



The Impact of Local Food on the Development of Gastronomy Tourism: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

Objective/Purpose/Rationale of the Study: Local food has received a huge tourism attraction and become an integral part in tourism experience, well recognized and studied by many hospitality and tourism scholars. Local food has now become an important stream of special interest tourism. Gastronomy tourism is one of the emanate concepts in the tourism sector. The experience of the culture that food belongs to also directs tourists to a region that makes food an essential attraction for tourism. Therefore, gastronomic pleasure is a crucial factor in choosing a travel destination.

Research Design/Methodology: Providing the scarcity of research on local food & gastronomic tourism, this research is exploratory by nature which focuses on the impact of local food to show how local food can contribute a major role in the development of Gastronomy tourism. Both the primary as well as secondary source of data are taken into consideration in order to extract the required and suitable data out of it. Primary source of data including a structured questionnaire survey among Culinary graduates, Chef, local cooks and Academicians. Secondary source of data focused on extensive literature review.

Overview of Findings/trends: The findings of this research showed that gastronomy tourism is influenced by the existence of local culture which includes the availability of food ingredients, religion, beliefs, and the nature of flavors formed by social & local culture. This study showed contribution to the development of gastronomy tourism. Gastronomy tourism can stimulate national, regional and local economic growth and development also by increasing employment opportunities, attracting foreign direct investment, and earning foreign currency.

Keywords: Gastronomy Tourism, Local Food, Local Culture, Tourist, Food & Beverage.

1. Introduction

In today's world, food is one of the important physical needs and in relation with the developing tourism and hotel industry, has led to the emergence of a sector that includes leisure time activities and are desired to be met outside. Majority of tourists, irrespective of the accommodations at which they are staying provide food and beverages services or not, prefer to eat outside; and get to know and explore the taste of the local food and new cultural experiences. For such authentic experiences as tasting local food which is made of those ingredients only available in

that specific region are the main decisive reasons for tourists' preferences to visit the destination (Sormaz et al., 2016). Food tourism researchers and tourism studies have greatly benefited from the tourist perspective, as it has brought increasing attention to the versatility of food tourism in contributing to the socio-cultural and environmental aspects of tourism. Understanding food tourism experiences requires a connection to the local foodscape, as these experiences primarily represent the local environments, people, and their stories through food. The foodscape is a dynamic social construction that links food to

specific places, people, and meanings. It constantly evolves alongside food choices, eating habits, and other factors that influence our relationship with food. Additionally, food tourism has played a significant role in shaping the local foodscape, influencing the local gastronomic culture and environment as a tourism resource. Local food presents the local lifestyle, local culture and the authentic taste of the destination. Local foods are the decisive factors for choosing the travel path, act as a motive for visiting the destination that keep the local food come in the center criteria of the gastronomy tourism development plan and promote that destination. Local food is self-correlated with the destination itself. Food acts as a vital component of the local culture and shows the background, local eating habits of a custom of society or destinations (AWASTHI et al., 2020).

In this context, there are critical research gaps that need attention. Firstly, the relevance of Gastronomy tourism to the local food remains unknown, despite extensive focus on the local gastronomic attributes from a marketing perspective. Understanding the interaction between tourists and local suppliers is crucial for comprehending the ongoing process of constructing the gastronomy destination. Secondly, the impact of local food tourism activities on gastronomy tourism has been neglected. While food experiences are considered an integral part of the overall destination experience, most research has focused on non-organized travel activities and individual choices, overlooking the rapid growth of established commercial activities such as custom dining, eating with local families, cooking classes, market tours, farm tours, and street food tours.

Therefore, this research aims to explore the impact of local food on the development of Gastronomy Tourism.

The objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the role of local food in shaping the development and growth of gastronomy tourism.
2. To identify the key factors and attributes of local food that contribute to the attractiveness and appeal of gastronomy tourism destinations.

3. To assess the impact of gastronomy tourism on the preservation and promotion of local food culture, heritage, and sustainability.

The study will consider both the local supplier and tourist perspectives, enabling a more nuanced analysis of the interdependent relationships between both. This research will contribute to bridging research gaps and adopting a holistic approach to local food & Gastronomy tourism, advancing our knowledge of the intricate connections between people, food, and place.

2. Review of Literature

Today tourists expect unique experiences from the places they visit. Local food and beverages are used as a means of advertising, branding and marketing of a gastronomy tourism destination and gives a taste of locality. It represents a general enhancement of cultural heritage, facilitates tourism producers to sharpen the profile of a destination and contributes to the tourists' experiences of the area. Locally produced and processed food can underpin the local economy and “add value” to the local farm producers. It can be a crucial instrument to diversify and add value to the local economy (Yi-Chin et al., 2011). In today's competitive world where there is a cut throat rivalry, the marketing and promotion of destinations is a complex challenge in itself as it has many obstacles with different agendas and expectations; and local food and their gastronomy has huge potential to develop, introduce and market a destination amongst tourists (Uner, 2014).

2.1 The concept of Gastronomy

The word gastronomy is derived from the words “gastros” and “gnomos” (which mean “stomach” and “knowledge or law” in Greek). Another word is culinary, which means dishes, food, food preparation techniques (Kivela & Crotts, 354-377). Local food and gastronomy tourism are an integral part of the culture of communities and destinations and tourists want to experience and “taste” the region they are visiting (Bessiere, 1998). Gastronomy tourism is the intentional, exploratory participation in the foodways of another - participation including the consumption, preparation, and

presentation of a food item, cuisine, meal system, or eating habit considered to belong to a culinary system not one's own (Long, 2004). Food is the only way where humans make themselves feel as civilized. The cuisine is the most important part of every region that showcases the culture and tradition of a local. The main purpose of tourism which a tourist uses is for leisure, business, recreational activities, rejuvenation, medical, VFR, education, or pilgrim where it forgets to mention the focus towards local food and gastronomy which is also considered a segment for tourism (Civitello, 2007). According to "Fox 2007" research publication, any individual or group of people, who explore a destination dedicatedly with a culinary motive, would be termed as "foodie(s)". Local food presents the specialty of that destination and represents local culture of that region itself. Gastronomic tourism includes visiting food producers, food and beverage festivals, restaurants and special places related to some special foods together with tasting a special dish, observing its production and preparation or consuming a local special dish cooked by renowned local cook or chef as well as witnessing the production process of that local food (Hall & Mitchell, 2005).

2.2 The Concept of Local Food

There does not exist a usually accepted definition of local food, that allows tourists or consumers to decide for themselves. Researchers argue that consuming local food indicates shorter distance from food production sites to food consumption sites in relation to the modern mainstream food system (Peters et al., 2008). Most of the researchers attempt to define local food by making reference to actual physical distance i.e. in miles, kilometers and hours of travel, or using national or regional boundaries as natural boundaries (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015). While "local" indicates geographical region, there is no such decided criterion of the distance between production sites and consumption sites (Martinez et al., 2010). In addition the definition of local food may vary depending on geographical proximity and seasonal food availability. Geographical proximity is only one of the major attributes

of the definition of local food. There exists a wide range of characteristics to define food as local. Tourists or consumers prefer local food in the belief that local food is fresh, safer and of higher quality in terms of health, hygiene and better tasting. Tourists or consumers prefer local food in order to explore and experience unique tastes and flavors of that region and also to support local economies as in the belief that local food is friendlier towards the natural environment (Meyerding et al., 2019). The social movement associated with local foods represents a cultural phenomenon that is closely linked to Gastronomy tourism.

As per studies conducted in the United States by hoteliers following views were found and concluded predominantly:

1. local food is of higher quality, fresher and delicious and
2. local food is usually preferred by tourists and guests themselves (especially after local ingredients are available) (Martinez et al., 2010).

Demand for local food affects the gastronomy development of the tourism sector and local community by supporting local economies i.e. by strengthening local producers, cooks communities) thus helping local communities survive and promote gastronomy tourism. Promoting local food results in development of gastronomy tourism which helps build a brand in a given region by influxing in tourist footfall and more investment, and creating authentic tourist experiences. Gastronomy tourism helps in connecting tourists with people and places where local food is produced. By supporting "local" food, gastronomy tourism may generate broad opportunities for local communities and their tourists. The development of gastronomy tourism will give a region's identity. Local food and gastronomy tourism promotes traditional festivals, eco-friendly practices and develops the identity of local heritage and also boosts local economies (Kyriakaki et al., 2016). Gastronomic tourism activities provide direct and indirect employment and financial income (Sahin, 2015). The food & beverage production industry is together with agricultural production, one of the significant traditional sectors in the country's economy

(Lukáš & Alžbeta, 2021). Gastronomy tourism is an important economic and social factor, which maintains the viability and sustainability of the destination. The production, service and sale of local food is an integral part of tourism as it creates an added value, especially for those tourists who are looking for new and unique experiences, and want to experience the exposure to learn about the regional identity and culture. Local gastronomy, and local food and beverages are an essential part of the local heritage. Local food can take over the prime attraction in the region, contribute to tourists' experience and satisfaction, and enable them to expand knowledge or cultural capital (Choe & Kim, 2018). The close connection of the local food, the natural conditions and cultural traditions of a region should be market oriented. Local food can be used as a region symbol that links up with a sense of authentic place (Lukáš & Alžbeta, 2021). Local food is believed to be authentic, pure and traditional and hence more fresh, hygienic and tastier. For example, Wine has long been used as a tourist attraction through experiences by many countries such as wine sampling, winery tours or traditional wine making activities. (Kauppinen et al., 2013). Local gastronomy has a positive economic impact especially for rural areas. Rural & Tribal areas have unique local tastes which are not found in any other place, and have ability to expand a sense of curiosity and adventure for newer tastes (Blakey, 2012). Promoting local food and gastronomy tourism in rural areas helps local farmers, producers and small business owners, and helps these rural economies to diversify (Everett & Aitchison, 2008).

2.3 Relationship between Gastronomy Tourism & Local Food

Gastronomy tourism involves experiencing environments, people, and their stories associated with food. Perullo (2016) highlights the significance of Gastronomy tourism experiences in shaping the local foodscape and its evolution, considering the inherent nature of food production and consumption. Foodscape, which can be understood as a landscape of food, serves as the interactive space for Gastronomy tourism,

where people, place, and food interact simultaneously (Mikkelsen, 2011; Long, 2010; Sage, 2010). Scholars from various disciplines have recognized the socially constructed concept of foodscape, influencing food culture, awareness, production, and consumption in society (Johnston & Goodman, 2015). However, despite its popularity in fields such as anthropology, geography, sociology, cultural studies, and health science, Gastronomy remains understudied in the context of tourism. Although the concept of Gastronomy is seldom acknowledged as fundamental in developing a food tourism destination (Casciola, Laurin, & Wolf, 2014), it holds potential as a valuable approach. Mikkelsen (2011) introduces a meso view for studying gastronomy at the local (community) level, particularly relevant for analyzing shared foodways that shape the social and cultural dimensions of a community. Such conceptualizations align with Johnston and Baumann's (2009) understanding of social constructs within specific places, people, and food systems. The gastronomy of a destination is subject to change, influenced not only by the dynamic relationships between food culture and materiality but also by the multifaceted interactions between tourists, food, and locals in the tourism context (Avieli, 2013). The broader interactions of food tourism encompass place, identity, culture, and people, forming a comprehensive gastronomic experience. Consequently, food tourism and the local foodscape are interconnected rather than separate entities, supporting a value-creation network that involves tourists, producers, and other stakeholders (Richards, 2021).

3. Research Design & Methodology

This research is exploratory by nature and qualitative in study which focuses on the impact of local food to show how local food can contribute a major role in the development of Gastronomy tourism. Both the primary as well as secondary source of data are taken into consideration in order to extract the required and suitable data out of it. Secondary source of data focused on an extensive review of relevant academic literature and industry reports on gastronomy

tourism, local food, and their interconnections. Primary data was collected through interviews, surveys, and observations in selected gastronomy tourism destinations. A diverse range of stakeholders, including Culinary graduates, Chef, local cooks, Academicians, Tourists, local food producers, tourism officials, and experts were included in the study. This approach ensures to reach tourists who have the ability to fully evaluate the local food offerings and its implications on the development of Gastronomy Tourism.

Observation/Results

The findings of this exploratory study highlight the significant impact of local food on the development and growth of gastronomy tourism. Local food acts as a key driver in attracting tourists, providing them with authentic, unique, and culturally rich culinary experiences. Local food acts as a significant motivator for travelers in choosing gastronomy tourism destinations, contributing to the overall appeal and differentiation of a location. Local food enhances the cultural experience of tourists, enabling them to connect with the local community, history, and traditions. Authenticity and uniqueness of local food play a crucial role in attracting gastronomy tourists. Visitors seek genuine and distinct culinary experiences that reflect the local culture and traditions. Quality and taste of local food significantly impact the overall satisfaction and perception of gastronomy tourism destinations. Diversity and variety of local food offerings add to the attractiveness of a destination, providing a wide range of choices for tourists. Locally sourced and organic ingredients are increasingly valued by gastronomy tourists, contributing to the sustainability and environmental consciousness of a destination. Gastronomy tourism plays a vital role in preserving and revitalizing local food culture and heritage. It creates a demand for traditional recipes, culinary techniques, and local ingredients, thus supporting local producers and artisans. Gastronomy tourism fosters collaborations between the tourism industry and local communities, encouraging the transmission of culinary knowledge, skills, and traditions across generations. The promotion of local food through gastronomy

tourism can generate economic benefits for the local community, supporting small-scale food businesses and contributing to the overall development of the region. The preservation and promotion of local food culture, heritage, and sustainability are integral components of gastronomy tourism, leading to economic, social, and cultural benefits for destinations. These findings underscore the importance of recognizing and leveraging local food as a vital asset in the development of gastronomy tourism.

Discussion

Local food plays an important role in the development of Gastronomic tourism which supports regional development by strengthening the link between local food and beverages and tourism and promotes local identity, culture and financial conditions. So, this will also ensure protecting historical and cultural heritages and passing it to next generations and ensuring its permanence. However, although there is numerous research done on food and beverage and culinary tourism, there is only a limited number of studies on “local food & gastronomy tourism”. Therefore; research, studies about local food, gastronomy tourism and its development should be carried out on a nationwide and international basis, Workshops and seminars should be held to inform foreign and domestic tourists, get their attention, and to introduce and promote local food and gastronomy tourism. National and international gastronomy festivals should be organized to introduce the gastronomy destinations to tourists. Traditional local food and beverage, raw materials, ingredients and food and beverage production, service and sales shows the culture of the destination and tasting of the local food and beverage means to experience the gastronomic culture of the destination. Local food is becoming one of the most promising segments of gastronomy tourism. Research shows that there is an interest in local and regional food and beverage by tourists.

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