

Gastronomy Tourism: Croatia, a Land of Wine and Plenty, or Beyond Pizza and Grill!

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between gastronomy and tourism is affirmed in select social sciences literature, but only a few studies are reported in the hospitality literature that specifically addresses gastronomy and tourism relationship. This exploratory study intends to bridge this gap by focusing on gastronomy's influence how tourists experience a destination (Wolf, 2006).

GASTRONOMY AND TOURISM

It was Long (2002) who first coined the term 'Culinary Tourism' in 1998 to express the idea of experiencing other cultures through food. Wolf (2006, p. 20), however, defines culinaria and gastronomy tourism as 'travel in order to search for, and enjoy prepared food and drink...and unique and memorable gastronomic experiences'. This supports earlier research (Finkelstein, 1989) which suggests that feelings and memories make dining out when on holiday, very special and attractive, because

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these become transposed into experiences that are often very personal. Importantly, these experiences also have the power to modify our eating preferences and tastes as well as imbue us with experiences of the culture that we are visiting (Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2010, 2011; Johns & Clarke, 2001; Johns & Kivela, 2001; Kivela & Crotts, 2009; Kivela & Johns, 2002). In this context, one of the functions of the destination's food service industries is the provision of those experiences and feelings that individuals believe they should be having while on holiday or while travelling. It is normal that we should experience pleasure as an essential part of a holiday experience, and dining out should be a pleasurable and memorable part of that experience. So much in fact, that culinaria and gastronomy play a pivotal role in the marketing of some tourist destinations. For example, some travel organizations (Travel, 2015) regularly offer gourmet or culinary holidays to Asia, Italy and France and holidays with cooking classes in Tuscany and Provence; Melbourne and Sydney in Australia are often marketed as the food and wine and restaurant destinations. (The Australian Tourist Commission—ATC—was one of the first destination marketing organizations to make a commitment to culinary tourism.) For tourists, this means that the destination's restaurants' ambience and cuisine are legitimate sources of pleasure which generates emotions and experiences, hopefully pleasant ones, that they are supposed to be having while on holiday (Kivela & Chu, 2001; Kivela & Crotts, 2009). However, while tourists often dine out in search of new taste and culinary experiences, they also encounter disappointment from time to time: an eatery that is a parody of the destination's image or what Finkelstein (1989) calls the 'manufactured images'. Nevertheless, an increasing number of tourist destinations are very sought-after because of their unique culinaria and gastronomy (Hjalager, 2002). Lifestyle and travel media also vigorously promote gastronomy, for example, magazines such as the *Epicure* and *Gourmet*. In search of new recipes and taste sensations, both food critics and celebrity chefs scour the world for new and different gastronomy, rediscovering old, long-forgotten recipes and discovering new ingredients and new culinary destinations. Therefore, it is appropriate to say that the relationship between gastronomy and a tourist destination is symbiotic because the destination provides the food, recipes, chefs and the cultural backdrop that makes gastronomy an ideal product for tourist consumption (Chang et al., 2010, 2011; Fields, 2002; Richards, 2002; Scarpato, 2002). Simply stated, gastronomy is an inextricable part the holiday experience.

Hjalager (2003) offers phenomenological model of culinary tourism experiences. The model of tourism and gastronomy lifestyles depicts tourist attitudes and preferences for food and eating according to four categorizations—*recreational*, *existential*, *diversionary* and *experimental* gastronomy tourists. The *existential* gastronomy tourists seek food combinations and eating experiences that foster (culinary) learning. For these tourists food consumption and drinking do not only satisfy hunger and thirst, importantly for them, such consumption means gaining in-depth knowledge about the local or regional cuisine and of the destination's culture. For these tourists, the holiday's success is measured by that special restaurant 'where only the locals eat'. The *existential* gastronomy tourist will actively seek and visit working farms and participate in cooking classes and harvesting of fruits, vegetables and wines; they will visit cheese and wine makers and go fishing with professional fishermen.

The *experimental* gastronomy tourists symbolize their lifestyle through food—usually trendy and 'in' foods. These tourists will actively seek the destination's smartest designer cafes and restaurants that serve innovative menus and offer equally chic service. The *experimental* gastronomy tourists keep up-to-date about trendy and fashionable foods, ingredients and recipes. They actively pursue trying out new ingredients and new ways of eating and preparing food. Yesterday's food trends are quickly replaced by today's food fashions. For the *experimental* quality and fashionability value of food is a major consideration—being part of their overall lifestyle.

The *recreationalist* gastronomy tourists are the more conservative type, that is, they appreciate and actively seek, while holidays, the familiarity of their home cuisine. The *recreationalist* gastronomy tourists actively engage in self-catering while on holidays. They also prefer to stay in self-contained accommodation such as holiday apartments if available. Often, they bring ingredients with them so that they will not have to do without. Dining ambiance and service style have little impact on *recreationalists*. They also do not like foreign foods, except those foods that have long become part of their everyday life.

The *diversionary* gastronomy tourists are the kinds of tourists that want to escape from the everyday life—mundanity (Finkelstein, 1989)—that includes day-to-day shopping and cooking for the family. For these tourists, while on holiday, food must come easily, without too much effort, and there must be plenty of it, for example, popular and chain restaurant operations. They prefer and actively seek menu items that are familiar. For the *diversionaries* quantity, not quality, of food is essential, for example,

large meat joints, jumbo-sized desserts and big plates of pasta are taken into consideration rather than haute cuisine. The *diversionary* gastronomy tourists have a dislike for exotic foods.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design was adopted that utilized quantitative techniques for data collection and analysis involving the use of a survey questionnaire. A survey sample should normally represent the population, particularly when a random sampling method is used. In this instance, however, it was not prudent to apply a random sampling methodology to disparate tourist subjects. The alternative strategy was to employ a systematic approach in selecting the subjects, and the subjects' age and gender were selected by a judgmental method. The sample size was set at 3600 (400 per summer per each island each year). The survey was conducted with the assistance and cooperation of selected restaurants at these main towns on Vis (towns of Vis and Komiža), Hvar (towns of Hvar and Stari Grad) and Korčula (town of Korčula). Based on the researcher's prior experience, the proposed sampling design minimized undue inconvenience to other guests and the participating organizations. The survey was conducted at the participating restaurant properties. The survey was randomly administered once per day from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm, two times per week on a continual basis over the three-month period. The reliability analysis was calculated to measure the internal consistency of each of the research instrument's main item banks. The coefficients for all item banks exceeded the recommended level of 0.50 (Hair, Anderson, & Black, 1995), ranging from 0.84 to 0.95.

In analysing the data, descriptive statistics were used to examine variables of interest, including Chi-square (χ^2). In order to compare samples across perceptual and experience dimensions or demographic grouping, appropriate comparative analyses such as ANOVA were used. Multivariate analysis (factor and regression) was also used. Only the findings of the select regression analysis are presented in this article.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A select example of demographic characteristics of the sample is presented in Table 13.1.

Of particular interest is that almost 30 per cent of the sample indicated that their main reason for travelling to these islands was to taste the local

Table 13.1 The demographic characteristics of the sample

<i>Main purpose for visiting Hvar or Vis or Korčula</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Holiday/pleasure	2050	59
Business/meeting	139	4.0
Visiting friends or relatives	244	7.0
Stop-over	35	1.0
Because of the island's authentic food	1007	29.0
Total	3475	100.0

cuisine. In real terms, one could argue that about 700,000 to 1.5 million tourists might be coming to Croatia to savour its gastronomy as well. These numbers are not inconsequential, and a 'culinary or gastronomy' tourism segment representing 10–12 per cent of the total visitor market is, by any measure, a significant market segment. For Croatia, this represents a substantial gastronomy tourism market segment possibility, and evidence suggests that motivation to travel for gastronomy reasons is a reasonably valid construct to use for tourism market segmentation purposes in Croatia. Croatia's tourism authority promotes Croatia as a great tourist destination vis-à-vis its tourist information offices in Croatia and abroad, and although it mentions Croatia's authentic foods, it does not specifically market Croatia's gastronomy to the international gastronomy tourism market segment, as is done, for example, by the Regional Tourism Authority in Tuscany or by the New Zealand's tourism board.

Factor Analysis

The Principal Components and Orthogonal (varimax) rotation method was used for the analysis. A variable was considered of practical significance and included in a factor when its factor loading was equal to or greater than 0.5 (Norušis, 1994, 2000), with a Bartlett Test of Sphericity value of 5922.133. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin overall measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) was 0.872. From the Orthogonal (varimax) rotated factor matrix, seven factors with 21 variables were defined by the original variables that loaded most heavily (loading ≥ 0.5) on them. The factor analysis produced a clean factor structure with relatively higher loadings on the appropriate factors with most variables loaded heavily on the first five factors but not on the sixth and seventh. The seven-factor solution

resulted in 67.9 per cent of the variance explained. The communality of each variable was relatively high, ranging from 0.39 to 0.81. A six-factor solution resulted in the following factor labels:

- Factor 1: Expectations of gastronomy
- Factor 2: Importance of gastronomy
- Factor 3: Gastronomy experiences at destination
- Factor 4: Gastronomy as reason for travel
- Factor 5: Evaluation of gastronomy experiences at destination
- Factor 6: Culture and gastronomy

Regression Analysis

The regression analysis showed that all predictors except (F#2) 'Importance of gastronomy', (F#4) 'Gastronomy as reason for travel' and (F#6) 'Culture and gastronomy' were included in the model for the prediction. The sample's gastronomy-tourist group 'Expectations of gastronomy' with Beta = 0.871 accounted for a very high 87 per cent of the variance explained, and together with (F#3) 'Gastronomy experiences at destination' with Beta = 0.041, and (F#5) 'Evaluation of gastronomy experiences at destination' with Beta = 0.043, was found to be the most important predictor groups which would consider returning to Croatia's islands to sample their gastronomy sometime in the future.

Both the literature and evidence from this study suggest that when travellers' expectations were met and/or were exceeded, they were likely to return to the destination sometime in the future. Importantly in this study, it appears that this also applies to gastronomy tourists and arguably that the 'existential' and 'experimental' gastronomy tourists, who are knowledgeable in gastronomy, are the most likely groups who would return to the same destination because of its unique gastronomy, providing they had satisfying gastronomy experiences (Evaluation of gastronomy experiences at destination). These results provide evidence suggesting that as a result of favourable experiences, repeat visits to a destination because of its unique gastronomy is a reasonably valid construct to use for destination marketing purposes. The results from this study clearly indicate that Croatia's gastronomy was a significant factor that positively contributed to the respondents' desire to return to Croatia again. Hence, it is argued here that Croatia's gastronomy plays a contributing role in the creation of a high-quality travelling experience and return behaviour. In addition,

the analysis of the findings also reveals that Croatia's gastronomy might be increasingly converging as a significant element in a range of touristic experiences. That is, gastronomy is increasingly vital to a whole range of tourism products and services that are offered in Croatia.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study described here finds that gastronomy is inextricably linked to the destination and the destination's image, in multi-dimensional forms, some of which are not yet clearly understood. From this study it can also be hypothesized that gastronomy and culinary experiences are powerful tools for marketing Croatia's uniqueness.

While the study confirms that Croatia's gastronomy is an integral part of the visitor's experience, Croatia's tourism marketing has not really focused on integrated strategies to develop, refine and capitalize on interest in gastronomy, and yet there is evidence which shows that various tourism authorities use gastronomy to create niche markets for their destinations, for example, Italy, France, Australia, Spain and New Zealand. Croatia's tourism marketing promotes its gastronomy in a peace-meal and uncoordinated manner as an adjunct to its overall tourism promotions, and yet, gastronomy promotions for the local consumption abound. That is, Croatia's tourism authorities do not have a clearly defined strategy to market, and defend, Croatia's unique and authentic gastronomy. There are several notable destinations that demonstrate such leadership in the gastronomy tourism niche. Noteworthy examples include Sydney and Melbourne, Australia; Western Australia; Singapore; Taiwan; Macau; New Orleans; New Zealand; Spain; and Greece. Space precludes discussing them here (for further reading, see Hjalager, A.M. (2003). *What do tourists eat and why? Towards a sociology of gastronomy and tourism*, in, J. Collen, and G. Richards, (red.). *Gastronomy and Tourism. ATLAS – expert meeting. Sandrio (Italy) 21–23 November 2002*. Academie Voor de Streekgebonden Gastronomie, Belgium).

SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR CROATIA'S TOURISM PLANNERS

The literature suggests that destinations with best chances for developing gastronomy tourism products are those destinations that already have the advantageous 'ingredients' to support a gastronomy tourism strategy. Such resources include unique and/or multi-ethnic cuisine, creative chefs,

unique marine and agricultural products, unique culinary heritage and so on. No doubt, Croatia is endowed with all of these 'ingredients' and more. Although gastronomy tourism is the primary tourism product in only a handful of destinations, a gastronomy destination like Croatia if serious about refining and niching its gastronomy tourism products, it should first perform an asset inventory. The inventory is then sorted according to type (cuisine type, culinary regions of significance with authentic and unique foods, authentic restaurants, growers and suppliers, markets and such). How many resources exist in each category? Then an informal ranking should be performed, for example, what is the quality of each resource on a scale of 1 to 5. Next, it should list what are Croatia's unique gastronomy assets? Does Croatia produce/prepare a unique food items? What are Croatia's gastronomy strengths/weaknesses? Should Croatia ban pizza from traditional-cuisine areas? Should Croatia trademark its indigenous foods/recipes like Tuscany does? That is, what exists in Croatia's gastronomy market that could be an opportunity of threat? And, what kinds of partnerships could Croatia forge to take gastronomy tourism product development to a marketable level, outside Croatia?

As the regional gastronomy tourism niche market intensifies, and as more professionals begin to understand its role within their tourism industry, we will see more gastronomy tours; more food-oriented travel guidebooks; more focus on travel in epicure magazines; and more itineraries that celebrate food/drink as an integral part of the travel experience. In the Croatian context and assuming that gastronomy tourism growth is to continue, business owners and the destination's marketers will have to consider innovative and synergetic opportunities for strategic partnerships. The matrix shown in Table 13.2 gives an idea of the types of gastronomy tourism alliances or business relationships that are likely to be successful in Croatia. As implied by the matrix, gastronomy tourism is a complexly interesting and potentially a very unique product to add to Croatia's destination product mix, if only because as all other tourists, gastronomy tourists leave their money within the local business economy before they return home. Importantly in the Croatian context, gastronomy tourism if strategically marketed as a unique product niche, it would greatly help in overcoming the Croatia's stereotype identity as the 'sun & sand' paradise. It would also provide additional opportunities for local businesses that are in some way connected to tourism. On a more positive note, regional competition and the synergy of complementary products help to raise the overall quality of the visitor's experience and the products

offered in all destinations. However, in developing gastronomy tourism niche for tourists visiting Croatia, it is not enough to simply offer a gastronomy experience; gastronomy tourism is also about making the tourist feel good as a result of their visit to Croatia. Making tourists feel good about being in Croatia is highly desirable, but it is even more desirable to make the tourists feel good about themselves. This is an important, and appealing, emotional dimension of gastronomy. To achieve this, however, requires an effort on the part of the destination's tourism planners and gastronomy providers to educate tourists about why the local cuisine and its associated culture are ubiquitous to the region they're in. If we are to consider the destination's gastronomy as a pleasurable experience, the pre-and-post elements of that experience gain added significance. This is because tourists appear to evaluate their holiday experiences against often-vague holiday ideas influenced by general motivators in the pre-holiday phase and re-assessed in the post-holiday phase. From the analysis of the results of this study, it can be said with confidence that respondents' satisfaction with gastronomy in Croatia was dependent on the image they had of the destination's gastronomy before visiting, compared with the actual experience of gastronomy that they had experienced. This before-after relationship is important when developing strategies for gastronomy tourism in Croatia because its gastronomy is much more likely to be mentioned by repeat visitors than by first-time visitors. Hence, since tourists' level of knowledge of the local gastronomy prior to consumption is likely to be less than their post-visit knowledge, this knowledge-gap knowledge must also be addressed when marketing gastronomy tourism.

In summary, it can be said that the impression of gastronomy present in the respondents' perceptions of their dining-out experiences offers a rich and an alternative perspective from which to understand the experiences of holiday-makers. The precepts investigated can also provide a rational framework for a future study about tourists' perceptions of various gastronomy products in Croatia and in other destinations. For Croatia's tourism planners, the emotive nature of gastronomy offers considerable potential in terms of the niche marketing. Offering experiences that dovetail with the motivations of individual tourists can ensure that gastronomy tourism in Croatia becomes even more popular in the future. Finally, the analysis of respondents' perceptions about their dining-out experiences in this study has underpinned the structuring of the hypothesis for a more in-depth investigation sometime in the future, that gastronomy plays an increasingly deciding role in the way tourists select a destination.

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