

Gastro Tourism and Developing Tourism Destination

Indumathi C

MBA, Department of Management Studies

Bharath Institute of Science and Technology,

Selaipur, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600 073

Bharath Institute of Higher Education and Research

ABSTRACT

Gastro tourism can be regarded as a form of niche or alternative tourism and as a result of growing competition and a change in traveler wants in terms of destination exploration, is now more often being included as a new or additional sector in the travel and tourism business. This situation affords gastro tourism the opportunity to be an important source of marketable images and experiences for the tourist, reinforcing the competitiveness and sustainability of the destination (Quan & Wang, 2003). The food and tourism industries benefit from this interaction, as local and regional food products become an important means of selling the identity and culture of a destination and enables food producers to add value to their products by creating a tourism experience around the raw materials. This paper outlines the key components of a proposed framework and the supportive tools that have been developed and tested with regard to developing and implementing gastro tourism as an attraction in a destination. It additionally postulates guidelines and recommendations for the development, packaging and marketing of local and regional foods.

Key Words: Gastro tourism, food, destination, local, regional

1. INTRODUCTION

Gastro-tourism, a niche that attracts billions in revenue and tourists worldwide, involves intentional pursuits of authentic memorable culinary experiences while travelling internationally, regionally or locally. For gastro-tourists, food is the motivation for travel; the locations merely functions as vehicles for gastronomic experiences such as food-related-activities that involve behind-the-scenes observations, cultural or regional illuminations and often hands-on participation, culminating in partaking food or drink. This article analyses the three phases of travel and corresponding elements essential for the creation of new gastro tourism enterprises. Food is considered as a reflection of the culture of a country and its people. Food is the ideal product to offer as an attraction in a destination and has many possibilities to be used as a marketing tool. Several authors have reflected on food and wine as an expression of place and how it is used to market a destination. This paper capturing the multitude of definitions and descriptions that characterize of the international food-related tourist industry segment within the broadest of tourism field. Food-related tourism refers to trips made to destinations where local food and beverages are the main motivating factors for all or part of the travel. In its broadest sense, gastro-tourism is defined as the intentional pursuit of appealing, authentic, memorable, culinary experiences of all kinds, while travelling internationally, regionally or even locally. The nature and quality of the gastro-experience is what matters the most. A Gastro-experience is an authentic, memorable, food- or beverage-related activity that involves behind-the-scenes observations accompanied with cultural or regional illuminations,

and often hands-on participation, that culminates in festive, casual, or formal partaking of food or drink.

GASTRO TOURISM

Gastro tourism is one of the offerings of a destination that can enhance existing tourism products, as it fits the definition of being an amalgam of individual products, services and experience opportunities. As an offering food tourism is a compilation of products and services of most of the attractions and resources as portrayed in the literature. Gastro tourism is an amalgam of natural features, culture, services, infrastructure, access, attitudes toward tourists and uniqueness. It can enhance the total experience of the destination even further as it is the only product that can be experienced using all the human senses, therefore deepening the tourism experience even more. According to Quan and Wang (2003), food tourism holds several implications such as: adding value to agricultural products; providing a theme to build up attractions; utilizing culture of foods as a food related event; incorporating food into mega events; and enhancing the local identity for destination marketing and development, therefore local and regional foods should not be regarded as trivial and ignored in tourism marketing. Food as a tourism product and experience can contribute to the competitiveness of the destination if appropriately developed and executed. Food is considered as 'an expression of a society and its way of life' (Kaspar, 1986:14), which is verified by Boniface (2003), who regards culture, both past and present, as an inevitable part of food tourism. Long (1998) accentuates the fact that food or culinary tourism is a sensory experience utilizing all the senses therefore making it central to the tourism experience.

- Tikkanen (2007) had identified five distinct motivations with respect to culinary travelers:
- Food itself is viewed as an attraction
- Foodstuffs are products that culinary tourists consume and purchase
- Food experiences are valued and sought
- Food is viewed and valued as a cultural phenomenon linkages between tourism and food production are sought and value

Experiencing authentic food through interesting, educational, enriching hands-on gastro-experiences becomes the focus and the inspiration for individual travellers, yet specific gastro-experiences are selected based upon unique personal preferences and distinct motivations.

FOOD TOURISM AND DESTINATION MARKETING

Food is seldom the key reason for visiting a destination and most often is considered as part of the overall destination experience. However, food is becoming one of the most important attractions as tourists seek new and authentic experiences and alternative forms of tourism. It is this very paradox that is creating the opportunity for food tourism to become an important and appealing attraction in a destination. The place or location is just the vehicle, or the backdrop, for experiencing authentic food in meaningful ways. Although Destination Branding in this tourist segment may look very different from country-to-country or town-to-town, this preliminary research suggests that it is possible to ignite a successful culinary tourism business. The destination can enhance the appeal of its resources and attractions by marketing them correctly by Crouch & Ritchie, 1999. This would include product development, packaging, positioning and the promotion of the attraction. Food tourism is regarded as one of the attractions offered in a destination and can therefore constitute part of the destination marketing

strategy of a destination. From the preceding perspectives it is apparent that destination marketing and food tourism are linked. No destination can therefore afford to ignore the importance of food as either a key or more often a supportive attraction.

2. BENEFITS OF LOCAL FOOD

Local and regional food as one of the important components of food tourism holds great potential to contribute to sustainable competitiveness in a destination, both from a tourism development and a destination marketing perspective. The promotion of local and regional food is an effective way of supporting and strengthening the tourism and agricultural sectors of local economies by: preserving culinary heritage and adding value to the authenticity of the destination; broadening and enhancing the local and regional tourism resource base; and stimulating agricultural production. The development of a framework and guidelines for developing and implementing food tourism can enable destination marketers and current and prospective entrepreneurs to optimize the tourism potential of local and regional food. Boyne et al. (2003) reinforce the need for a framework to enable the stakeholders to cooperate and achieve the effective implementation of marketing strategies regarding food tourism.

This preliminary research suggests that it is possible to ignite a successful culinary tourism business with:

- Minimal adjustments to a few necessary, but considerably basic infrastructures such as health and safety, transportation and communication
- A freely structured spattering of home resources and rich talent
- An organized and marketed unique promise or brand
- An ongoing feedback process that monitors tourist and stakeholder satisfaction during all three travel phases regarding the shared brand promise.

Most importantly, the co-dependent aspects of all stakeholders must be recognized, embraced and reflected in the marketing and implementation of the gastro-tourism brand promise.

3. CONCLUSION

A Gastro-experience is an authentic, memorable, food- or beverage-related activity that involves behind-the-scenes observations accompanied with cultural or regional illuminations, and often hands-on participation, that culminates in festive, casual, or formal partaking of food or drink. Food remains the star attraction, actually replacing location as the destination brand. Gastro-tourism refers to the intentional pursuit of appealing, authentic, memorable culinary experiences of all kinds, while travelling internationally, regionally or even locally. Emerging markets in underdeveloped countries as well as underdeveloped pockets in developed nations can become gastro-tourism destinations for travelers who yearn for intimate cultural immersion through authentic food adventures. The place or location is just the vehicle, or the backdrop, for experiencing authentic food in meaningful ways. Although Destination Branding in this tourist segment may look very different from country-to-country or town-to-town, this preliminary research suggests that it is possible to ignite a successful culinary tourism business.

4. REFERENCES

- [1] Cohen, E. and Avieli, N. (2004) Food in tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research* 31, 755-78.
- [2] Corigliano, M.A. (2002) The route to quality: Italian gastronomy networks in operation. In A. Hjalager and G. Richards *Tourism and Gastronomy*. London: Routledge.
- [3] Crouch, G.L and Ritchie, J.R.B. (1999) Tourism, competitiveness and social prosperity. *Journal of Business Research* 44, 137-52
- [4] Du Rand, G.E., Heath, E. and Alberts, N. (2003) The role of local and regional food in destination marketing: A South African situation analysis. *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing* 14, 97-112.
- [5] Kivela, J. and Crofts, R. (2006) 'Tourism and gastronomy: gastronomy's influence on how tourists experience a destination', *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, Vol. 3, No. 30, pp.354-377.
- [6] Long, L.M. (Ed.) (1998) 'Culinary Tourism: Eating and Otherness', Special Issue of *Southern Folklore*, Vol. 55, No. 3, pp.181-204.
- [7] Long, L.M. (Ed.) (2004) *Culinary Tourism*, The University Press of Kentucky, Lexington Kentucky, USA.
- [8] Sims, R. (2009) 'Food, place and authenticity: local food and the sustainable tourism experience', *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp.321-336.
- [9] Tikkanen, I. (2007) 'Maslow's hierarchy and food tourism in Finland: five cases', *British Food Journal*, Vol. 109, No. 9, pp.721-734.