDIA

Eating Symbols

If there’s one country where symbolism reigns supreme, it’s India. This symbolism reflects a way of thinking, a social structure, and beliefs—and, of course, it’s reflected on the plate as well. In this episode, Anne-Sylvie will attend a feast organized for the annaprashana of a little boy named Priya. This meal will symbolically mark his introduction into his community. The menu will include manjal sadam, a dish believed to bring good luck; paruppu usili, prepared in accordance with the symbolic customs of his caste; and finally, kheer, a dessert that will symbolically separate him from his mother.

What this traditional Indian feast tells us is that food is never merely something to be eaten. It carries a moral, cosmic, or social significance. Turmeric symbolizes protection; vegetables, purity; and rice pudding, belonging to a group. Eating or offering these foods, therefore, is not merely about feeding the body: it is about passing on a symbolic blessing.



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GEORGIA

Eating to Celebrate Life

In Georgia, there is a feast that gives thanks to the earth, shares abundance, and reminds us that feeding ourselves always depends on other forms of life. In this episode, Anne-Sylvie will set out to discover the feast known as Supra, held during Rtveli, the grape harvest festival that takes place every year in September or October, depending on the region. In this episode, we'll come to understand that eating also means acknowledging that human life depends on a network of relationships: the earth, plants, animals, rain, the sun, human labor, and the community.

During Supra, therefore, we don't just eat to celebrate the work being done; we eat to acknowledge that the vine has yielded its fruit, that the sun has ripened it, that humans have guided this process, and that fermentation will now continue the work of life. The grapes picked that morning aren't yet wine, but they're already in the process of becoming it. The banquet takes place precisely at this turning point: the moment when the harvested produce of nature becomes part of culture.

INDONESIA

Eating to forgive

In many societies, forgiveness is not merely an internal or moral decision. It must be enacted, and food often serves as a mediator. Where words may fall short, a meal opens up an emotional pathway: we welcome the other person, we feed them, and we agree to eat with them. This is the purpose of the Lebaran feast—the Indonesian name for Eid al-Fitr, the holiday marking the end of Ramadan—which Anne-Sylvie will attend to conclude this series. In Indonesia, and particularly in Java, it goes far beyond simply breaking the fast. It is a meal of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Lebaran teaches us that food is not merely a reward after fasting; it is the visible sign of a world restored to order. After a month of spiritual discipline, the meal becomes a social prayer: everyone returns to God, but also to their loved ones, purified of their sins.



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