

Gastronomy Tourism

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Abstract

Gastronomy tourism has become an important niche market in the tourism industry. While many tourists make efforts to enjoy local cuisine while travelling to new places, an increasing number of tourists are making the focal point of their travels on particular cuisine or certain restaurants in other countries, planning side tourism activities around the food. This article traces the emergence, trends, and challenges of gastronomy tourism, with a brief look at the case of Japan.

Keywords

gastronomy, culinary, food, tourism, niche tourism, tourism trends

Introduction

With food comprising a third of expenditure by tourists (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2012) and two thirds of tourists saying food while traveling contributes to their overall travel experience (Hall, 2012), it is unsurprising that food has become a specific focus of tourism. Moreover, the increasing trend among tourists to pursue more novel and authentic food experiences in the local areas where they travel has led to businesses and organizations at both the national and regional levels to develop strategies to tap into this lucrative market. Initiatives are not only aimed at food consumption and experience at the tourist destination, but also promotion of food culture and food exports abroad. This article traces the emergence, trends, and challenges of gastronomy tourism, with a brief look at the case of Japan.

What is gastronomy tourism?

Gastronomy tourism in simple terms is “the act of traveling for the taste of a place in order to get a sense of place” (World Food Travel Association [WFTA], 2019b); it is primarily experiential in nature, the motivation to a visit a particular region specializing in food or beverage production not only for consumption but also to participate in related activities such as festivals and markets to learn about the regional identity and culture (Hall & Sharples, 2003). It has been suggested that gastronomy tourism evolved from wine tourism, visiting a vineyard or winery region to enjoy firsthand the nature and culture

of wines directly in the landscape of its production.

Although the term “food tourism” has been around for a long time, “culinary tourism” was commonly used following publication of the first white paper on the topic in 2001 by Erik Wolf, founder and executive director of WFTA: *Culinary Tourism: A Tasty Proposition* (WFTA, 2019b). “Culinary tourism” reverted to “food tourism” around 2012 to move away from elitist connotations associated with the word “culinary”. This has now been replaced by “gastronomy tourism” to more properly reflect the consumption of food as a cultural culinary experience.

Today gastronomy tourism embraces a wide scope including eating local food in restaurants and cafes; participating in festivals, food markets, and Christmas markets, both at home and abroad; participating in cooking classes, either separately or included in a tour, such as making *udon* in Japan (Henderstein, 2018); work experience on farms; and visiting food or beverage factories or museums (Stanley & Stanley, 2015). Food exports also play a role in whetting the appetite for travel abroad and sampling food in its original locale.

The gastronomy tourist of today can be categorized roughly into three profiles: first, the deliberate gastronomy tourist, whose primary travel purpose is cuisine; second, the opportunistic gastronomy tourist, who will actively pursue to experience local cuisine while travelling; and finally, the accidental culinary tourist, who may participate in food-related activities because they happen to be there (Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries, 2018). Strategies for expanding gastronomy tourism should take this in to account, seeking ways to maximize the targeting of each group.

How did gastronomy tourism emerge?

One could argue that gastronomy tourism emerged when restaurants first evolved at the end of the 18th century in France, catered by chefs formerly employed by aristocratic families prior to the French Revolution (Mealey, 2018). Food previously available outside the home was at unadorned common tables in taverns and roadside inns, which was basic fare such as bread and cheese, and cold meats (Ford, 2014). Those early restaurant diners on individual, cloth-covered tables set with fine china, considered themselves experts in gastronomy, the fine art of food, taste, and cooking.

Railway development in the 19th century fostered travel and dining abroad in Europe. Other forms of transport, such as the car, ship, and airplane have also played a role in the globalization of food tourism. The famous Michelin Guide was first published in 1900 to help road travellers in France find good food en route in France (Michelin Guide, 2019). Not only transportation, but wine, beer, and food festivals in various parts of the world to meet and foster growing interest in the cuisine of other cultures has also spurred visits to foreign countries to try out authentic local food (Parmar, 2016).

Last but not least is the impact of social media and the Internet including Facebook, Instagram, blogs, and dedicated websites such as those of TripAdvisor and other local tourist information organizations, for example, the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO; <https://www.japan.travel/en/>). Food tourists themselves, so-called “foodies,” are keen to share their culinary experiences on social media,

posting photos of dishes on Instagram, for example. Friends who see the photos of their eating experiences may also want to do the same. Potential customers of restaurants are also influenced by online reviews: good reviews prompting others to also want to sample the fare, bad reviews dissuading them. These trends have prompted many countries to broaden free Wi-Fi access, especially in Japan, which had previously lagged behind.

What are the trends in gastronomy tourism?

The main trend drivers in the gastronomy tourism industry come from all stakeholders, not only tourists themselves who seek more unique and authentic culinary experiences, want more interaction with locals, and are concerned about the origin, quality, and sustainability of local food, but also the tourism promoters seeking innovative ways to broaden the market (Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries, 2018).

Globalization

Expansion of gastronomy tourism worldwide is facilitated on a large scale by global organizations such as the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), which held its first World Forum on the topic in 2015, now an annual event. UNWTO has also started publishing a Global Report on Food Tourism, the first and second of these being issued in 2012 and 2017, respectively (UNWTO, 2012, 2017). In addition, the UNTWO Gastronomy Tourism Network promotes exchange of expertise, knowledge, and development of the gastronomy tourism sector among members (UNTWO, 2019a).

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Intangible Cultural Heritage list (UNESCO, 2019) also bolsters gastronomy tourism globally. Examples of listings from various continents include the Mediterranean Diet, the gastronomic meal of the French, and traditional Mexican cuisine (listed 2010); *washoku* (Japanese traditional food), *kimjang* making in South Korea, and Turkish coffee culture and tradition (listed 2013); flatbread making in Iran, Turkey and other countries, and beer culture in Belgium (listed 2016); and culinary traditions of Malawi (listed 2017).

Numerous global competitions and awards further publicize gastronomy tourism. For example, the UNTWO Gastronomy Tourism Startup Competition, launched in (UNWTO, 2018), targets companies that incorporate both sustainability and expansion potential. The Japanese company Ginkan promoting a tailored restaurant app was among the first five finalists. Another is the FoodTrex awards for excellence and innovation in food and beverage travel experiences, which has seven categories: best food or beverage destination; best food or beverage tour experience; best food or beverage lodging experience; best creative space for a food lover attraction; most innovative use of local ingredients in a food service menu; and best local storytelling in a food or beverage experience (WFTA, 2019b).

Authenticity

Documenting authentic cuisine on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists, certification of

chefs or service providers of authentic cuisine in addition to certification of agricultural products is becoming a trend. For example, in the case of Japan, there is certification for chefs who wish to provide Japanese cuisine in foreign countries (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries [MAFF], 2019b). Moreover, to promote authentic regional food, Japan has certified a number of regions (21 at the time of writing), accredited as “Savor Japan” areas, featuring food and specialties particular to the area MAFF, 2019b).

Dining with Locals

Not only are there more initiatives for general travel to rural areas, and interaction with the host communities, a number of websites have sprung up to meet the demand for local dining and other food-related activities. Some enable tourists to search for a private home-cooked meal experience, cooking lesson, or food tour in many parts of the world (for example, <https://www.eatwith.com/>, <https://www.travelingspoon.com>). Specific apps to promote regional cuisine to foreign visitors are also starting to appear, for example, “All Tokai fresh foods and local specialties navigation service” in Japan (MAFF, 2019b).

What are the challenges of gastronomy tourism?

Sustainability

One of the major challenges of gastronomy tourism is sustainability. This refers to sustainability of provision of local authentic offerings and supply of local produce to restaurants. Overtourism, while providing economic benefits, is diminishing supply against demand, driving up prices, which may affect affordability of certain foods by local people over tourists. As an illustration of this issue, two Tokyo restaurants previously awarded a 3-star Michelin rating (Sukiyabashi Jiro Honten and Sushi Saito) are no longer listed not because of lower standards but because of exclusivity—the general public are no longer able to make reservations (Michelin Guide, 2019). Moreover, oversaturation of the globalized market for certain products through promotion and exports may also dilute the uniqueness of local produce (WFTA, 2019a).

Accessibility

Accessibility of barrier-free facilities is a growing challenge for tourist areas and eating establishments. A recent presentation by Josh Grisdale (Grisdale, 2019), founder of Accessible Japan (<https://www.accessible-japan.com/>), highlighted the issues surrounding wheelchair users. For example, some restaurants may have steps, making it impossible for wheelchair users to enter. Potential patrons heavily rely on social media and other websites with barrier-free information to find out about accessibility of facilities. If they cannot find information, 50% decide not to travel, impacting gastronomy tourism.

Dietary Issues

Another challenge is the issue of tourists on special or restricted diets, for example, diabetics, vegans and vegetarians, those requiring Halal food, and those who have allergies, which may be fatal. Information on vegan, vegetarian, and Halal eateries has grown rapidly in recent years with much information about suitable restaurants and food producers now available on the Internet. Allergy issues remain an area that demands further attention. Given that it is estimated that at least 3% of the world population (240 million) may suffer one or more allergies (World Allergy Organization, 2019), some of whom may prefer not to risk traveling, this is a tremendous loss of potential tourism business. Different countries have different legislation regarding the information and labelling of allergens on pre-packaged food and non-pre-packaged food (for example, food served in restaurants) that may only be written in the local language only, which may be difficult for tourists from other countries to decipher.

To illustrate this, let us take a brief look at the difference in processed food labelling between Japan and the United Kingdom (UK). In Japan, it is required to include on food labelling seven allergens: buckwheat, crab, egg, milk, peanut, shrimp, and wheat (MAFF, 2018). There is only a recommendation to additionally include twenty other allergens such as sesame, soy, and walnuts. As a comparison, in the UK it is mandatory to include the following 14 allergens on pre-packed food: celery, cereals containing gluten, crustaceans (such as shrimp, crab, and lobster), eggs, fish, lupin, milk, molluscs (such as mussels and oysters), mustard, tree nuts (such as walnuts and hazelnuts), peanuts, sesame seeds, soybeans, and sulphur dioxide and sulphites (Food Standards Agency, 2019). Since some allergic reactions may prove fatal, this should be an urgent matter for gastronomy tourism.

Labelling and Packaging for Export

Labelling in general is also an issue for duty-free goods bought by tourists as well as exported goods. There is not only a requirement to comply with the legislation of the country importing, but packaging, and packaging size or volume may affect sales owing to custom or regulations. Duty-free liquor allowances vary from country to country, for example, the UK allowance for spirits is 700 ml. In addition, some companies brew sake bottle in 500 ml bottles while in fact 750 ml bottles may make it more attractive to some overseas consumers as this is equivalent to wine bottles' standard size (Kyodo News, 2018).

What is the situation of gastronomy tourism in Japan?

Recognition

While the term *gastronomy tourism* is not widely known in Japan—only 18% of respondents were familiar with this term in a survey conducted among Japanese municipalities promoting tourism for the UNTWO publication *Gastronomy Tourism – The Case of Japan* (UNTWO, 2019b)—Japan prides itself on its food and recognizes the importance of promoting Japanese cuisine as part of tourism promotion. As mentioned above, Japanese cuisine, *washoku*, was inscribed in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural

Heritage Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2013 (UNESCO, 2019). This was done partly to document Japanese culture but also to promote Japanese cuisine within Japan and overseas through food exports and restaurants.

Promotion

Tourism promotion in Japan is overseen by the Japan Tourism Agency, established by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport, and Tourism (MLIT) in October 2008 (MLIT, 2019). MAFF is also heavily involved in the marketing and promotion of agricultural and food products both locally and globally. MAFF has an annual award for the promotion of Japanese food or food products abroad as well as various pages on its website dedicated to *washoku* in addition to cuisine and recipes of local dishes in regional areas (MAFF, 2019b).

Dissemination of Information

Many tourism information publications nationwide advertise eating establishments that offer local specialities. The Japan National Tourist Organization on its website has a section on food and drink for the tourist featuring restaurant areas and specialities of various regions, including local food and drink, and their production such as local sake, beer, and whisky (JNTO; <https://www.japan.travel/en/things-to-do/eat-and-drink/>). Strategic promotions and alliances with a range of food-related businesses would provide more scope for further promotion of gastronomy tourism in Japan (UNTWO, 2019b).

Visitor Numbers

The number of visitors to Japan has soared in recent years as government promotions to reach inbound tourism targets have exceeded expectations (UNTWO, 2019b). Tourist numbers doubled from 2003 to 2013 from 5 million to 10 million, to over 30 million in 2018 (JTB Tourism & Research Consulting Co., 2019). Although spending levels are stable, international visitors are now making on average 4 trips in 2017 compared with only one trip in 2010. There is also an increasing trend for visitors to cite Japanese food as a pull factor, 59.3% compared with 49.9% for shopping, 43.5% to enjoy nature, and 43.4% to enjoy hot springs. Expenditure on food by foreign tourists is around 20% of overall spending after shopping (around 40%), and accommodation (25%) (MLIT, 2017). Top spending in terms of food per person is from visitors from Vietnam, Australia, and Spain.

In spite of a continuous upward trend in tourism numbers, critical issues regarding tourism in general in Japan including gastronomy tourism are the impacts of natural disasters, infectious disease outbreaks, and regional tensions (see separate section below). Disasters such as the Tohoku earthquake in 2011 and earthquakes in Kyushu in 2016 (MLIT, 2017), and volcanic activity such as in Hakone in 2019 (Kyodo News, 2019b) have all had negative impacts on tourism, which takes time to recover (JNTO, 2019; JTB Tourism & Research Consulting Co., 2019). In the last couple of decades, infectious diseases in Asia such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Avian Flu have impacted not only inbound tourism but also employment in the tourism industry (Rosselló et al., 2017).

Sustainability and Food Safety

Closely related to the issue of natural disasters is the issue of sustainability. Food may be contaminated by natural disasters such as flooding, environmental disasters such as oil spillages and chemical contamination, as well as radiation from nuclear disasters, with critical implications for food provision and export. For example, in spite of eight years having passed since the disaster at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant, many countries, most notably Taiwan and China, continue to ban imports of seafood, rice, and other processed food from that area (MAFF, 2019a).

Regional Tensions

At the time of writing this article, recent political tensions between Japan and South Korea have seen inbound tourism from South Korea plunge nearly 20% in October 2019, resulting in the first drop in overall numbers of inbound tourists since 2012 (JNTO, 2019; Kyodo News, 2019a). Not only have inbound visitor numbers been affected but Japanese exports. Exports of beer to South Korea were said to be zero for October, 2019, highlighting the extent to which regional tensions may have an impact. South Korea is a major importer from Japan, being third after China and the United States of America (Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2019).

Discussion and Conclusion

Gastronomy tourism has seen rapid growth over the last few decades. The consensus among industry experts is that to sustain that growth clear strategies need to be developed and implemented with coordinated effort, regulation, and support, including clear definitions of local and authentic cuisine as well as best practices by and among all stakeholders—both national and local governments, businesses and workers in the industry, and host communities (WFTA, 2019a). Regulation, for example, may take the form of accreditation of genuine local foods or dishes, or the chefs preparing them. In addition to such local authenticated food, destinations should provide education in the culture and traditions of local food to create a better understanding and appreciation of a region's unique food heritage, thus ensuring sustainability of its future. Moreover, this should be complemented by raising awareness among local host communities as well as staff in the hospitality and tourism sector of the history and culture of local cuisine.

Innovation of food, culture, and integrated activities is a key feature of the future of gastronomy tourism. A report on a workshop by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on food and the tourism experience highlights ways a number of member countries are innovating gastronomy tourism (OECD, 2012). These include promoting local food in restaurants (Nordic region); educating foreign visitors about the art of gastronomy and culture such as through food laboratories (Italy); promoting local cuisine as an intangible cultural heritage (Latin America); providing appropriate legal and financial support to help organizations develop foodscapes (food and food culture centering around the landscape and environment where the food is produced), as well as customized culinary tours and cooking classes (Korea); creation of new food products (Spain); establishing

gastronomic experiences as the “pillar” of the tourism experience (Austria); and promoting food and lifestyle (France). Innovation in social media will also continue to play an important role as a platform for promotion of gastronomy tourism.

In conclusion, gastronomy tourism like tourism in general is sensitive to many factors including environmental issues, natural disasters, and regional tensions. On the other hand, gastronomy tourism is a vital rapidly growing segment of the tourism industry. Since people need to eat, abundant opportunities for growth abound whether or not the tourist is local or foreign or has a specific inclination to seek a unique or authentic experience. However, to ensure that each country can sustain and protect the uniqueness and authenticity of its cuisine and foster gastronomy tourism, governments should implement appropriate policies and strategies to that end so that gastronomy tourism can continue to flourish and delight.

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[要約]

美食観光は、観光産業の重要なニッチ市場になっています。多くの観光客が新しい場所に旅行しながら地元の料理を楽しむ努力をしていますが、ますます多くの観光客が他の国の特定の料理や特定のレストランに旅行の焦点を当てており、食品周辺のサイド観光活動を計画しています。この記事では、日本の事例を簡単に見て、グルメ観光の出現、傾向、および課題を追跡します。

[キーワード]

美食、料理、食べ物、観光、ニッチ観光、観光トレンド