

ECONOMIC SCIENCES

SWOT ANALYSIS OF GEORGIAN GASTRONOMIC TOURISM

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Introduction

Georgia has always been the prize stone of great empires. Unfortunately, there were constant attacks, sometimes they captured some part of our homeland, sometimes the whole country. Sometimes this happened for a short time, other times the occupation lasted for hundreds of years. If one can see something good in all this, it is the variety of Georgian cuisine. However, our culinary arts were not only influenced by invaders. Due to its convenient geographical location, Georgia has always been at the crossroads of trade routes. First, it is enough to mention the Great Silk Road. Foreign merchants traveling on these roads also had a great impact on Georgian food culture.

Over the centuries, Georgians took the best of everything that foreigners had, later rejected and forgot something, changed and kept others according to Georgian taste. However, the influence of foreigners is visible in many ways, and a prominent example of this is "Foreign Spice", its name clearly indicating that it was imported from a foreign country. This is how many dishes have come to this day, for example, khinkali or kali, whose roots, as experts claim, are from Asia, but Georgians added their own nuances to their recipes and cooking methods and turned them into real Georgian dishes.

Another important advantage of Georgian cuisine is its diversity. Every corner of this small country is enlivened by its unique culinary art. Not in every corner, sometimes the dishes are different even at the level of the ancient village. "In the villages of Kartli: in Dzegvi and Nichbis, the local population still prepares "garlic khinkal", which may be made elsewhere (eg in Tetratskaro), but the mentioned dish is mainly characteristic of these villages. The same villages are characterized by another peculiarity in terms of traditional cuisine. This is a wild growing "capar", which the locals collect and pickle for the winter. (This member of the caper family is also used in folk medicine)." To the surprise of the participants of a one-week tour in Georgia, they eat khachapuri every day and it is always different. Let's take the Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti region, which is quite small and very few in number. While traveling here, the tourist gets acquainted with three different historical-geographical provinces of Racha, Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti, as if similar but different architecture, life, cuisine, wines, and it is impossible not to bring the visitor into admiration.

One of the important elements for the development of Georgian gastrotourism is Georgian wine and Georgian wine tourism. Wine tourism is considered a sub-species of gastronomic tourism, but for Georgia, wine and wine tourism are so important (Taktakishvili, 2017). that they often become the reason and basis for implementing gastronomic tours.

In addition to the above-mentioned factors, Georgian gastronomic tourism has other positive and negative aspects. We considered that a simple analysis will more clearly present the state of this type of tourism in Georgia. Considering the educational (professional) factors and consumer demand is crucial in this process (Abashidze, 2023; Kvirikvaia et al., 2018).

Overall, the tourism industry in Georgia is still in its early stages of development, but it has the potential to be a major driver of economic growth. The government has taken steps to promote tourism, such as easing visa restrictions and investing in infrastructure (Papava, Charaia, 2021; Gamsakhurdia et al., 2017, Sikharulidze, 2018). Tourism can also play a significant role in small and medium size business development in Georgia, including through fintech technologies also (Lashkhi et al., 2022a; 2022b); Tourism as one of the drivers of the Georgian economy (Kadagidze et al., 2021; Tsutskiridze, Charaia, 2023; Anguridze et al., 2015), makes a significant contribution to the Georgia wellbeing and life standard uprise.

SWOT analysis

At the beginning, I will explain a few important points from each graph of the SWOT analysis in a relatively broad way, and at the end, a summary and detailed list of these issues will be presented in the form of a table.

Strong sides

✓ Positive image of Georgia as a tourist country and permanent increase in the number of foreign tourists and visitors over the last 20 years. Work in this regard began as early as 1998, when the State Department of Tourism and Resorts of Georgia was created, and in terms of image promotion and branding, activities were especially intensified since 2004, which, along with the resolution of other issues (security, unilateral cancellation of the visa regime with tourist generating countries, etc.) A steady and steady increase in tourists and visitors followed. The only exception was the regression caused by the pandemic in 2020-21 (Meladze et al., 2022; Charaia et al., 2021; Papava, Charaia, 2021).

✓ One of the distinctive and authentic elements of Georgian cultural heritage - Georgian cuisine, which is a delicious and amazing mixture of spices, herbs, recipes and cooking methods left here by many ancient civilizations.

✓ A diverse range of authentic local Georgian dishes and Georgian wine (Saferavi, Khvanchkara, Kindzmarauli, Rkatsiteli, Tsolikauri and others) and dishes (Khachapuri, Khinkali, Kubdar, Shkmeruli, Chakafuli, Tsiv, Tkemali and others) brands, which are well known domestically and internationally in the tourist market;

✓ Tasting of local cuisine and wine ranks first among the tourist activities carried out by foreign visitors in Georgia, and satisfaction with Georgian table

and hospitality is quite high. Unfortunately, the same is not true of the quality of tourism services in general;

- ✓ Establishing a close connection between the local population and tourists through wine and food products, which is a good way for guests to have a full-fledged cultural exchange with the locals. That's why Georgian gastronomy can become one of the factors that bring foreign tourists to the country again and again, the so-called. will facilitate re-visits;

- ✓ Rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage, modern and creative culture, which makes Georgia a fascinating tourist destination. 3 cultural monuments (Mtskheta, Gelati and Zemo Svaneti), one natural monument (wetlands of Georgia), as well as 4 intangible cultural monuments (Georgian polyphonic song, Georgian way of making wine in a pitcher, Georgian alphabet and Georgian wrestling) are included in the UNESCO list of material culture monuments.

- ✓ Traditional hospitality of Georgians. "The guest is God's!" This expression shows how much a Georgian appreciates a guest, whom he considers a gift from God. "Wonderful" is another Georgian word that emphasizes the natural hospitality of Georgians. "Superb" is a synonym of the best, the best, excellent, and the content indicates that the Georgian kept and increased the best for a stranger, a guest;

- ✓ Georgian traditional table, the same bread culture, which in 2020 was awarded the status of an intangible cultural heritage monument of national importance. The Georgian table is very complex, multifaceted and multi-layered, followed by archaic elements and angular features. Its etiquette, tradition, tamada, merikife and toasts are a truly Georgian phenomenon, the like of which cannot be found anywhere else, which makes it very attractive and interesting for tourists;

- ✓ A Georgian village, where tourists can taste ecologically clean products and authentic dishes (sour-dough, dambal-cottage cheese, sulguni, Gudi cheese, churchkhela, honey, etc.) and wine;

- ✓ Georgia's convenient geographical location, due to which it can play the role of a tourism hub in the South Caucasus in general and, among other things, a gastronomic tourism center;

- ✓ Convenient geopolitical location of Georgia in the region. Historically, Georgia and Tbilisi have always represented the political center of the South Caucasus. Today, the Great Silk Road, Trasecka and, recently activated, the Middle Corridor remain almost the only routes for freight and passenger traffic between Asia and Europe due to the Russia-Ukraine war. In addition, due to the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, it is impossible to carry out combined gastronomic tours in the South Caucasus without traveling to Georgia;

Weaknesses

- ✓ I consider the biggest obstacle facing the development of Georgian gastronomic tourism to be the lack of a strategic plan that will be approved by all participants of this sector;

- ✓ Also, it is a serious challenge that food product manufacturers and restaurant business representatives do not properly realize the great potential and profitability of gastronomic tourism, which is why most of them consider the local population as the main target

segment and pay less attention to tourists. While working on this topic, I asked almost all famous restaurants in Tbilisi to fill out a simple questionnaire that did not require any confidential information. I received answers from only 10% of respondents. This speaks for itself about the attitude of the managers of these enterprises towards tourism. Due to such a small number of responses, of course, this study turned out to be statistically unreliable, but it still provides an opportunity to draw certain conclusions. For example, at Odabade restaurant, which positions itself as a place to offer authentic Georgian, in particular Maghreb dishes, 50% of guests are foreigners. A few other restaurants have slightly less but similar statistics.

- ✓ Lack of complete inventory and register of local authentic food products and dishes remains an important problem. An inventory of food-related tangible and intangible heritage such as utensils, customs, recipes, products, etc. should be carried out. Then it is necessary to identify from them those special products, dishes and drinks of local gastronomy that have the greatest potential to be introduced in the tourist market, in order to create the basis for creating a new gastronomic offer or renewing the existing one.

For the rest of the information on weaknesses, see below in Table N 1.

Opportunities

- ✓ Development and adoption of a strategic plan for the development of gastronomic tourism, which will make it possible for this type of tourism to move from the tracks of spontaneous development to planned evolution; This, of course, is the most important and difficult task, but at the same time, it is possible to make a stable, thoughtful development of this sector, based on the principles of sustainability, and therefore, the economic, ecological and socio-cultural benefits obtained, will be balanced.

- ✓ Georgia is not perceived in the international market as a gastronomic tourism destination, which makes it difficult to "sell" it, but this so-called "Underestimation" is a possibility even if the right steps are taken;

- ✓ Today, in Georgian gastronomic tourism, technological innovations tested in marketing are almost not used, but their use can become the main driving force of this type of tourism; This should be done through a combination of digitization, big data management and artificial intelligence to be able to predict customer behavior and needs. Such activities will primarily facilitate business to facilitate access to customers throughout the value chain.

- ✓ Improving the scenario, environment, places and system of hosting tourists in order to perfect the gastronomic tourism product - there is an opportunity to create museums, gastronomic interpretation centers, meeting and event halls, etc., which will contribute to the diversity of the tourism product and the satisfaction of tourists.

See the rest of the information about the possibilities below, in Table N 1.

Threats

- ✓ Greater diversity of gastronomic tourism products and more aggressive marketing among Georgia's competitors in gastronomic tourism. There is quite a lot of competition in this field, so without competitor

analysis and comparative analysis it is impossible to develop this type of tourism correctly. Especially since most of our competitors have a better quality-price ratio, more diverse products and better marketing compared to us.

✓ Failure to consider the changed behavior and needs of tourists as a result of the pandemic, especially

in family kitchens and cellars. In the post-pandemic period, people pay more attention to the observance of sanitary-hygienic norms, healthy food, ecologically clean products and general health care. If these issues are not taken into account, it will be difficult to hope for the satisfaction of tourists.

See Table N 1 below for more information on hazards.

Table 1.

SWOT analysis of Georgian gastronomic tourism

Strength	Weakness
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Positive image of Georgia as a tourist country; 2. Georgian cuisine, as one of the distinctive and authentic elements of Georgian cultural heritage; 3. A diverse assortment of authentic local Georgian dishes; 4. Georgian wine and food brands, whose awareness is high in the international tourist market; 5. The priority of tasting local cuisine and wine from the tourist activities carried out by foreign visitors and high satisfaction with Georgian table and hospitality; 6. Establishing a close connection between the local population and tourists through wine and food products and a full-fledged cultural exchange between them; 7. Rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage, modern and creative culture; 8. Traditional Georgian hospitality and Georgian bread as a unique cultural heritage; 9. Georgian village where tourists can taste ecologically clean products and authentic dishes and wine; 10. Convenient geographical location of Georgia; 11. Convenient geopolitical location of Georgia; 12. The abundance of Georgian restaurants, family kitchens and family wineries; 13. As a result of the increase in the income of the local population, a large part of it has the opportunity to visit Georgian restaurants, get a good gastronomic experience, travel to get new impressions; 14. Popularity of culinary television programs and shows; 15. Permanent increase in the number of foreign tourists and visitors over the last 20 years. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Absence of a strategic plan for the development of Georgian gastronomic tourism; 2. Improper image and branding of Georgia as a gastronomic tourism destination; 3. Improper marketing of Georgian cuisine in the global market; 4. Lack of competitive gastronomic tourist product corresponding to international standards and its diversity; 5. Inappropriate hybridization of the gastronomic tourism product with other types of tourism. An exception may be the MICE business, however, there is quite a large reserve here as well. 6. "New Georgian cuisine", if it exists, could not become as important an element for gastronomic tourism as the Spanish Nueva Cocina (New Cuisine) for the Basque Country and Spain. 7. Lack of modern technologies and innovations in the marketing of gastronomic tourism; 8. Absence of complete inventory and register of local authentic food products and dishes; 9. The scarcity of culinary events and the absence of a calendar of gastronomic festivals and celebrations with fixed dates; 10. Absence of an effective distribution system for the existing gastronomic tourism product; 11. Uneven distribution of gastronomic tourism products and events between regions of the country; 12. Absence of an international quality certification system for Georgian food products; 13. Absence of a national quality model of gastronomic tourism enterprises, which is why the risk of tourists getting a low-quality experience is high; 14. Lack or absence of personnel trained in accordance with modern international standards; 15. Lack of experience in receiving foreign tourists and lack of relevant skills, including foreign languages; 16. Absence of training programs aimed at training chefs so that they can properly use more local products, be able to perform the function of a guide and interpret, which will increase the quality of this type of tourism; 17. Inadequate quality of gastronomic tourist services and Georgian tourist services in general; 18. Absence of authoritative national, regional and local associations and networks of gastronomic tourism; 19. Inadequate awareness of the great potential and profitability of gastronomic tourism by food producers and restaurant business representatives. 20. Orientation of the modern Georgian peasant on the quantitative index of production, not on the qualitative one; 21. Unbalance of products and dishes in Georgian gastronomy (e.g. lack of fish dishes); 22. Absence of programs for research and monitoring of gastronomic tourism markets, as well as assessment of the impact of this type of tourism on the territories,

Opportunities	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Development and adoption of a strategic plan for the development of gastronomic tourism, which will make it possible for this type of tourism to move from the tracks of spontaneous development to planned evolution; 2. Georgia is not perceived in the international market as a gastronomic tourism destination, which makes it difficult to "sell" it; 3. Today, the technological innovations tested in marketing are almost not used in Georgian gastronomic tourism, but their use can become the main driving force of this type of tourism; 4. Growing interest of local and foreign tourists in Georgian food products and cuisine; 5. The possibility of creating interesting culinary routes through small catering establishments and family kitchens in the regions of Georgia; 6. Planning and holding gastronomic festivals and events on fixed dates, especially in regions, which will make it easier for tour operators to include them in tourism programs; 7. Based on the growing interest in local food products and family cooking, the creation of cooking schools, courses, farmers' markets and others; 8. Creation of communication and cooperation mechanisms, both between the state and private structures, and between the sectors involved in gastronomic tourism. 9. Improving the scenario, environment, places and system of hosting tourists in order to perfect the gastronomic tourism product. 10. Planning events for local communities that encourage them to give a name to their gastronomic traditions, strengthen their sense of pride and help preserve their cultural identity. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Greater variety of gastronomic tourism products and more aggressive marketing among Georgian competitors in gastronomic tourism; 2. More and more interest in gastronomic tourism in our neighbors, as well as in our competitor countries in tourism in general, and concern for the development of this sector; 3. The Covid-19 pandemic and the slow pace of tourism recovery in the post-pandemic period; 4. Failure to take into account the changed behavior and needs of tourists as a result of the pandemic, especially in family kitchens and cellars; 5. Due to the lack of effective quality control mechanisms for local products and dishes, unmet expectations and dissatisfaction of tourists 6. Difficulties in lending to gastronomic tourism businesses, especially startups, high interest rates and high collateral fees; 7. Ignoring the requirements of a healthy lifestyle and healthy food and not making appropriate changes in Georgian cuisine; 8. Unstable political situation of the region and the country (Abkhazia and Samachablo occupied by Russia; Russia-Ukraine war, Karabakh conflict) 9. Increased political risks due to the Russia-Ukraine war, disruption and slowdown of global logistics connections, danger of deepening inflationary processes and economic recession in the world; 10. Increased natural disasters due to global warming, climate change, difficulties in the production of agricultural products; 11. Improper condition of water supply, sewage, roads and other communal infrastructure in the regions;

Conclusions

It can be safely said that Georgia has an excellent potential for the development of gastronomic tourism, which, unfortunately, is only partially utilized. The strengths and opportunities of Georgian gastrotourism are so impressive that even in the absence of any well-thought-out strategic plan, the business manages to achieve success in this field independently, without assistance from the state. But this cannot continue indefinitely, especially since our direct competitors constantly take care of the diversity of their gastronomic tourism products, carry out quite aggressive marketing, and there is constant promotion of this industry by the state.

In order for Georgian gastronomic tourism to develop stably and take its proper place in the global tourism market, there are many problems to be solved, but, in my opinion, it is first necessary to develop a strategic plan that will be approved by all participants of this sector.

This strategic plan should define key strategies such as: product strategy, market strategy and target audience and positioning strategy (WTO, 2019).

As the World Food Travel Association points out in its 2020 report, such a well-planned tourism strategy can bring many benefits. In particular:

- Attracting new and repeating visitors;
- Improving visitor experience;
- Positive economic impact;
- Sharing positive impressions;
- Protection of local heritage;
- Education of the local population.

Hopefully, soon Georgia will have such a plan developed, approved and adopted with the participation of all the main stakeholders of the field, and our country will take a proper place in the international market of gastronomic tourism.

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