

Francesc Fusté-Forné

Food for tourists: A need or a pleasure?

Abstract

Food tourism has been a largely studied topic during the twenty-first century. However, there are still knowledge gaps in terms of approaching food tourism research from a visitor and tourist perspective. In front of the huge variety of practices offered by food and culinary tourism, academic works focused on motivation factors become crucial for accurate planning and adequate management of food and tourism linkages in destinations.

Key words: culinary heritage; destination management; food tourism; tourism marketing

While food has been obviously present in any trip since the beginnings of tourism activity, it has only gathered major academic attention during the last two decades. Among the referent literature for food tourism researchers there are still found the composite volumes edited by Hjalager and Richards (2002) and Hall, Sharples, Mitchell, Macionis and Cambourne (2003). Some research focused on the role of food in destinations earlier, but these aforementioned works mark to some extent the beginning of food tourism-based research. Accordingly, Chen and Huang (2016, p. 44) affirm that "with the growing importance and popularity of food tourism, recent years have witnessed a surge of research interest in food tourism". In this sense, there is an increasing body of research on a wide range of areas related to food and tourism at destinations, as food is becoming one of the important attractions for travellers (Boniface, 2003; Horng & Tsai, 2012).

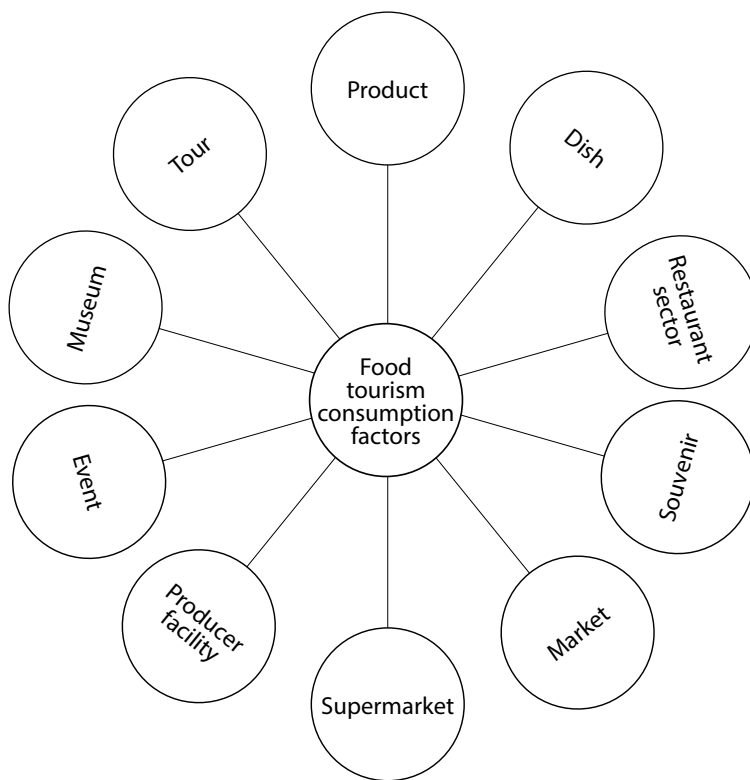
Local foods offer a huge potential in terms of contribution to the destination's differentiation, specialization, and competitiveness. While some foods are seasonal, in a globalised world, food is available any day of the year, any time of day and in any weather (Kivela & Crotts, 2006). Thus, linkages between food and tourism have been studied from different approaches. However, there is still room to further analyse the role of traveller motivation for food and gastronomy. Even if the food it is not regarded as a significant motivation for travel, it has to be argued that food takes an important slice of the traveller's expenditure, or, that it represents a third of the total economic tourist contribution to the destination (Telfer & Wall, 1996). Furthermore, since food is now often perceived as a heritage resource, which is arguably important in the motivation for travelling, this too will certainly require further research (Hall, 2016). In-depth analysis focused on visitors' motivations and perceptions will represent an opportunity for comprehensive research that may serve to verify beyond doubt the importance of food tourism from a demand perspective in a particular geographical context.

This knowledge would immeasurably benefit policy makers and destination managers who are charged with developing innovative food tourism strategies based on the understanding of needs, expectations and behaviours of visitors' experiences with regards to food consumption (Altintzoglou, Heide & Borch, 2016; Bryce, Curran, O'Gorman & Taheri, 2015; Okumus, Kock & Scantlebury, 2013, Tsai, 2016). Within this context, a wide range of topics fit into the analysis of the linkages between food tourism, motivation, and demand expenditure. While both motivations and attractions will vary

Francesc Fusté-Forné, PhD, Faculty of Tourism, Universitat de Girona, Spain;
E-mail: researchexperientourism@gmail.com

depending on the context of the practice; differently experienced in urban environments or rural areas. Food in tourism is primarily present (see Figure 1) in products and dishes and is mostly consumed through restaurant industry venues (i.e. bars, cafeterias), and food souvenirs. In addition, in the current context of increasing new accommodation forms such as shared apartments, local markets (i.e. farmers markets, municipal markets) and supermarkets, are gaining tourist attention. When looking at the source of products, farms and factories within the frame of food producers' facilities, have also become significant food landmarks. In a more structured way, food tours, themed museums and events – fairs, festivals, or tastings emerge, as well as foodways that showcase a strong interest in local culinary landscapes and food cultures.

Figure 1
Destination food elements to analyse single or multiple food tourism practices' motivation



In closing, it is important to acknowledge that further research must be done in this direction, and importantly, to evaluate the different insights between those tourists that regard food tourism consumption as a need, and those who consider it as a pleasure. This heavily relies on the type of resource analysed as seen in Figure 1, and the specific motivation showed by the tourist, for example, why they visit a farm, a market, or eat in a particular restaurant. Bringing light to this complex debate would put the research to the service of the stakeholders and would contribute with relevant results to the management of food tourism at destinations.

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