

The background of food tourism tourism essay



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This chapter will explain the background of food tourism. The researcher will explain why food tourism is a niche activity and what the benefits of niche tourism are. This chapter will also outline the interaction between food and tourism. Furthermore, the researcher will describe the trends shaping the tourists interest in food. This chapter will then analyse the recognition of food tourism internationally, most notably within countries such as Canada and Whales. Finally, the researcher will investigate the food tourism industry in Ireland and examine how Ireland measures up as a food destination when compared to international standards.

Food tourism, which can also be referred to as gastronomy or culinary tourism is increasing as an area of research among tourism scholars (Hall, Sharples and Mitchell 2003; Smith and Xiao 2008). In 1998, folklorist Lucy Long first defined the relatively new term “ food tourism” as “ intentional, exploratory participation in the foodways of another – participation including the consumption, preparation and presentation of a food item, cuisine, meal system, or eating style considered to belong to a culinary system not one’s own” (Chrzan 2006; International Culinary Tourism Association 2010; Long 2004). This definition indicates travelling with the intention of experiencing other cultures through their food (Chrzan 2006). However, Smith et al (2008) argue that Long`s definition is exclusive and narrow, limiting food tourism to food experiences belonging to another culture. In contrast to Long`s definition, the International Culinary Tourism Association (ICTA) (2010) define food tourism as “ the pursuit of unique and memorable culinary experiences of all kinds, often while travelling, but one can also be a culinary tourist at home”. This definition explains food tourism in its broadest sense

and includes all culinary experiences from Michelin star restaurants to local bakeries or cookery schools (Chrzan 2006; ICTA 2010).

Furthermore, the ICTA (2010) explain that local residents can be culinary tourists in their own town simply by breaking their routine and trying out new restaurants. Erik Wolf, President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the ICTA explains that “ true culinary tourists are perfectly happy at a roadside café in the middle of nowhere, as long as there is something positively memorable about their dining experience” (Wolf 2006, p. 2).

2. 3 Food Tourism as a Niche Activity

According to Novelli (2005) niche tourism or special interest tourism is one of the fastest growing areas within the tourism sector. Douglas, Douglas and Derrett (2001) concur and believe that the growth of niche tourism is seen as a reflection of the increasing diversity of leisure interests among the twenty-first century tourist. The traditional two week sunbathing holiday abroad has given way to niche tours catering for peoples special interests (Collins 1999). The term niche tourism is largely borrowed from the term niche marketing. In marketing terms, niche refers to two inter-related ideas. “ First that there is a place in the market for a product, and second, that there is an audience for this product” (Novelli 2005, p. 4). Therefore, the clear premise of a niche market is a more narrowly defined group, whereby the individuals in the group are identifiable by the same specialised needs or interests, and are defined as having a strong desire for the products on offer (Novelli 2005). This can be customised to refer to a specific destination tailored to meet the needs of a particular market segment, for example, a wine growing region can position itself as a niche destination offering tours of its specific wines.

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The size of a niche market can vary considerably, however it allows the market to be broken into relatively large market sectors – macro-niches; for example cultural, rural or sport tourism which can then be divided into precise market segments – micro-niches, for example geo, food or cycling tourism (Deuschl 2006; Novelli 2005). Niche tourism has been frequently referred to in tourism policy and strategy documents in recent years in opposition to mass tourism (Hall et al 2003; Novelli 2005). “ The connotations of a more tailored and individualised service carries its own cachet relating to features like the small scale of operations, implied care and selectivity regarding discerning markets, and a suggested sensitivity of tourists” (Novelli 2005, p. 6).

Such features provide a more suitable fit with planning and development policies relating to environmentally sustainable and socially caring tourism. For these reasons, organisations such as the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) and the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) view niche tourism consumption as more of a benefit to the host communities when compared to the more traditional forms of mass tourism (Hall et al 2003; Novelli 2005). Furthermore, niche tourism is also seen as a mechanism for attracting high spending tourists. Take for example the concept of cookery school holidays, a market which is expanding year by year (Sharples 2003). Google Insights (2010) show a consistent web search interest in cookery holidays over the years 2004 to 2010, with particular interest from the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US). Ballymaloe Cookery School, located in one of the most scenic areas of Ireland, East Cork is one of Europe’s foremost cookery schools. The school which is run by well known

cooks Darina and Tim Allen has attracted people of all ages and abilities, from all over the world since it's opened in 1983. The courses range from simple one (average price €125) to two day courses (average price €575), based on a certain theme, such as baking, finger food, salads or pasta dishes, to more lengthy week long courses (at an average price of €895). An analysis of their website showed that some cookery courses are booked out with an option to join a waiting list (Ballymaloe Cookery School 2010; Sharples 2003).

2. 4 The Interaction between Food and Tourism

Although it is agreed that food tourism is a niche activity, Novelli (2005) categorises food tourism as a subset of rural tourism due to its roots in agriculture. Wolf (2006, p. 6) contradicts and illustrates food tourism as a subset of cultural tourism because “ cuisine is a manifestation of culture”. Everett (2008, p. 337) agrees with Wolf and suggests that food tourism provides a “ conceptual vehicle for pursuing a more culturally aware tourism agenda”. It can be assumed that food is representative of a culture, take for instance Italy, a country which is known throughout the world for its pizza and pasta dishes. Nevertheless, food tourism is a newly defined niche that intersects and impacts on the long entwined travel and food industries (Wolf 2006). Food is a vital component of the tourism experience. Selwood (2003) suggests that food is one of the most important attractions sought out by tourists in their “ craving for new and unforgettable experiences”. A growing body of literature suggests that food can play an important role in the destination choice of tourists’, and more significantly, in visitor satisfaction (McKercher, Okumus and Okumus 2008). The food consumed by tourists in a

place is part of the tourists' memory of their visit to that particular holiday destination (Failte Ireland 2009a; Fitzgibbon 2007). Henderson (2009) explains that food and tourism have a very close relationship as food is a critical tourism resource. Food is vital for physical sustenance and all tourists have to eat when travelling. However, both Henderson (2009) and McKercher et al (2008) declare that the desire to try different foods may act as a primary motivator for some, or part of the bundle of secondary motivators for others. Culinary tourists are drawn by the opportunity to consume, and dining out is a growing form of leisure where meals are consumed not out of necessity but for pleasure (Smith et al 2008). Much of the literature on food tourism refers to the concept of visualism as epitomised by Urry's "tourist gaze" (Urry (1990) as cited in Everett 2008, p. 340). Everett (2008) discovered that viewing windows are being built in food tourism sites in an effort to meet an increasing demand for a more embodied, immersive and authentic food tourism experience. These viewing windows bring the producer closer to the consumer and allow the tourist to "gaze" into the "backstage" of food production activity (Everett 2008, p. 340). As previously mentioned, all tourists have to eat when travelling. Therefore, from an economic point of view, 100% of tourists spend money on food at their destination (Wolf 2006). Yet, data on food tourism appears scarce. Selwood (2003, p. 178) explains that food is a very much "overlooked and unsung component" of tourism literature. Hall et al (2003, p. 1) agree and cite "food, just like tourism, was for many years a fringe academic discipline, and was frowned upon as an area of research by students". Typically, food is placed together with accommodation in collections of tourism statistics, partly because it is almost always part of another attraction, and also

because of it being a necessary element of survival no matter where a person is located (McKercher et al 2008; Selwood 2003). As the ICTA (2010) point out, the more that food is accepted as a main stream attraction by destination marketers, the more research that will be done to further develop and justify this niche activity (ICTA 2010; Wolf 2006). Hashimoto and Telfer (2006) refer to the Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC) who has recognised the growing interest in cuisine and have begun to promote Canada as a food tourism destination. The CTC (2010) highlight local Canadian cuisine as one of the top five unique selling points on offer in the country. Furthermore, dining out is one of the most popular activities undertaken by Canadian tourists (Selwood 2003).

Hashimoto et al (2006) cite that Canada has approximately 63, 500 restaurants and Canadians themselves spend CAN\$39 billion annually in restaurants, eating out on average 4. 7 times a week. The contribution of food to the Canadian tourism economy is of considerable importance and, because of their intensive use of labour, food preparation and food services also contribute very heavily to the tourism employment sector. In Canada, nearly a million people work in the foodservice industry and the promotion of local cuisine is therefore an effective way of supporting local economies along with agricultural production (Hashimoto 2006; Selwood 2003). The importance of food to the tourism industry has increased significantly within the last ten years, according to the Welsh Assembly Government (2009). They believe that the availability of high quality, local food has become a key driver for tourists when selecting a holiday destination. A “ Food Tourism Action Plan” has been drawn up to promote Wales as a destination where

high quality and distinctive food is widely available. Currently visitors on short breaks in Wales spend 18.7% of their holiday spend on food and drink whereas visitors on longer holidays spend 17.8% (Welsh Assembly Government 2009). Research carried out by the Travel Industry Association in conjunction with the Gourmet Tourism Association and the ICTA reported in March 2007 that over the previous three years 27 million travellers engaged in culinary or wine related activities, while travelling throughout the world. Therefore, the Welsh Government believe that there is a clear demand for culinary experiences, and “outlets which promote and market high quality Welsh food and drink for consumption or purchase” (Welsh Assembly Government 2009, p. 3).

2.5 Travel Trends

As previously mentioned, some tourism agencies such as the CTC have begun to recognise the growing interest in food and have embarked on the promotion of their destination as a food tourism location. However, the question arises as to the trends which are shaping the tourists interest in food. Nowadays, modern food tourists are better educated and have travelled more extensively, therefore they are culinary savvy and want to experience individualism as they search for local, fresh and good quality cuisine that reflects the authenticity of the destination (Chon, Pan, Song 2008; Yeoman 2008). Moreover, the influence of the media and the emergence of niche food programmes have influenced the tourism industry as celebrity chefs such as Gordon Ramsey and Jamie Oliver increase our interest in good quality food.

Furthermore, the media is now full of magazines, such as Food & Travel, Intermezzo, Cuisine, Gourmet Traveller, Australian Gourmet Traveller; radio shows and even entire lifestyle channels, such as Good Food or the Food Network which clearly connect food and tourism. In addition, the world is online. Whether through computers or mobile phones people can constantly read and talk about food, nowadays people blog about it, online restaurant reviews are instantly available and Tripadvisor now produce a list of the best places to eat in each country (Yeoman 2008). According to Chon, Pan, Song (2008) travel trends are becoming more activity-interest based rather than destination based. More and more travellers are deciding what activities they want to take part in first and then choosing the destination which offers them. Many of today's leading destinations offer superb accommodation and attractions, high quality service and facilities and every country claims unique culture and heritage. As a result, the need for destinations to promote a differentiated product is more critical than ever in order to survive within a globally competitive marketplace (Morgan and Pritchard 2005). Food tourism shapes culinary destinations such as France, Italy and California whereas in emerging destinations such as Croatia, Vietnam and Mexico food plays an important part of the overall experience. Food is essential to the tourist experience, it can change the image of a destination, take for example the city of Las Vegas which was a renowned gambling destination where cuisine was barely an afterthought. This changed dramatically in 1992 when Wolfgang Puck became the first "celebrity chef" to come to Las Vegas when he opened Spago at the Caesars Palace Forum Shops. He started a growing culinary revolution in Vegas which paved the way for fine dining restaurants. At present, majority of the hotels and/or casinos in Vegas have

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celebrity chef restaurants attracting many tourists eager to sample the best cuisine money can buy (Wolfgang Puck 2010). There are currently sixteen Michelin Star restaurants in Las Vegas, with Joel Robuchons Restaurant at the MGM Grand currently holding three Michelin stars (Quezada 2010).

2. 6 Food Tourism in Ireland

According to a Mintel report on Ireland, published in 2009, the food tourism market outperformed the overall tourism market between 2003 and 2007, however, neither has been immune to the effects of the global economic slowdown which has caused the value of the food tourism market to decline by 4% in 2008, and the value of the broader tourism market to decline by 3%. The market for food tourism in Ireland was worth €2. 23 billion in 2008. Nonetheless, this figure was a decrease of 4% on 2007 figures and brought an end to a 26% increase between the years 2003 to 2007 (Mintel 2009; Fitzgibbon 2009). According to Tracey Coughlan (2009) from Failte Ireland, the most appealing activities for tourists in Ireland stand as heritage, natural amenities and sports. Sinead O'Leary (2002) agrees and in her study of "Qualitative and quantitative images of Ireland as a tourism destination in France", French visitors to Ireland were asked to describe their image of Ireland in terms of " common attribute-based components and holistic aspects". Her findings show that the key images of

Ireland remain the welcoming people, the beautiful scenery and the relaxed pace of life. Unfortunately, food did not get a mention, however, beer; most notably Guinness was cited by 37% of French Tourists as an image which is most readily associated with Ireland. This suggests that food has a lower priority when it comes to the primary purpose of visits and as Coughlan

(2009) illustrates this is not just among French tourists. Nevertheless, as demonstrated above, the food tourism market is strong; therefore a gap exists in Ireland for a strategic approach to food tourism and the more demanding culinary tourist. As mentioned in the introduction Failte Ireland proposes to develop a Food Tourism Ireland strategy in the future. However, no report has of yet been published by Failte Ireland in relation to Irelands approach to the development of food tourism. Ireland has a wealth of natural opportunities at its doorstep, for example food festivals, fine artisan producers, food trails, high quality local farmers markets and world class cookery schools such as Ballymaloe Cookery School or Dunbrody Cookery School. It can be assumed that such images of Irish food festivals or Irish farmers markets would be beneficial from a food tourism perspective. Tracey Coughlan of Failte Ireland stated that “ The quality of our food ingredients is recognised worldwide as excellent in terms of both quality and authenticity”. “ While Irish cuisine may not be as renowned as those of our neighbours on the continent, the strength of our basic ingredients – beef, lamb, and dairy – are a strong selling point”. It is therefore suggested that in these challenging times, continuing to create demand for our tourism product is vital. “ Specialist areas like food and annual events like Harvest Feast are very important in this regard” (Failte Ireland 2009). Furthermore, Mintel (2009) report that the quality of food coupled with the availability of local produce are the most influential factors for tourists when choosing somewhere to eat. Mintel (2009) also point out that online reviews and guides such as the Michelin guide, the Michelin Pub Guide, and the Bridgestone Guide can be exceptionally influential on tourists’ choices. However, it must be realised that Ireland face challenges in its task to stimulate further demand from a

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food tourism perspective. The perception that Irish food is expensive, service related issues (a consistent level of quality is required), Irish food cost issues and the lack of innovation to create new food experiences are of concern (Coughlan 2009). It is therefore suggested that Ireland must build on the success of its food export market and take advantage of its natural opportunities. All the relevant agencies and bodies in Ireland must work together in order to develop a food tourism Ireland strategy which will fully integrate into and support the broader national and regional tourism development objectives.

2. 7 Summary

According to the literature, food tourism is increasing as an area of research among tourism scholars. However, data on food tourism is scarce. Although primarily a niche activity with a defined and reachable market, food tourism can have an extensive impact on every holiday experience as all tourists have to eat. This creates a connection between the food source and the food destination, as the food consumed by tourists in a place is part of the tourists' memory of their visit to that particular holiday destination. As explained, travel trends are becoming more activity-interest based rather than destination based. Furthermore, modern food tourists are better educated and have travelled more extensively. It is apparent from the research that the influence of the media has a major part to play in the recognition of food tourism. Online reviews and guidebooks can be exceptionally influential on tourists' choices. As demonstrated above, the food tourism market in Ireland is strong, despite the lack of a food tourism strategy. Although some issues arise, overall, Ireland has a wealth of natural

opportunities available, all of which could be used for the promotion of food tourism. Some tourism agencies such as the CTC have begun to recognise the growing interest in food and have begun to promote Canada as a food tourism destination. It is evident that the interest in food tourism spans across all age groups and the size of the potential market is large. Further analysis of the culinary tourist will be examined in the next chapter.