

## Research Paper

# Gastronomic Heritage in Tourism Management

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**Abstract:** One of the factors that affect tourists' value of experience is the value of consumption where food experience plays a crucial role. While gastronomic tourism had always been in existence, its popularity is very much on the rise nowadays. It is not considered unusual to travel long distances for food tasting and smart businesses are taking the best advantage of this demand. Even if the main purpose of travel is not gastronomy-related, food experience is still highly significant for building a strong experience value. This paper focuses on the gastronomic heritage, its role in creating value in consumption and how the optimal food experience can be achieved in today's tourism. A true gastronomic experience requires not only good taste but also a harmony of visuals, presentation and service. Therefore, gastronomy will be analysed as a whole process from presentation to service and taste. Creating value in the consumption of food is also a matter of good and fitting representation. As gastronomy is a key element of culture, it is essential to represent the related cuisine if cultural tourism is intended. Thus, related topics will be covered in this paper. The sense of taste and its role in creating an emotional platform for the customer will also be examined alongside value creation in consumption. The paper does not claim the importance of gastronomy only. Due importance is also given for history, heritage, the consumption behaviour of the tourist and stakeholders' management skills. The reader will, step by step, come to understand the importance of gastronomy. All in all, the paper intends to establish a good understanding of the core aspects of food experience and its place in tourism.

**Keywords:** Gastronomy, hospitality, food value, food experience, gastronomic heritage.

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## Introduction

Human beings need to eat for survival; it is an indispensable necessity to maintain bodily functions. However, this is not the only kind of relationship humans have with food. Since the beginning of human history, people have gathered together for

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food and eating practices. As a matter of fact, our relationship with food is one of the things that differentiate us from other animals on the planet. The pleasure and satisfaction from eating food which we enjoy implies that this instinct for survival has more importance in our lives than just being a basic need (Genç, 2014). Food is as much a cultural and social element as it is a basic need. It is one of the main components of a tradition. Whether food is art or not is debatable. However, when taken into account all the preparation and presentation, the concept of food does involve artistic production.

Apart from its significance for life and position as a social and artistic element, food is also increasingly “becoming a central decision-making factor in travellers’ choice over a destination” (Surenkok Kesimoglu, 2011). Nowadays, quality gastronomic experience for customers is not only a challenge for restaurants or cafes but has become very competitive amongst tourism destinations.

The food experience is frequently present in daily life. Isn’t it interesting not to philosophize and think about an activity that people do a couple of times in a day? This is perhaps due to the fact that it has been considered a highly integral element of everyday life and the tourist experience (Surenkok Kesimoglu, 2011). It is included in mostly every touristic activity because it is an activity in our daily life too (Genç, 2014).

By managing needs, wants, desires and resources, the subject of gastronomy has developed to the extent that a dozen other sectors could benefit from it. In addition, it has paved way for new industries or disciplines that are beneficial, for example, molecular gastronomy. This paper intends to explore and analyze the food experience extensively. First, the paper looks at the history of food and its evolution throughout centuries, i.e. the gastronomic heritage. It will provide a fundamental understanding about the stages that led the food service sector to its current stage and the turning points in the approach to gastronomy. Then, food experience and consumer behavior will also be examined.

## **Gastronomic Heritage**

The art of gastronomy has been evaluated for different purposes and from different perspectives for thousands of years. Gastronomic heritage can be defined as the art of food & beverage production, combination and consumption. Studies have been very helpful for our understanding of food as a significant part of the culture on earth. Therefore, it is highly important to provide a basic foundation on the history of food.

### *Traditional and Modern Food Systems*

The distinctive factor in making food is the cooking techniques. After humans started cooking the food they found or hunted, food became much more than just fuel for their bodies. The transformation of food into a social phenomenon and the centre

of rituals marked the second revolution. The third revolution was the domestication of animals and the fourth, the onset of agricultural activities. The fifth revolution began when food entered the process of becoming a tool of social differentiation among humans. The sixth revolution marked the development of food mobility. In this stage, food products can be transported over long distances and become known to other cultures. This cultural exchange brought about a process of interaction and change. The seventh revolution, which is ecological, started with the discovery of America. The eighth and current stage started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is still ongoing.

There are a lot of archival findings that prove the long history of food services. For instance, the figures in ancient Egyptian temples and tombs demonstrate that people used to prepare and serve meals for mass feeding. Ancient wall paintings or sculptures show that prepared meals were sold in street markets. It is not hard to deduce that there were exceptional cooks famous for their meals, even in those ancient times (Gürsoy, 2013).

In the Chinese archives dating back to B.C., it is mentioned that travellers used to find accommodation in roadside inns and ate there. In major Chinese cities, various kinds of food and beverages, especially pilaf and alcohol, were sold and businesses resembling today's restaurants were in operation. China has one of the most untouched and preserved food-beverage cultures in the world (Gürsoy, 2013). Although it is very conservative and untouched, you can find Chinese restaurants in most places today.

### *Romans*

When Romans founded the Roman Empire, they carried on the food culture and famous cooks of the lands they conquered, thus creating a rich-cuisine culture. Romans were extremely fond of feasts, to the extent that some of the emperors brought their empire to the edge of collapsing because of their festive passions. The word "tavern" comes from the Roman Era. The early version "tavern" referred to small diners serving food and wine (Gürsoy, 2013). Some sources cite that the oldest known cookbook was written during the rule of the Roman Empire, by the famous gourmet of that time, Apicius. It was called *De re Coquinaria* (On Cookery) (Morgan, 2006).

### *Middle Ages*

After the fall of the Roman Empire, feasts and the tradition of eating outside lost its glory for a while. Only inns that were located on safe and busy routes could maintain business. However, the tradition of eating *en masse* continued in monasteries among priests and monks. Famine and epidemics probably had a big role in this; in addition, it is possible that the clergy also strictly discouraged the sin of gluttony (Gürsoy,

2013). It should be noted that the Middle Ages was a religious period in Europe and “gluttony” is considered one of the seven deadly sins. However, even if the Roman Empire had fallen and the festive scene had changed, Italy remained as the centre of gastronomic experience.

### *Renaissance*

After the Middle Ages, Europe entered a period called Renaissance where the gloomy atmosphere of the previous period slowly dissipated and religion was replaced with refined taste. Along with amazing developments in the arts and transformations of the way of thinking, the cuisine culture showed tremendous advancement too. As rulers, aristocrats and clergy got richer and richer, extravagant feasts regained their glory again in this period. Aristocrats were the leaders in developing gastronomy, as in art. The renaissance of food started in Italy and then spread to France, where it flourished (Gürsoy, 2013).

New ingredients were brought to Europe during Renaissance as a consequence of Christopher Columbus’ discoveries over the seas and food like turkey, corn, cocoa, potato, tomato, new types of pepper and coffee were also brought in from other Middle East and Asia expeditions. The arrival of these new ingredients marked a milestone in changing and shaping a new food culture.

### *French Cuisine: Birth of the Restaurant*

Before the meaning that is known today came to be, the word “restaurant” meant “healing broth”. There are plenty of different restaurant recipes inherited from centuries ago, using ingredients brought together akin to alchemy. They were actual works of alchemy, because alchemists put valuable stones in the recipes. Renowned French dictionaries still describe restaurant as a type of semi-medicine in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, while Diderot and d’Alembert categorised it as a medical term in their encyclopaedia (Spang, 2000).

The restaurant today which refers to a socializing venue where food is served came from this medical broth. In fact, the first restaurant owners rarely sold solid food. Hence, the first restaurants were places where people went for sipping food to heal their bodies. The aspects that separated them from taverns, inns or food banks were individual tables, variable meal times and medical broths. Even after the mid-nineteenth century, restaurants were very scarce in France and one would only encounter them in the capital city of Paris. They were considered a characteristic of the city, and foreign travellers were astonished with this innovation. It was not only foreign travellers like British and American people who were fascinated with the restaurants of Paris; those who came to visit from rural areas of France were also bewildered by these places (Spang, 2000).

The opening of the first restaurants which could be described as both an interesting cookery enterprise and a scientific innovation was a quest for health as much as an attraction of the 18<sup>th</sup> century's distinguished culture to food. In that period, all merchants, intelligentsia and the court were obsessed with physical pleasure and finding earthly, scientific ways to reach it. The hype was so immense that it became a common hobby to read medical brochures. This was the context within which the first restaurants opened in France, and it is not surprising that the first restaurant owners defined their positions as providers of health care and physical pleasure. The 1760s' and 1770s' restaurants presented a platform of diet that addressed sufferers of very different sensitivities, combining conservative science and pastoral plants. They claimed they were simplifying nature with the help of science and technology (Spang, 2000). Eventually, with the accelerated innovations in medical science, medical doctors separated themselves from this line of work and restaurants evolved on their own.

### *Evolved Restaurants*

Approximately 20 years after the first restaurants opened, they were no more specializing in only serving healing soups to sensitive customers. Instead, restaurants were focused on providing immaculate services to individual tastes. While diners served masses with standardized meals, restaurants were serving small and customized meals at cosy tables. The service type called "au restaurant" represented customized food service to a customer who came alone at any time of the day. Thanks to their superb furniture, varied menu and flexible working hours, restaurants presented their customers with entertainment to revive their souls and the kind of hunger satisfaction that traditional inns and diners could provide. The work of inns and diners was closely tied to their set of regular customers, while restaurants were the places where unexpected customers came to satisfy their individual needs (Spang, 2000). Therefore, it could be proposed that these restaurants were the places that gave birth to the notion of experience value. Unlike local inns and diners, restaurant owners were very much interested in gaining a wide reputation for the experience they provide, as their line of work was not restricted to a small area. People would not travel relatively long distances to visit local inns or diners, as they were only picked for their convenience. However, if a restaurant had a reputation, it could draw customers from faraway places.

In the traditional *table d'hôte* style applied elsewhere, all customers would be served food together sitting at a big table, and the meals were standard. Restaurants, however, introduced the *à la carte* style, which means "according to the menu". Simply put, *table d'hôte* refers to the table of the home owner, and customers would eat what they found, not what they wanted (Spang, 2000) whereas in restaurants,

customers could demand what they wanted. Restaurant customers could look at the menu and choose whatever they like and could also customize it with requests related to the cooking style and ingredients. The *à la carte* style of serving could be considered as the milestone of creating the food experience value. It not only changed the experience of customers, but also transformed the format of kitchens and the way cooks and kitchen staff worked. The *table d'hôte* style did not require the use of menus as the clientele knew the standardized meals and the setting allowed the prepared meals to be seen. On the other hand, in *à la carte* restaurants, meals were prepared in a separate kitchen and cannot be seen by customers. Therefore, they used menus with prices for every meal. As the mealtimes were not set in stone and customers could come at any moment to order any dish, the kitchen staff was required to be ready with the necessary ingredients all the time. This made the restaurant business as much toilsome and expensive as it is sophisticated.

In French, *la carte* means more than just menu. It also refers to the map of a nation or a city. Just like the image of a boot is the symbol of Italy and a hexagon is the symbol of France, menus are symbols that define the features of a restaurant, making it distinctive with the organization, language and items particular to it (Spang, 2000). Menus started to become one of the most important aspects of the food experience value.

It was Marie-Antoine Carême and then Georges Auguste Escoffier who modernized the French kitchen. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Carême refined culinary principles, organized techniques and put recipes and menus in a system. After Carême, Escoffier “streamlined the commercial kitchen into the arrangement that is still used in major restaurants today”. His planning is known as the brigade system, and will be discussed later (Morgan, 2006). It might come as a surprise that today’s restaurant system did not exist until recent times and it took the human race such a long time to invent it. However, after restaurants started their journey, they made progress very fast and it is now a part of daily life.

The history of food and the transformation of gastronomy into an art form has been briefly covered. It is important to understand the history of techniques, traditions and ingredients to understand the gastronomic scene of the present and improve it with better knowledge. Today, food experience is a significant part of tourism and is creating its own field. In the next section, the food experience value in tourism will be explored in detail and the creation of value in consumption will also be discussed.

### **Basics of Food Experience**

Human beings cannot survive without food and wherever they travel, they need to eat. Food is also “a common language and, above all, a universal right. As any language,

it is spoken to communicate, to share emotions, feelings, sensations” (Buiatti, 2011). Therefore, the food experience is not only about taste but also provides a social link between people.

When people share food, they take pleasure in sitting at a table together and contemplate about their pleasures related to the service; hence, a good food experience is closely related to hospitality. The word *hospes* has two meanings in languages derived from Latin; it means both the person who welcomes and the one who is welcomed (Buiatti, 2011). The host and guest relationship is a significant part of the gastronomic experience and the best way to explore it is by focusing on the “slow food experience”. That is not to say that fast food does not require good hospitality; however, its practices are very different and do not reflect the kind of experience we would like to delve into as it lacks some important dimensions.

Food experience has always been an essential part of the tourist experience, as wherever people travel, they need to eat, and their expectations change according to the itinerary planned. The tourism industry creates value in an essential service such as food by “making experiences memorable”. The experiences are designed in a way that take into account the tourist’s means, time and space. Pleasure and convenience are merged together. On the other hand, culinary tourism is a relatively new field. In culinary tourism, food is the spotlight. People focus on food when they make their plans. This might be as simple as making a reservation in a restaurant or as complex as travelling long distances and organizing itineraries around wineries, restaurants, cooking schools, local farms, food festivals etc. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004). It becomes even more crucial for those working in tourism to provide an immaculate service and create higher value for people who seek food experiences.

### *Staff Organization*

Organized staff is one of the basic tenets of the food experience. Nobody wants to go to a restaurant where they cannot find anyone to bring the menu or take food orders. There would be chaos in the kitchen and the serving area, if the staff is not aware of their own job descriptions and that of their colleagues. Hence, the restaurant system must work flawlessly in order to provide a pleasant experience to the customer.

Two of the most important qualities to look for in a chef are skilfulness and cleanliness. In today’s world, chefs must also have an open mind and be creative enough to follow the latest trends which spread quickly in this digital era. An example of a trend from Turkey is “triliçe”. It spread all over Istanbul’s food scene in a very short period of time, and one can find it in many places ranging from small, local cafes to major restaurant chains. It is important to have specialties in the menu that define the legacy of the restaurant, but chefs should present new alternatives, too.

The headwaiters or *maitre d’hôtel* also play a significant role in providing a good

food experience. Chefs usually stay in their kitchen and rarely come out to converse with customers, but as headwaiters are responsible for the whole waiting staff, their management skills determine the quality of the hospitality service. Headwaiters have different job descriptions depending on where they work. Being a headwaiter means different things in restaurants, bars or night clubs. In order to create value in food experience, a headwaiter should possess what is called “people skills” along with management skills. Being seated at the right table in the right manner matters to the customers and their perception of the experience. Some customers might be easy to serve, but others may make special requests, and the headwaiter must be able to deal with ordinary situations as well as extraordinary ones.

Waiters come next after headwaiters in the hospitality hierarchy; however, they are the ones whom customers see and converse with the most. Therefore, their skills and attitudes are highly important for the food experience. Waiters should possess the necessary knowledge and are able to provide quality service. For instance, they must know the content of the menu by heart and be ready to make suggestions to the customer if necessary. They must pay attention to the food orders given to avoid any misunderstanding. Also, it goes without saying that waiters should be polite, respectful and attend to the needs of the customers sufficiently, without being a nuisance.

The roles of chefs, headwaiters and waiters in creating the food experience value have been examined thus far. There are other roles in the food service industry like bartenders, bus boys and sometimes musicians, entertainers, valets and bodyguards. Their roles and services have a significant part in the whole food experience, too. However, for now, only the most basic roles will be looked at. However, it is equally important that even small or local businesses follow the general rules in food service. Customers take notice of little things and it might change the memory of their experience for better or worse.

### *Safety and Hygiene*

Safety and hygiene is another important subject in providing valuable food experience to customers. This aspect should not be taken lightly just because customers cannot see the kitchen area or the preparation of food. Customers would not remember their experience fondly if they leave with an allergic reaction, food poisoning or find hair in their meal, no matter how tasty their food was. Different countries or states have different regulations on safety and hygienic requirements for commercial food service operators, but some general rules are applicable everywhere.

Safety is as important to customers as it is to workers; hence, slow food premises should pay attention to the well-being of their employees. Morgan (2006) defined food-borne illness as “any sickness resulting from food contamination”. Biological, chemical or physical contamination in the workplace can lead to this type of illness.

Biological contamination occurs when harmful microorganisms like certain bacteria, viruses, parasites or fungi reproduce in food. In order to avoid food contamination, food must be stored at the right temperature, kept dry and not used after a certain period of time. Chemical and physical contaminations are more obvious as they refer to pesticides, cleaning agents, toxic metals like lead, zinc, copper and antimony found in kitchen utensils or foreign objects that accidentally make their way into food.

Some of the customers might be allergic to the ingredients on the menu. It is the business' responsibility to point out these allergens and warn them. For a better gastronomic experience, menus should include a variety of food that can be eaten by customers with different conditions. For example, nut allergy is very common and if all the items on the menu have nut or its derivatives, a customer may leave the place dissatisfied.

By ensuring the hygiene of the workplace and staff, food-borne illnesses can be kept away (Morgan, 2006). Therefore, it is fundamental to pay attention to the cleanliness and maintenance of the kitchen utensils and equipment as well as the customer dining area. The staff should also maintain their personal hygiene in the kitchen and service area.

### *Creating Value in Food Experience and the Role of Tourist Behaviour*

In order to come up with ways to add value to the food experience, it is important to understand its construction first. Value is an abstract concept and is related to many aspects of tourist behaviour such as motivations, perceptions and perspectives (Zins, 2000). Different academics view the definition of value differently, as Zins (2000) summarizes below:

- a relation or trade-off between all advantages received and disadvantages taken into account (e.g. Monroe & Krishnan, 1985) or similar
- a weighted comparison between give- and get-characteristics (Sawyer & Dickson, 1984) or
- the tourist's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on the perceptions of what is received and what is given (Zeithaml, 1988)
- value is not to be reduced to its functional aspects but extends to social, emotional and epistemic components as well (Sheth, Newman & Goss, 1991).

A notion as multidimensional, abstract and relative as value requires a rather sophisticated approach to measure in gastronomic experience. In an age where things grow, change and are consumed very fast, people continually seek the optimal experience among countless alternatives and do not settle for anything less than the experience they demand. Therefore, competition is fiercer than ever. As some examples of high-end establishments, the Breakers Hotel boasts 17,000 staff and the Crystal Symphony serves with a crew of 550 for up to 940 guests. The Burj Al

Arab greets guests at the airport in chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce, and wine glasses are never less than half full on the Seabourn Spirit. On the Crystal Symphony, which claims that no request is outrageous, private butlers clean and press clothes, shine shoes, pack for guests and do just about anything else you can imagine. As for fine dining, “at the Four Seasons, personnel actually wait until a fish dish is ordered before they catch it from their on-site ponds” (Bowen & Santos, 2006).

The examples above set out the scene for today’s tourism where customers are entitled to demand the experience they want, or even the ones that they have yet to imagine.

### *Postmodernism and Its Influence on Culinary Consumption*

Postmodernism brought with it a major transformation in consumer behaviour. Perhaps not the remaining part of the world per se, but the developed world consists of consumer societies. The word “consumer” does not refer just to customers buying tangible products from retail outlets, anymore. In consumer societies, “any form of service, whether in the commercial or public sectors, should adopt an explicit ‘customer orientation’,” because the scope of the term consumer has been widely expanded (Sloan, 2004).

As such, it is not a surprise that culinary tourism is flourishing as a separate field, moving away from being a part of the general tourism. In the postmodern society, individuals form their own self-identities through consumption (Sloan, 2004). The manner in which people consume demonstrates which group or groups they belong to in a society. It reflects their socio-economic class, the trends and social conventions they follow and the method they use to seek social acceptance. Culinary taste might seem to be an individual preference, but it is more so about social acceptance (Sloan, 2004). Hence, providers of food service should take into account the social context and profiles of their customers so as to excel in the food experience they provide. What customers prefer might sometimes differ from their taste.

### *Authenticity*

Authenticity means being true to the original state of something. In the case of food experience, it requires being true to the food itself and its origin. Inundated by competitive alternatives, today’s customers are on the look for the most genuine experience. Food is a way of experiencing another place, without necessarily being there physically. In order to achieve this experience, a restaurant should be true to the food it provides and present it in the right atmosphere. It is in stark contrast to the way global food chains like McDonalds and Burger King operate. Gourmet travellers often seek the original. In a way, these modern tourists are searching the purity of the past, a time before market forces adulterated the gastronomic scene (Scarpato & Daniele, 2003).

Today, food suppliers do business on an international scale. Therefore, they need to ask themselves whether they want to provide customized experience to people from different cultures with different tastes, in an age where people travel long distances to satisfy their taste bud cravings (Scharf, 2011). A good example of meeting halfway the issue of standardizing chains and the demand for authenticity can be seen in Wetherspoon pubs in the UK. They have branches scattered all around the country; yet, they pay special attention in customizing each pub according to the town's history and specialties.

It is also important to note that an increasing number of food service destinations are “employing locally produced food and beverage products to strengthen their tourism products” (Boyne & Hall, 2003). This is a crucial approach in creating authentic dishes as well as keeping true to the original recipes.

Authenticity is essential to the food experience; as in culinary tourism, people find the opportunity to test and push the limits of the unfamiliar. Unpredictability is the root of novelty and it creates the context where one could escape from daily life routines and have an authentic experience (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004).

### *Motivation*

Although the main motivation for visiting a food service facility is for eating, there are other underlying motivations. It is important for a business to observe and analyse these motivations to create value in their food experience.

Swarbrooke and Horner (1999) categorized tourist motivations into personality, lifestyle, past experience, past life, perceptions and image. Personality traits often observed may include “gregarious or loner? Adventurous or cautious? Confident or timid?” In the same manner, the lifestyles of customers affect their decisions immensely. Someone seeking a healthy lifestyle will have a different motivation compared to those who put their taste first. Past experience and past life are related to previous experiences, whether good, bad or nostalgic. Perceptions are also built based on these past experiences and the world view of the customer. Image is also crucial, as where one eats and the kind of service one receives affects the perception of others of them. These motivations come in various combinations for everyone.

### *Memory*

Customers' memories, referring to their recollections about their past experiences are highly important for creating value in food experience. The memory of an experience is in fact more important than the experience itself, as memories will result in return customers (Wright, 2010).

To create good memories, the food service businesses must appeal to the sensory system of the customers. It is obvious that a restaurant should offer delicious meals

that satisfy the palate of their customers. However, they should not forget that the sensory system includes visual, sense of touch, hearing and the sense of smell. Ideally, a gastronomic experience should include all of these senses in a positive way to achieve an unforgettable and cherished memory. Therefore, businesses must organize their work in a way that appeals to as many of these senses as possible. Gibbs and Ritchie (2010) proposed to consider the restaurant as a theatre stage where every detail and move is integrated in harmony to help the business excel in providing a valuable and memorable food experience.

### Conclusion

This paper explored the creation of value in food experience, in particular in the slow food service industry. The field of gastronomy has a long history dating back to ancient times, with ancient Greeks and Romans considered as pioneers. The evolution of gastronomic experiences has been astonishing and in the 1700s, the French established the grounds for “restaurant” that spread around the world and became a staple component of our society today. Today, customized and authentic experiences are highly valued in a world of competitive alternatives. Therefore, culinary tourism has flourished as a field of its own.

Food service operators need to add value to the experiences they provide to their customers, in order to be competitive. This could only be achieved by creating a multi-faceted business that takes into consideration all dimensions of tourist behaviour and integrating them into quality service. A restaurant should pay close attention to its staff organization, safety and hygiene as a rule of thumb. However, these alone will not lead to success. The authenticity of the experience, motivations of different customers and appeal to the sensory system of customers to create memorable experiences are the key to a successful food experience.

It cannot be denied that the future is bright for food service operators who understand the sophisticated nature of food experiences, follow local and global innovations closely and raise the value in the right manner.

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