



# Australian Taxation Office

## The joy of food bringing people together at the ATO

With a strong policy of inclusion, the ATO has been involved in Harmony Day for many years. But when Site Coordinator for the Perth Office, Ken Thomas, stumbled upon A Taste of Harmony, he knew he'd found a winning event that would celebrate the cultural diversity of the organisation's staff in a fun and engaging way.

As a self-confessed foodie, Ken already knew that food was a great way to bring people together, so naturally he was thrilled with an event that resulted in conference rooms awash with the colour and aromas of dishes lovingly prepared by his colleagues.

We spoke to Ken about how he got involved and why he can't wait to start planning next year's A Taste of Harmony event.

## Why did you choose to take part in A Taste of Harmony?

Being a lover of food myself and growing up with Maltese and Italian neighbours I was lucky to have an early introduction to international cuisines. The idea of an international food fair appealed to my taste buds and while researching this I found the A Taste of Harmony website. It had lots of ideas and useful tools to organise our event. And I was on my way!

## How did the event work?

Once we decided on an A Taste of Harmony event, every staff member in the building was invited to attend. We invited teams to band together by hosting food stalls to help showcase their diverse backgrounds. This was interpreted differently

by different staff with some teams focused on a certain culture, while others decided to showcase their different cooking skills. Either way, great pride in cultural heritage and tradition were evident in the wonderful contributions.

## Your event was large in size. How did you get the word out and coordinate the activity?

We launched the event months in advance via our weekly staff update. Noticeboard posters were displayed in all breakout rooms and screens in our common rooms were also used to promote the event. A registration page was set up for participants and the event was promoted by Site Leaders. There was also a display set up to inspire staff.

## Tell us about some of the food at the International Food Fair!

We had over 60 dishes on the day with 12 stalls brightly decorated throughout our conference rooms. Fabulous dishes included Indian samosa, pork gyoza, guacomole and corn chips, chicken biriyani and raita, Malaysian crepes with curry sauce, Guinness casseroles, Scottish shortbread and scones with jam and cream.

## What did you bring?

My dish was homemade vanilla slice. I am chuffed to say it has become well known and very popular with our staff. Whenever I bring it in it's gone within minutes.

## Did you use any resources from the website?

The flag generator was a great tool and we used this when decorating the rooms on the day. Posters and food tags were also used to identify the variety of dishes that had been prepared.

## Why is celebrating cultural diversity important in your workplace and in a government agency?

The ATO is a diverse organisation and by embracing our differences we support everyone to realise their true potential. By building an inclusive workplace, we promote improved productivity, greater creativity and innovation as well as an increase in employee wellbeing and engagement.

## What benefits did you see from your employees taking part in an A Taste of Harmony event?

This event was an opportunity not only to taste different foods from around the world, but for staff to interact and hear stories of differing cultures and food traditions. The event proved that food really brings people together in starting conversations and finding commonality. It also connected staff from a variety of different business areas in a fun and relaxed environment.

## Are there any particular stories of staff that you remember that you can share?

We had a winning dish of the day – Malaysian Crepes with Curry Sauce – made by an employee from our mail room. She was ecstatic and emotional as it was a family recipe that had been handed down through the generations from her great-great-grandmother!



EVERYONE BELONGS

HARMONY DAY  
EVERYONE BELONGS

A Taste of Harmony

