

Gastronomic Tourism as a Destination Attraction in Kazakhstan

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ABSTRACT

The article highlights the key aspects of gastronomic tourism as a modern touristic destination in Kazakhstan. The purpose of this article is to find out the basic concepts of gastronomic tourism as a tremendously growing opportunity for the development of regions in Kazakhstan and their active participation in the formation of an innovative tourist attraction. The theoretical differentiation of gastronomic tourists based on travel purposes has been implemented. The segmentation of this type of tourism is also considered in terms of the relationship to food concept as the main travel motivator for a particular destination. An attempt to consider gastronomic tourism as a perspective view of the development of Kazakhstan regions has been made. The findings may have important implications on culinary tourism strategy for the future development and implementation in the region.

Keywords: *gastronomic tourism, culinary tourism, gastronomic tourist, tourism*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a human activity which provides new experiences to those who practice it. Needless to say that tourism activity has a real impact on economic and social development as it greatly contributes to the GDP and the role it plays on the labor market. Tourism is that branch of the economy that still plays an important role in many countries around the world. In our days tourism has become a tremendously large concept which includes a number of specific activities one of which is food or culinary tourism.

Visiting other countries with the purpose to get acquainted with a traditional food or enjoying culinary culture is a great idea for those who want to receive new impressions and touristic experience. Gastronomic tourism is so-called a travel to taste something new as a best culinary pleasure to understand the culture of a people living in that specific destination. The traditional food tasting is an important mean of entry into a different culture which allows feeling difference not only intellectually but also on the sensory level. Local food is the main attribute of a destination place adding the overall feeling of the tourist experience. It makes food an integral part of tourism consumption and production increasing its role in the successful development of the entire tourism industry. Nutrition is one of the elements included in the new concept of cultural heritage and cultural tourism that is explained by a growing tendency to welfare, quality of life, sustainable environment and quality experience while traveling.

The Relations between Food and Tourism

The term culinary tourism was introduced in 1998 by an assistant professor of food and culture at the State Bowling Green University - Lucy Long. The International Association of gastronomic tourism was founded in 2003 by Eric Wolf (The International Culinary Tourism Association). In 2012, the term culinary tourism has been replaced by the term gastronomic tourism due to the fact of the study conducted by the International Association of gastronomic tourism which indicated that the majority of surveyed respondents believed that culinary tourism is focused on elite visitors mainly. Therefore, it was decided to replace with a more available for the majority term, combining food shops, street vendors, pubs for locals, wineries, one of kind restaurants into one general concept.

Gastronomic tourism is an emerging phenomenon that is developing like a new tourist product due to the fact that one third of the trip budget is spent on food consumption. As a fact of this, local cuisine is an important factor in terms of vacation quality. One of the most used definitions of gastronomic tourism has been offered by Lee, gastronomic tourism "is a journey, in regions rich in gastronomic resources, to generate recreational experiences or have entertainment purposes, which include: visits to primary or secondary producers of gastronomic products, gastronomical festivals, fairs, events, cooking demonstrations, food tastings or any activity related to food" (Lee et al., 2015).

One of the main implicit factors that tourists consider in choosing the destination is food. As Lacy and Douglass (2002) mentioned "every tourist is a voyeuring gourmand". To define the gastronomy the following highlighted three approaches being considered (Taar, 2014):

- Gastronomy is a fine cuisine, it is a patrimony established by generations of cooks and is the result of a delicate processes.
- Gastronomy is studying the physical characteristics of foods (such as quality) and seeks to better understand the processes that occur when food is consumed.
- Food is the source of inspiration and pleasure.

Gastronomic tourism is a niche travel who tries to achieve a perfect balance between useful and pleasant, between the daily needs of food and culinary experiences that can positively mark tourists. Consumption is an integral part of the tourist experience which is represented by (Diaconescu and Nistoreanu, 2013):

- Visiting places;
- Attendance to different traditions and customs;
- Eat local cuisine.

For the consumers of gastronomic tours, it is necessary to define in advance with the travel concept. The traveler can visit a country famous for centuries-old culinary traditions and get acquainted with its attractions. Another one can visit the vivid and memorable gastronomic festivals which are held periodically in different parts of the world. For example, the Oyster Festival in Ireland in September, Oktoberfest in Munich, or in November Beaujolais Nouveau - a young wine festival held in France.

The importance of the connection between food and tourism cannot be ignored. Each destination has different levels of attractiveness that can draw tourists from different countries (Au and Law, 2002). Authentic and interesting food can attract visitors to a destination. Using Getz and Brown's (2006) application and definition of wine tourism, we can say that culinary tourism can be associated with travelers' interest in the food of a destination. On the other hand, the destination will use food as the main attraction and will develop marketing strategies that will focus on the food. It is important for marketers of a culinary destination to know the image currently held by its targeted customers and how to affect their intention to visit through effective marketing strategies. Frochot (2003) recommended food images can be utilized to exhibit the cultural aspects of a country. Corigliano (2002) stated that culinary tourism can be categorized as cultural tourism, because of its connection to the preservation of agriculture product. For example, Italy is famous for its wine and olive oil regions. In essence, culinary tourism involved gourmet tours which include touring farms and wineries as well as tasting food products. Additionally, culinary tourism also could provide travelers with unique experience where they could experience the culture of a particular destination and associate it with the past history. The author also established a framework of culinary tourism as depicted in Figure 1.

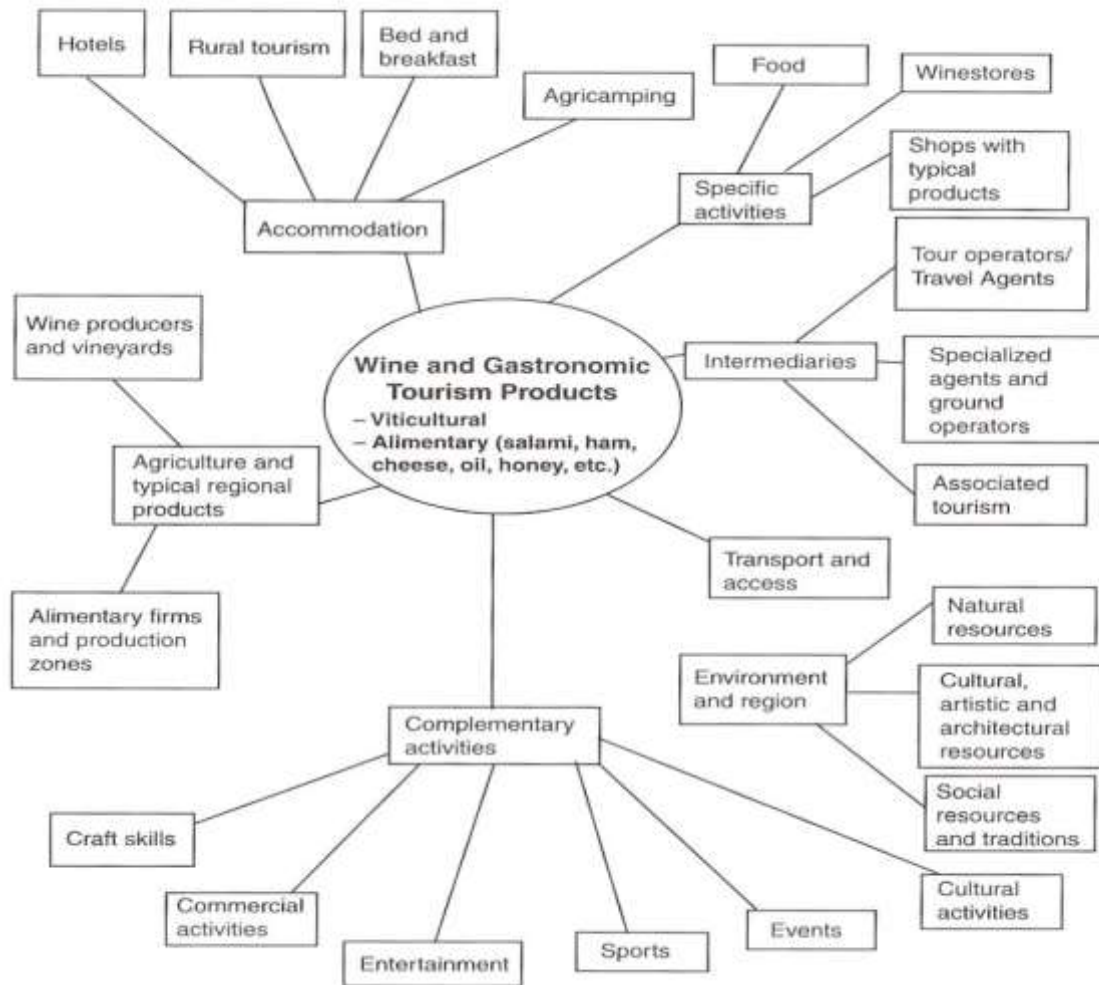


Figure 1. Supply components of wine and culinary tourism system

According to the World Food Travel Association, it is now possible to allocate 12 categories of gastronomic tourism:

1. Culinary schools and master classes
2. Culinary Entertainment
3. Culinary trends
4. Culinary events
5. Culinary media
6. Culinary preparations
7. Food stores
8. Gastronomic tours of agencies
9. Catering establishments
10. Farmers' markets

11. Gastronomic clubs

12. Manufacture of food products

Tour operators are increasingly explaining that consumers select destinations not on the number of beaches or historical monuments but on the fact of assessing gastronomic attractiveness of the country. However, gastronomic tourism in Kazakhstan is a rare concept. Lack conceived routes and poor infrastructure are not best criteria of travel. Few foreigners and locals are ready to pay to cross the vast expanses of Kazakhstan with a view to try this or that national food. And it is important not just to try a culinary product but also to join the art of cooking.

Gastronomic Development as a Concept in Kazakhstan and International Experience

Among the factors hindering the development of gastronomic tourism in Kazakhstan are:

- Lack of experience with local tourist operators to organize gastronomic tours.
- The high cost of gastronomic tours.
- Insufficient quality of visitor services at the enterprises of tourism and hospitality.

The Kazakhstani tourism operators of gastronomic tours rarely include elements of culinary into gastronomic trips. For today, there is no clear concept of gastronomic operations in Kazakhstan. Experts believe that in the foreseeable future some unique gastronomic routes will appear in Kazakhstan where priorities will be given to "green" gastronomic tourism.

Factors favoring the development of gastronomic tourism (in addition to the availability of resources) include: the ability to create new jobs and the involvement of local residents in the workflow; the presence of diverse natural and recreational potential, rich cultural and historical heritage; availability of educational institutions of higher education and centers of professional training in the field of tourism and hospitality; the organization of major international and regional business, cultural, entertainment and sporting events.

As a matter of fact, there are no culinary tours specifically designed for the travelers to taste local food in Kazakhstan. Some experts advise to combine such tours with the local traditional events: for example, the opportunity to see the celebration of (Navruz) New Year and try Kazakh cuisine. In addition, gastronomic tours proposed to carry out during the harvesting process the meat for the winter. This may allow visitors to experience the nomadic lifestyle of the Kazakhs who have not had any food storage technologies. As a rule, the cattle slaughtered for the winter with the first frosts. Gastronomic tours in Kazakhstan in the late fall - early winter would be a great help in the low season, experts say. It is possible to develop not only the direction of Kazakh cuisine but also the national cuisine of the people living in Kazakhstan, as well as to cooperate with neighboring countries in the organization of such tours.

The specific features of gastronomic tourism:

- Kazakhstan regions have conditions for the development of gastronomic tourism;
- Gastronomic tourism is not the nature of the holiday season;
- Culinary tourism in varying degrees is a constituent element of all tours but in contrast to other types of tourism familiarity, national cuisine becomes the main motive and purpose of a gastronomic tour;
- promoting local farms and producers of food products is an integral part of any gastronomic tour.

At the same time, the interest in gastronomic tourism in Kazakhstan requires reinforcement's events. It can be a variety of gastronomic festivals (for example, well-known festivals in Germany and the Czech Republic) and farmer's trips. However, the potential local manufacturers are not in a hurry to start the tour to their production. One of the main reasons for this is the low level of agricultural development in the country. It turns out that potential interest from tourists exists however; the marketing proposals are definitely not enough. Within the framework of the tourism cluster development program by 2020 Kazakhstan should become a leader in the tourism industry. In the course of this program, the number of Kazakhstani tourists

will increase significantly, as well as to attraction of foreign tourists. The main task to be solved by the government and the private sector is the development of the Kazakhstan tourist market as whole and gastronomic tours in particular.

There is an attempt to systematize the types of gastronomic tourists in relation to gastronomy as a main attractor in a tourist trip. Gastronomic tourist by definition by (Shenoy 2005) is a person who eats out often, gets local food and drinks of local production, having preferences that prevail in high-end establishments and hardly ever selects the catering establishments which operate under a franchise system. For example, it is proposed to divide the tourists traveling with gastronomic goal into 5 types. The first two can be attributed to the target audience of this kind of tourism:

- Gastronomic tourists: experts, gastronomic critics;
- Foodies: enthusiasts who are interested in high-quality food, local producers, seasonal products;
- Interested buyers: perceive food as a complement to the pleasures of the holidays. Tasting local food without much enthusiasm;
- Uninvolved, not considering the food to be an important part during the holidays;
- «Sluggish consumers»: having no interest in new foods while traveling.

Culinary tourism has shown itself sufficiently profitable source of the state of the economy. However, despite the current situation in Kazakhstan, more business focused people realize the promise of this direction. It is difficult to find data on the economic impact of the region promoting gastronomic tours. Few tourist companies or governments have ever conducted such research studies. However, it should be noted that all travelers are eating and drinking. To draw a simple conclusion, we can assume that averagely 25% of expenditures are spent on foods and drinks by an average tourist during the trip. This percentage is certainly higher when traveling with a gastronomic purpose.

Tourism Association of America in 2012 conducted a study in which more than 60% of respondents expressed a willingness to go on a gastronomic journey in the next 12 months. This study also proved that the gastronomic tourist spends twice as much as "regular" tourist. They are willing to pay for the opportunity to taste authentic food made with local products by local chefs. The main groups of gastronomic tourists in the near future will form:

- families with double income no kids (DINKS: Double Income No Kids);
- families (or single) without children (SINKS: Single Income No Kids);
- young people aged 25-35 with no children;
- middle-aged people, 45-55 years, well-educated with high-income, whose children have left home (so-called "devastated family nest");
- representatives of the generation of the baby boom birth 1950;
- divorced, seeking to create a couple and considering going to the restaurant at this point.

(The International Culinary Tourism Association, 2010) proposed to count "readiness index" to take gastronomic tourists. According to this index the most ready country to receive gastronomic tourists is Scotland (79 points out of 100), Canada (67 out of 100) with the main emphasis here is on the agricultural sector. The lowest level of readiness and, in turn, the greatest potential for development has been indicated by South Africa (28 of 100). There was no data for Kazakhstan. Gastronomic tourists are very active in other activities - they are more likely than ordinary tourists, visiting historical sites, going to the theaters, attending music festivals, parks and gardens, play golf, enjoy spa services actively.

According to a study in Europe, it can be observed that the food fairs are promoting the local products (59%) and the visits to the markets and to the manufacturers/producers (53%). Bearing less importance among the products offered by the gastronomic tourism are the museums (mentioned only by 12% of the respondents) and presentations with 6% positive responses (Figure 2).

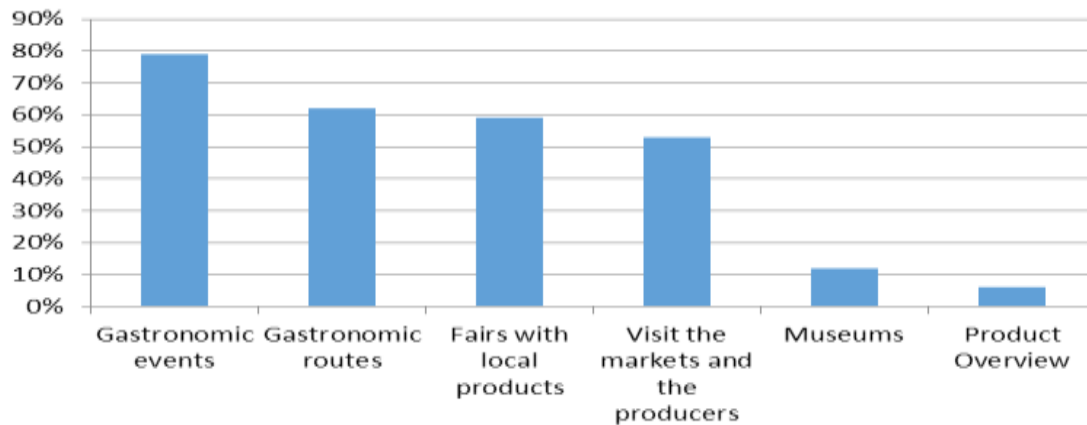


Figure 2. European Gastronomic visitors' preferences

For the development of the gastronomic potential of the regions, the use the European and international experience on the part of the formation of culinary baskets of best products of the region can be adapted. In fact, the network does not exist in Kazakhstan as it is in France where the life in the village is considered more prestigious recent years.

There are the following possible ways of development of gastronomic tourism in the world that can be successfully applied to Kazakhstan:

1. The development of culinary tourism resources specific to the region.
2. Development of areas with the possibility of obtaining numerous tourist experiences including gastronomy.
3. Cooperation between private producers of tourist and gastronomic services.
4. The use of an effective marketing strategy to destinations which includes gastronomic offer, raising public awareness about this form of tourism.
5. Raising public consciousness by promoting local food culture.

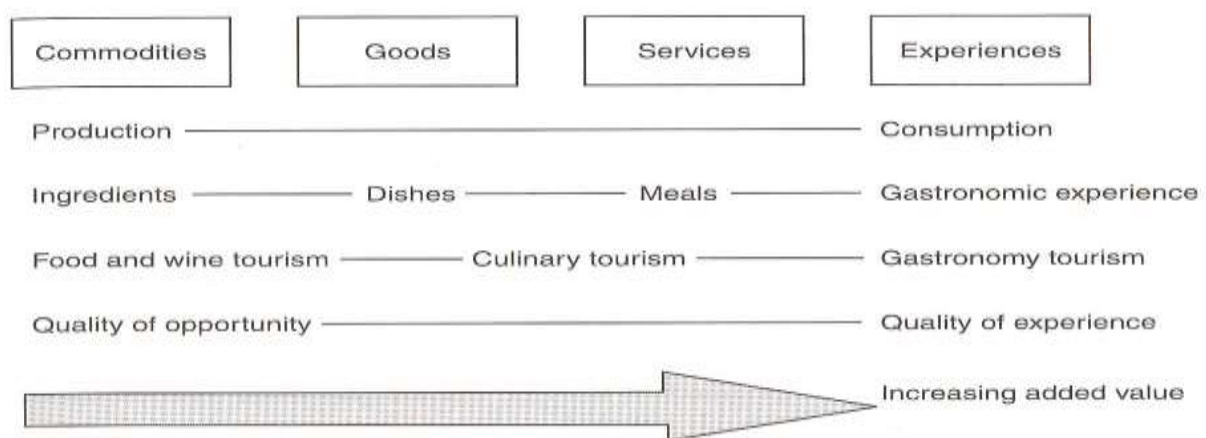


Figure 3. Relating consumption and production in gastronomy tourism experience.
Source: Greg Richards; 2002, p19.

Finally, Richards (2002) designed a model of culinary tourism as shown in Figure 3. This model depicted the links in culinary tourism, starting with the production of food, consumption, and experiences. In summary, the figure represents a network of culinary tourism which begins at the farm or vineyard and ends at the restaurants that might determine the “quality of experience.”

Conclusion

According to (Dozier, 2012), it is obvious that gastronomy plays an indispensable role in the promotion of tourism. In the development of gastronomic tourism, traditional strategies can offer the possibility to use the strategic tools to articulate the quality, variety and uniqueness of local products and gastronomy of a territory. Consequently, the creation of plans to form development guidelines and create gastronomic tourism products is perceived as a priority for tourist destinations. In the context of increasing competition in the field of tourism and its marketing, each region is in search of unique products with the help of it could be differentiated from other regions. By itself, the local cuisine is already one platform that includes the necessary resources which can be used as a marketing tool to attract visitors, promote the cities, regions or even countries. Accordingly, Kazakhstan has a tremendous potential to develop own niche in gastronomic tourism based on a strategy to build the image and the brand of the destination.

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