
Introduction

Destinations: The New Desire to Cook – why cuisine and wine are becoming increasingly important

Glancing at websites of destinations, we see happy people walking or cycling around, beautiful landscapes in summery green, blue waters and of course famous and not so famous sights. The mix of culture, sport and wellness is booming – with no remarkable differences among destinations. Differentiation, however, is an outstanding way to make a mark in the ever increasing competition between destinations.

A tourist product without accommodation and food is inconceivable. Good hotels and a supply of beds appropriate to the target group form the foundation of such a product. And the hotel sector is making good progress. Food is a basic necessity when travelling – perhaps this is the reason why the culinary offerings in many destinations are still replaceable. But there is a light at the end of the tunnel. More and more companies and destinations are rediscovering culinary offerings in a new way. Austria and South Tyrol, Italy, are good examples here.

Food and wine are becoming an increasingly important element of travel decisions and are developing into a distinct market segment. More and more frequently, tour operators are offering culinary packages. Wine tourism, for example, is no longer a niche product: cycling tours along the river valleys of wine regions are especially attractive. Accordingly, many destinations are looking for new ways to differentiate their products within this segment. The potential of food and beverages is diverse and still far from fully exploited.

The mega-trends of *Healthy Living and Healthy Eating* are being manifested in the *LOHAS* (lifestyle of health and sustainability) consumer group. A series of food crises have increased the need for transparency, confidence and food safety, which has led, among other things, to a stronger demand for organic products. However, not only organic products have become firmly established on the supermarket shelves, but also regional products, with the latter enabling a certain degree of differentiation in the supply. And this is where the tourism industry comes into play; when local restaurants use regional ingredients or when producers open their doors to visitors. Numerous winemakers

are setting an example; their tasting rooms are becoming more and more attractive and are a showcase for their wines.

A wide array of potential is opening up for the tourism industry, in turn awaiting academic analysis and practical implementation. The relative aspects cited below could be a good way to bring academics and industry practitioners together in order to enhance destination development:

- Food trends need to be identified and analyzed according to their importance for a destination's culinary offerings. Whereas in 2013 vegan food was still an almost ridiculed niche segment, three years later it is commonplace in our culinary offerings.
- A new desire to cook is reflected in an increasing amount of cooking studios and cookery courses in towns and cities
- Sensory seminars are on the increase. The themes are becoming more differentiated. The wine and chocolate theme is sending wine fans into rapture. Tastings are being offered for the most varied products: beer, mustard, salt, etc., are all receiving acclaim.
- An increasing range of training programs is on offer for all world cuisines
- Social cooking is a new cornerstone of the shared economy and is enjoying a boom period
- Allergies and food intolerances are still neglected phenomena – both in hotel rooms and restaurants

What do all these developments mean for tourism destination products? There is, for example, a strong demand for guided city tours with a focus on culinary delights. The above mentioned developments offer many opportunities for innovative products which can help to promote a destination's image. Some good examples are the Austrian *Via Culinaria* or Kaltern, a South Tyrolean village whose *wein. kaltern* project has reinvented the destination on the tourist map.

The way to a man's heart is through his stomach; a good culinary offering will sustainably remain in visitors' memories and make a destination likeable. Eating and drinking are basic necessities, but guests want to discover new things. Home-grown produce, wine cellars and kitchens are sources of huge potentials that are waiting to be unlocked.

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