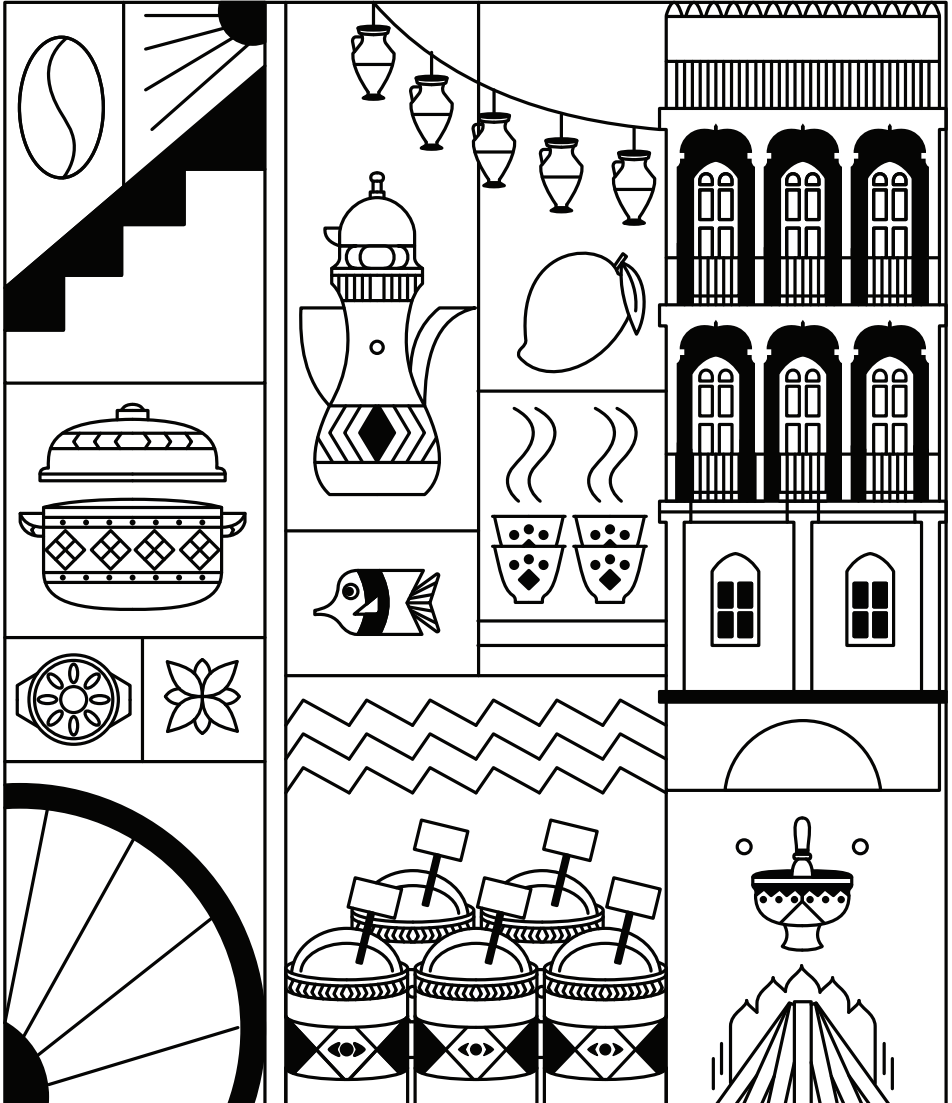


FOOD EVENTS

DESTINATIONS



Acknowledgement

In line with the key pillars of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, "Food Events: Destinations" aims to cast a spotlight on the influential role of food events in shaping the socio-economic landscape of Saudi Arabia's tourism and culture. This work is a collaborative effort, featuring contributions from esteemed authors worldwide, each bringing their unique national and international perspectives to the table. Their collective expertise has been crucial in enriching this book's content, offering a multifaceted view of the culinary world.

We extend our profound gratitude to all the authors who have dedicated their time and insights to this project. Their diverse voices and deep knowledge have been integral in crafting a comprehensive and engaging narrative.

Our special acknowledgment is reserved for the Culinary Arts Commission, whose continuous and generous support has been fundamental in making this book a reality. Their vision and dedication to promoting Saudi Arabia's culinary heritage have been a constant source of inspiration and guidance throughout this journey.

Table of Content

01

**Feasting on Culture and Sustainability:
The Evolution and Influence of Food
Events in Saudi Arabia**

Salman Alotaibi, PhD

12

02

Food Events: Issues and Trends

Ahmad Puad Mat Som, PhD

12

03

**Local Food and Farmers' Markets
in Highland destinations**

Ahmad Puad Mat Som, PhD

12

04

**Culinary Celebrations and Rural Revitalization:
The Transformative Role of Food Festivals in
Saudi Arabia**

Huthayfah Madkhali, PhD

12

05

**Destination Marketing Through Festivals
and Food Tourism**

Salman Alotaibi, PhD

12

06

**Festivals: A Way To Discover
Diversity Of Local Culture**

Salman Alotaibi, PhD

12

07

**Culinary Tourism Experiences
and Memory**

Fahad Alhuqbani, PhD

12

08

Food Tourism Trends

Samer Yaghmour, PhD

Kashif Hussain, PhD

12

09

**Food and Drink: Strangest Events
and Festivals**

Khaled Alsumait, PhD

12

10

References

12

01



Feasting on Culture and Sustainability: The Evolution and Influence of Food Events in Saudi Arabia

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Overview

This book addresses many crucial subjects pertaining to food events. The chapters of this book cover the influence of food festivals on sustainable tourism, the significance of local cuisine in promoting highland destinations, the connection between food celebrations and rural revitalization, the role of festivals and food tourism in destination marketing, the potential of festivals as a means to discover local culture and create lasting experiences, the impact of food and drink in enhancing events, and lastly, the book addresses the present challenges and future prospects in this field.

This section emphasises the key concepts that are being discussed in the book's chapters; specifically, the significance of sustainability, culture, and creating distinctive experiences in food events.

Saudi Food Events and Sustainability

The food event industry has experienced substantial growth in Saudi Arabia overall, and is now recognized as one of the most expanding sectors in the country. Hence, the matter of sustainability is paramount to the economy, environment, and the well-being of the local communities. In the past few decades, there has been a rise in environmental issues that jeopardise the habitability of the earth for future generations.

The Saudi Arabian government places considerable emphasis on the matter of sustainability and has launched several endeavours to boost eco-friendly practices. For instance, the country launched the environmental laws and established The National Center for Environmental Compliance that inspects all

entities that might have potential to harm the environment. The centre's primary focus is on conserving and safeguarding the environment, its resources, and preventing its degradation. This is achieved through the provision of top-notch services that enhance compliance with environmental legislation and standards.

Another important initiative is the Saudi Green Initiative (SGI). SGI, in conjunction with the Middle East Green Initiative, makes a significant contribution to combating climate change, safeguarding the environment, conserving plant, and animal life, and enhancing air quality in the region. Hence, it is imperative for decision makers and stakeholders involved in events in Saudi Arabia to consider sustainability throughout the event's development and implementation.

Food events can serve as important catalysts for fostering positive and sustainable development in both local and global contexts. Food festivals often function as venues for showcasing the products and craftsmanship of local producers, as well as advocating for sustainable methods and bolstering regional economies. The need to promote sustainability consciousness is important to the success of the Saudi event industry. Any events that are held in the country should consider social, environmental, and economic issues. The ecological repercussions of events, such as food waste and carbon footprints, necessitate the implementation of sustainable methods and responsible management. This can be accomplished by implementing sustainable practices, supporting Saudi local businesses, and fostering inclusivity.

Food festivals in the country have a societal impact on the community. Food festivals can enhance social sustainability by fostering social cohesion and deepening connections among individuals within the communities that organise and participate in these events. It is crucial to acknowledge the symbiotic relationship between sustainable agriculture and responsible tourism. The increasing fascination with culinary tourism underscores the crucial significance of food in bolstering the sustainability of tourism, bolstering local economies, and advocating for environmentally-friendly policies.

Efficient event design has the potential to generate more sustainable business models, which can contribute to the long-term viability of cultural and sporting activities, even under challenging economic circumstances (Richards et al., 2014). According to Bob (2010), the way an event is designed is directly influenced by factors related to incorporating sustainability. Singh et al. (2008) further noted that in order to effectively implement and monitor sustainability, specific indicator tools should be designed into the process from an early stage.

Some food events in Saudi Arabia utilised techniques that minimise environmental harm such as providing complementary transportation services and bicycle storage facilities to decrease the reliance on cars and lower the release of CO₂ emissions; using biodegradable containers to serve food thus avoiding their disposal in landfills; and posting supportive remarks on social media to encourage followers to think about their waste production and environmental effect leading up to, during, and after the event.

Local Community, Culture, and Events in Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia, food events are characterised by their diverse nature and encompass a wide range of culinary experiences that extend beyond mere consumption. These events are immersive festivities that pay homage to culture and tradition. The local cuisines in the country are always present during food festivals and have an effect on the economy and culture. The presence of local cuisines would help visitors to gain insights into the daily lives of the local people and fully engage with the culture. Food events are essential in communities, functioning as important economic and social centres that encapsulate the local culture and traditions of the people. Attendees of food events witness tangible representations of the cultures they aim to discover and admire during their visit. Events offer a chance for both local residents and tourists to actively engage in the vibrant culinary culture.

Destinations in Saudi Arabia can be boosted by food festivals, which provide guests with one-of-a-kind, genuine experiences that showcase local culture and customs. These festivals have the potential to promote Saudi Arabia's national identity and demonstrate the country's dedication to conserving its cultural legacy by providing experiences that are strongly entrenched in the rural and traditional components of Saudi culture. Food festivals are often used to boost the promotion of local cuisine and culture by showcasing and allowing people to taste traditional culinary products. For example, the cuisine Culture Festival in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia stands out as a notable event that provides guests with a distinctive chance to indulge in exceptional culinary experiences and delve into the rich Saudi cuisine heritage.

Visitors Experience of Events in Saudi Arabia

In the context of events and festivals, experiences are becoming an increasingly significant factor. In fact, experiences that are unique and unforgettable are essential and, according to Pine and Gilmore (1998, 1999), serve as the most effective means by which suppliers can achieve a competitive advantage. Events have frequently been characterized as "distinct" or exceptional forms of experience (Getz, 2012), and Saudi Arabia recently organized and hosted many unique experiences. The events in Saudi Arabia are functioning as instruments for promoting the Kingdom's culture. Therefore, it is important to ensure that all visitors will have a great experience during the event they attend.

Geus et al., (2016) provided a conceptual model of the event experience which consists of the core (multi-phased and multi-influential) and the multi-outcomes of the event experience. This model suggested that the event experience is a constantly producing interaction between individuals and the event environment, which is always influenced by both physical and social elements. Additionally, the experience is shaped by the degree of engagement and involvement, and includes a range of experiential components that result in feelings of satisfaction, emotional responses, behavioral outcomes, cognition effects, the generation of memories, and learning outcomes. Moreover, experience can occur at any point in the progression of the event (See Figure 1.1 below).

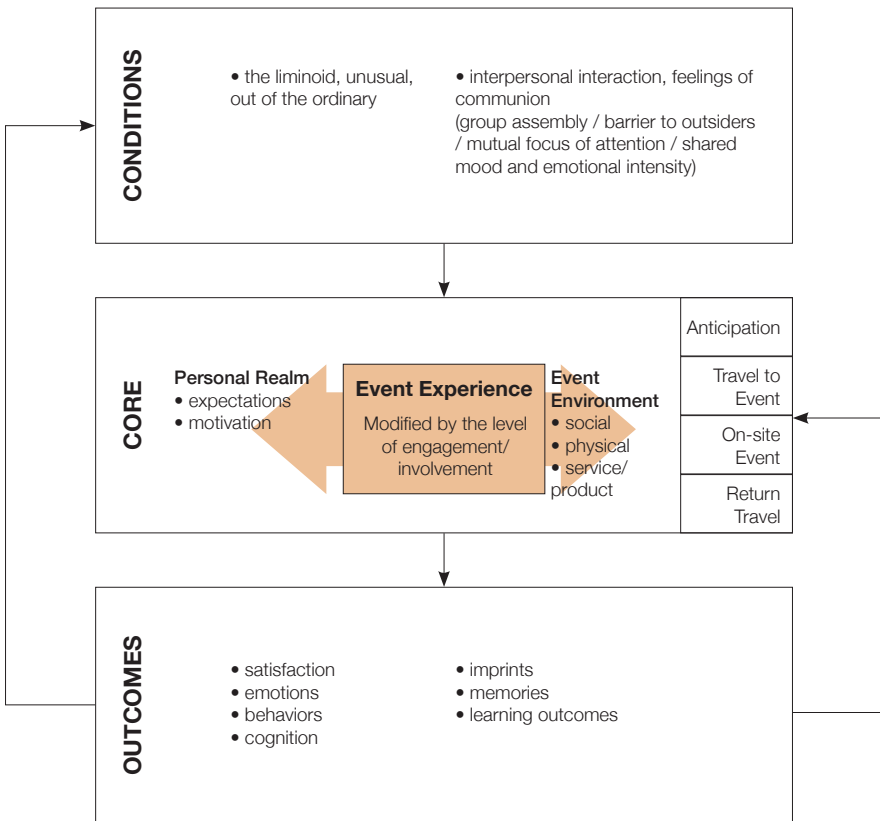


Figure 1.1: A conceptual model of the event experience. Source: Geus et al., 2016.

Geus et al., (2016) emphasised multiple variables that could influence visitors experience to an event such as:

Experience Interaction

Experience interaction is primarily influenced by an individual's mental state and specific circumstances, rather than the theme, program, or setting of the event (Getz, 2012). Also, expectations and motivations have a significant impact on interaction (Getz, 2012). The event environment can be seen as a stage where interactions occur with others, the physical environment, and the service environment (Morgan, 2008; Robertson et al., 2008). Therefore, event designers should ensure that interaction is more likely to occur during an event.

Experience Involvement

Abrahams (1986) and Andersson (2007) emphasise that experience interaction is a dynamic process that demands active involvement. Pine and Gilmore (1998, 1999) defined experiences based on the differentiation between passive and active absorption or immersion. Involvement "is an unobservable state of motivation, arousal or interest between an individual and recreational activities, tourist destinations or related equipment" (Havitz & Dimanche, 1990, p. 567). Geus et al. (2016) state that event experiences entail interactions between visitors and the event environment, which includes social, physical, and service aspects. Therefore, successful events happen when visitors are actively involved to some extent.

Experience Conditions

Ahola (2005) asserted that experiences are primarily distinguished by the presence of uncommon events such as stimuli, heightened emotional intensity and activity, absence of excessive effort, and interpersonal contact. Getz (2012) emphasised the significance of the uncommon as a catalyst, stating that individuals have a strong expectation that an event would deviate from the norm. Interpersonal interaction has a crucial role in triggering remarkable experiences. It involves the sense of communion with others, specifically through the formation of community bonds or the disruption of social structure, as described (Ahola, 2005).

Experience Outcomes

Experience provides several results, including satisfaction, emotions, cognition, and behaviour (Geus et al., 2016). Schmitt (1999a, 1999b) proposed the presence of five discrete classifications of experiences: sensory experiences, affective experiences, creative cognitive experiences, physical experience behaviours and lifestyle, and social-identity experiences that emerge from affiliation with a reference group or culture. An established method for evaluating experiences from a managerial standpoint involves examining perceptions of service quality (Mossberg, 2007) and satisfaction levels (Otto & Ritchie, 1996). Experiences also activate the senses and elicit emotions (Shaw & Ivens, 2005). Tourist experiences elicit behavioural responses, including the development of skills and active engagement (Ballantyne et al., 2011; Kim, 2010).

Designing Event Experiences

The field of design encompasses various disciplines such as architecture, graphic design, communication design, interior design, product design, among others. In the field of event management, design plays a crucial role in ensuring the success of an event as it contributes to enhancing the event in all aspects (Brown and James, 2004). According to Richards et al. (2014), design processes are employed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of events, increase stakeholders' awareness of events, ensure the creation of specific outcomes like social practices, social cohesion, cultural processes, and economic impacts, minimise adverse effects of events such as noise, nuisance, and environmental damage, and maximise the achievement of the event in terms of attendance, the calibre of the encounter, and other outcomes.

The event design proposed by Ferdinand and Kitchin (2012) pertains to the deliberate stimulation of sensory and emotional encounters, and it encompasses more than just production logistics. According to Getz (2012), design involves the utilisation of themes, locations, consumables, services, and programs to provide experiences that help various stakeholders achieve specified goals. Designing an experience should be informed by an understanding of how guests engage and interact. According to O'Sullivan and Spangler (1999), to create something that may be rightfully referred to as an experience, the experience provider (or creator) must fulfil five crucial aspects of experience, and these are:

1. The phases of the encounter, which encompass the events or emotions that transpire before, during, and after the experience.
2. The real experience, including the things that happen during the experience that affect how people participate and how the outcomes turn out.
3. Needs that the experience meets, referring to the deep psychological or emotional needs that make you want to or need to take part in an experience.
4. The participant's and other participants' roles, alluding to the influence of the participant's and other participants' characteristics, actions, and expectations on the experience's final result.
5. The function and relationship with the provider of the experience, which depends on the provider's capacity and willingness to personalise, manage, and synchronise various elements of the experience.

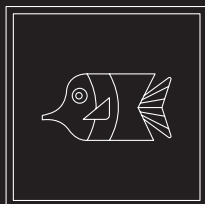
Storytelling Through Food Events

Event designers have recognized the growing importance of storytelling, as visitors increasingly seek personalised and distinctive experiences. An effective method for creating and attaining success is by connecting distinct narratives to the overall experience, as suggested by Mossberg (2008). Stories elicit a distinct response from individuals compared to regular marketing initiatives, as they are more memorable and trigger emotions (Woodside, 2010). The primary objective of storytelling is not solely to communicate factual details and data, but rather to enrich, augment, and imbue facts with significance in order to construct a narrative centred on a certain idea (Gabriel, 2000). A narrative comprises an introduction, development, and conclusion. Typically, it includes a pivotal moment or climax and conveys a message intended to elicit emotions in the audience or reader (Lundqvist et al., 2013). Stories provide inherent entertainment value, thereby captivating and retaining individuals' attention (Baumeister and Newman, 1994).

Conclusion

This chapter emphasises the significance of creating food events while considering elements such as sustainability, culture, local cuisine, experiential results, positive experience, and visitor engagement. The experience provided in festivals should be carefully designed, executed, and measured to ensure its sustainability and thriving. Also, information presented or conveyed to visitors play a role in the experience and should add value to visitors. All information presented in the food event should be meticulously planned to convey the festival's message to the visitor about the local culture or how the event cares about the environment and sustainability. Ultimately, guests will return to the food events they find enjoyable and memorable over time.

02 Food Events: Issues and Trends



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Introduction

Festival and event tourism has experienced rapid growth, and is now considered one of the fastest-growing segments within the global leisure business sector (Li and Petrick, 2006). Culinary or food festivals are a burgeoning and dynamic component of festival and event tourism, gaining global prominence and demonstrating noteworthy macroeconomic effects on the destination and host communities. Today, whenever there is a strong emphasis on “place competition” in relation to destination development, culinary festivals assume a prominent position as a commoditised offering that is sometimes driven by economic considerations. There has been a notable surge in the number of culinary festivals in recent decades, which has garnered significant interest among the academic community (Cela et al., 2007). The present chapter provides an overview of the historical context and development of food events, as well as an examination of the categorisation of food events. The subsequent sections of this study delve into the convergence of food, culture, and society, and analyse the obstacles, prospects, and prospective trajectories of food events on a global scale.

Historical Perspective and Evolution of Food Tourism

Stille (2001) posits that food has emerged as a fundamental element contributing to the formation of identity within the context of tourism. Food tourism has become an integral component of the contemporary hospitality industry, including the travel endeavours of both current and prospective visitors, regardless of their chosen destination. Hall and Mitchell (2001) provide a definition of food tourism as the act of visiting primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants, and specific locations where the primary motivation for travel is to taste and experience the unique attributes of specialist food production regions. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that not every visit to a local food vendor or café can be classified as food tourism. Rather, it is a purposeful endeavour undertaken by tourists or persons with the intention of partaking in a culinary experience or sampling a certain type of cuisine. According to Hall and Sharples (2003), the primary motivation for travel behaviour or tourist decision-making in attending food events should be the desire for a unique and distinct experience.

The earliest recorded food events in human history primarily revolved around rituals aimed at ensuring the successful growth of crops and bountiful harvests. These events also served as celebrations for significant occasions within specific regions or communities. In the present day, a significant proportion of culinary festivals are strategically utilised as tools for stimulating tourism and enhancing regional economies. While it is customary nowadays for planned gatherings to include food and drinks as essential provisions, there has been a discernible surge in the worldwide appeal of events that revolve specifically around the consumption and appreciation of food and beverages (Hall & Sharples, 2008). Consequently, each locale aims to cultivate a distinctive and recognisable tourist offering, with one such example being a culinary event. The lifestyle of the “foodie,” an individual who has a strong passion for food, has become deeply ingrained in modern society. As a result, food tourism has emerged as a rapidly expanding global trend, attracting a significant number of travellers seeking unique culinary experiences. Many locations are actively targeting these high-value, niche food tourists in order to capitalise on this growing market.

The majority of destinations are actively involved in supply-side development and marketing strategies. This entails promoting their offerings by emphasising their high quality, uniqueness, authenticity, or trendiness. Frequently, this marketing strategy is associated with establishments in the food service industry, including restaurants and chefs, as well as with fisheries, agricultural producers, and various events. There is, however, a deficiency in research-driven comprehension of the intended consumer base, including their underlying motives, precise desires, and the strategies that may be employed to entice them to visit a certain location (Robinson & Getz, 2014). Consequently, scholars have examined the significance of food tourism events through the lenses of motivation, experiences, satisfaction, and expenditure.

Typology of Food Event & Event Portfolio

Events have a significant role in stimulating tourism, and are prominently featured in a location's strategic planning and promotional efforts. The literature extensively covers the functions and implications of scheduled events in the context of tourism, which are increasingly seen as crucial for enhancing destination competitiveness. However, it was only in recent decades that the concept of "event tourism" gained recognition and acceptance within the tourist industry and academic research community. The following expansion of this sector may be characterised as remarkable (Getz, 2008). According to Getz (2008), planned events may be seen as spatial-temporal phenomena that are characterised by their uniqueness resulting from the interactions between the setting, individuals, and management systems. The latter encompasses the programme and the design components. The allure of these events lies in their inherent variability, necessitating one's physical presence to fully appreciate the distinct experience they offer. Failing to attend an event results in a missed chance to partake in its offerings. Moreover, the use of "virtual events" across diverse media platforms presents a compelling proposition for both consumers and the tourism sector, since they offer distinct experiences that are both intriguing and valuable. Planned events have a specific function, and what was formerly driven by individual and community efforts has predominantly shifted towards the domain of professionals and entrepreneurs.

Getz (2005) developed a portfolio approach to event-tourism strategy which categorises events into four types: mega-events, landmark events, regional events, and local events (see Figure 1.1). Mega events are well-recognised and meticulously planned gatherings of significant magnitude, characterised by predetermined temporal and spatial parameters. Frequently, these occurrences manifest within a certain contextual framework, adhering to a predetermined timetable, or are specifically designated to commemorate particular events or public holidays. In the realm of tourism, landmark events refer to significant events that occur either once or on a repeating basis for a certain length of time. These events are primarily designed to augment the recognition, attractiveness, and economic viability of a particular location. Local and regional events, which are situated at the foundational tiers of the portfolio pyramid, typically draw domestic participants, although they may also garner international attendees and receive worldwide media attention.

Possible Measure of Values

Growth Potential	Market Share	Quality	Sustainability
Image Enhancement	Community Support	Appropriateness	
Environmental Benefits			

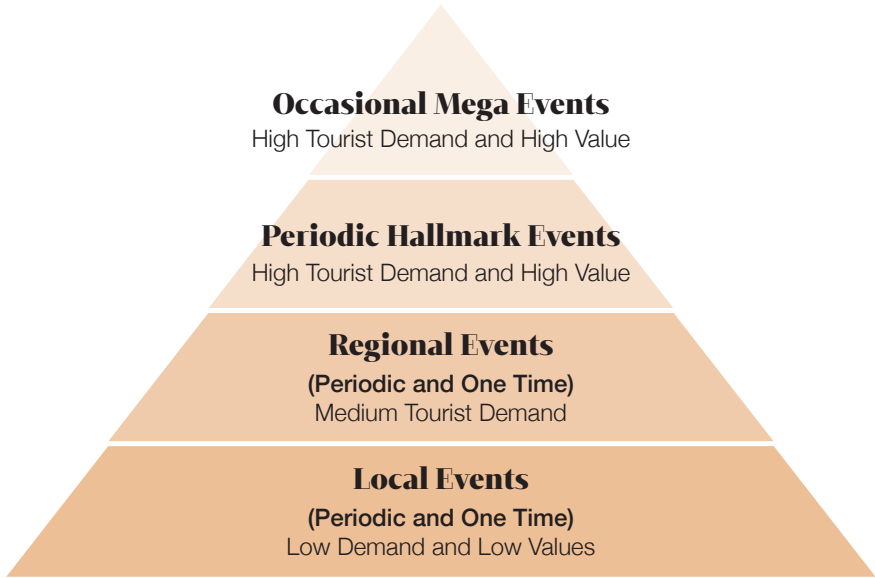
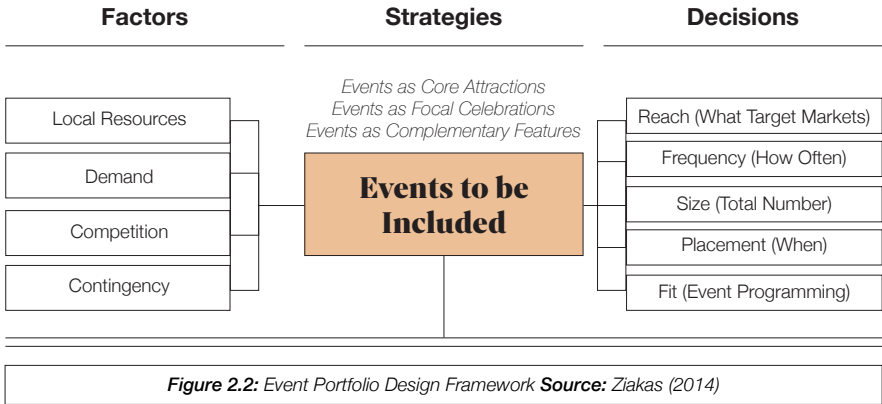


Figure 2.1: The portfolio approach to event-tourism strategy – making an evaluation **Source:** Getz (2005)

In the 2014 study conducted by Ziakas, a comprehensive framework for the construction of event portfolios is proposed (see Figure 2.2). The development of an event portfolio necessitates the implementation of strategic decision-making processes regarding the chosen events, while also considering various factors that influence the portfolio's sustainability. These factors include local resources, market demand, competition among events, potential alternative community products, as well as contingencies related to environmental and socioeconomic changes or unforeseen incidents. The inclusion of events inside a portfolio might have many functions. According to Getz (2013), events may be conceptualised as attractions, animators, place-marketing tools, image-makers, and catalysts.



Similarly, Ziakas (2010) suggests that a host community can employ events within their portfolio for several purposes. These include utilising events as primary attractions, or as tools for fostering tourism development and focal celebrations to stimulate community development, while incorporating events as complementary features that enhance recreational options and facilitate development. When developing a portfolio plan, it is crucial to consider five significant strategic decisions: reach (which target markets to focus on), frequency (how often to engage with these markets), size (the total number of events to include), placement (when to schedule these events), and fit (the alignment of event programming with the overall portfolio strategy).

Drawing on the aforementioned typology and event portfolio, it may be posited that food events cover structured occasions or assemblies that predominantly centre around the investigation, indulgence, and commemoration of food. These events can take on various shapes and scales, ranging from small-scale community activities to large-scale festivals and international contests. At the core of a food event is a deliberate focus on the gastronomic aspect, highlighting the diverse dimensions of food, including its preparation, presentation, cultural significance, and, of course, its consumption.

Food events function as platforms that facilitate the gathering of individuals to interact with food in various manners. These establishments transcend the customary practice of consuming food by curating an engaging encounter that frequently includes components such as culinary showcases, samplings, educational sessions, and participatory engagements. Such events have the potential to exhibit a diverse range of local and worldwide cuisines, encompassing both traditional and contemporary culinary techniques, as well as a wide variety of food products. Instances of such occurrences include food

festivals, farmers' markets, street food fairs, culinary tours, pop-up dinners, and more. The concept of "food events" encompasses a wide range of meetings centred around food, serving as platforms for individuals to come together and engage in the exploration, admiration, and commemoration of the vast array of culinary customs and advancements.

The Intersection of Food, Culture, and Society

As previously stated, there has been a notable surge in the popularity of events and festivals for touristic purposes in recent years (Thrane, 2002), and among the diverse options on offer, tourists often favour the ones that are food-themed. Food events are diverse in nature and encompass a wide range of culinary encounters that go beyond mere consumption. Instead, they have become immersive festivities that honour culture, tradition, and innovation. The common thread across these various events is the significance of food as a medium for social engagement, cultural manifestation, and sensory discovery. Food events serve as channels for cultural interaction in an increasingly interconnected global society. They are gateways to the core of many communities, providing a glimpse into their traditions, rituals, and histories. Furthermore, they are frequently employed as platforms for showcasing the work of local producers and craftspeople, thus advocating for sustainable practices and bolstering regional economies.

There is a general consensus that food festivals, when executed effectively, can significantly help generate tourism income and enhance the reputation of host communities. Kim et al. (2010) claim that the revenue generated from festivals has the potential to yield many economic and non-market advantages, which in turn bolsters the local economy. Typically, the economic advantages encompass the generation of revenue and the creation of employment opportunities; while the non-market advantages include fostering a positive perception of local cuisine and host communities, improving the reputation of local authorities, and enhancing the communities' quality of life. Furthermore, the financial contributions made by visitors at local food festivals may contribute to the cultivation of new culinary traditions and the overall preservation of culinary heritage.

Similarly, tourism planners and festival marketers across many regions may be able to identify certain food and beverage options for commemoration purposes. According to Xie (2004), if regional cuisine is adequately developed, it has the potential to be utilised as an important resource for food festivals. In conjunction with other culinary tourism destinations, such as farms and orchards, food festivals hold particular appeal in rural regions because they encapsulate the allure and cultural significance of a tourist site and its rural surroundings. However, it is worth noting that food festivals are readily available in urban regions due to the higher population density. This concentration of restaurants, cafes, and cooking schools in urban areas often leads to a larger presence of celebrity chefs and a greater inclination towards culinary experimentation, such as fusion cooking (Wolf, 2006).

Therefore, food festivals are seen as a suitable form of “creative destination” that may be developed to enhance the competitive tourist industry by including other valuable assets of the host locations (Prentice & Andersen, 2003). Partaking in local gastronomy and engaging in interactions with locals also engenders a sort of territoriality among visitors, which in turn can foster a sense of pride linked with their exploration of unique culinary experiences that are unlikely to be encountered in their own familiar environments or by their acquaintances. Furthermore, apart from providing tourists with opportunities to learn about the cultural aspects of societies different from their own, engaging in the consumption of indigenous cuisine or participating in local cooking practices and dining rituals during festivals serves a significant social purpose, like establishing new social connections, reinforcing existing social ties, and granting visitors the chance to partake in unfamiliar food items or unconventional eating customs (Okumus et al., 2007).

Hosting community festivals is seen by festival organisers as a means to enhance the spiritual well-being of communities. When a celebration encourages attendees to engage with issues and questions that are central to the human experience, they develop a deeper understanding of their collective humanity. This, in turn, fosters a sense of universal kinship among all individuals, promoting love, justice, and harmonious coexistence (Dunstan, 1994). Food festivals provide a platform for local individuals to showcase and exchange festival cuisine, thereby affording them the opportunity to engage in social interactions, derive enjoyment, and be entertained. This experience holds significance in fostering positive social connections (Xiao & Smith, 2004), with a particular emphasis on strengthening familial ties. With their ability to foster communal celebration, contemporary food festivals have thus emerged as highly sought-after events for both local inhabitants and tourists.

According to Spiller (2012), the act of consuming food and beverages transforms into a multi-dimensional encounter, facilitating the visitor’s connection with the specific location and its cultural aspects. These three aspects encompass the elements of taste, location, and cultural heritage. The act of purchasing or sampling food directly from the producer may evoke a sense of culinary refinement and expertise among customers, while simultaneously highlighting notions of personal distinctiveness and singularity. Upon entering an event setting, both locals and non-locals are exposed to its unique and distinct temporal and spatial context. According to Falassi (1987), the food items that are consumed during these events, or acquired for later consumption, serve as a representation of alternative temporal and spatial dimensions which visitors do not typically encounter in their daily lives.

Challenges, Opportunities, and Future Directions

Despite the many joys and advantages they can generate, food events also grapple with their share of challenges. Issues of sustainability and food safety demand careful consideration; particularly when organising and participating in food events on a large scale. One of the most pressing challenges is the environmental impact of large-scale gatherings. From food waste to carbon footprints, the ecological consequences of such events demand sustainable practices and responsible management. Guan et al. (2019) note that solid and liquid waste volumes, greenhouse emissions, agricultural water use, and farming fertilisers are all environmental consequences that should be acknowledged by policymakers, tourism organisations, and stakeholders.

Additionally, food safety plays a pivotal role in shaping the success and experience of food events at various levels. The phenomenon of commodification of and fixation on food is a noteworthy observation, principally in the context of food events. These events demonstrate a shift in the perception of food, where its significance extends beyond its nutritional value. Instead, food has become one of numerous commodities that consumers use to enhance their social standing and validate their self-importance. This behaviour disregards the potential health and ethical consequences associated with such practices (Bertella & Vidmar, 2019). Thus, it is very important that organisers adhere to stringent regulations throughout the planning stages to ensure that vendors comply with local health codes, possess necessary permits, and follow proper hygiene practices. Failure to do so can lead to legal consequences and reputational damage. During the event, the responsibility shifts to food vendors and exhibitors, who must comply with food safety standards, including proper food storage, cooking temperatures, and overall hygiene. Maintaining regulatory compliance is crucial, as non-compliance can result in fines, penalties, and even closure of the event. The enforcement of these practices contributes to a safer environment for attendees, reducing the risk of foodborne illnesses and fostering a positive experience. For attendees, food safety directly impacts their health and well-being and is thus integral to the overall success, reputation, and sustainability of food events.

Amidst these challenges, global food events still offer significant opportunities for positive impact. They serve as platforms for culinary innovation, allowing chefs and food entrepreneurs to showcase new ideas and products to a diverse, and often international, audience. Moreover, these events can stimulate local economies by promoting tourism and supporting local businesses, ranging from farmers and artisans to restaurants and hotels. The interconnectedness of the global food scene during such events also fosters cultural exchange, creating opportunities for cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

As the culinary landscape evolves, so too must the framework within which food events operate. The definition of food events, therefore, extends beyond the ephemeral pleasure of a good meal; encompassing a dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation, community and global connectivity, and the sensory and intellectual dimensions of the human experience. In exploring the intricate tapestry of food events, one discovers not only the richness of diverse cuisines, but also the profound ways in which these gatherings shape our cultural, social, and economic landscapes.

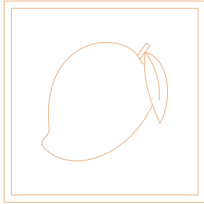
Looking ahead, the future of food events holds exciting global prospects. Sustainable practices are likely to become more ingrained in event planning and execution, with an increased focus on minimising environmental impact. Technology is expected to play a transformative role, enhancing the virtual experience of events and providing new avenues for participation. There is also a growing awareness of the social impact of food events, with a potential shift towards events that actively address issues such as food insecurity, inequality, and the promotion of healthy eating habits. Furthermore, global food events may evolve to embrace inclusivity, representing a broader range of culinary traditions and voices to create a more representative and diverse food landscape on the world stage. As the culinary world continues to evolve, global food events will play a pivotal role in shaping the future of gastronomy, influencing trends, and contributing to a more interconnected and sustainable global food community.

Conclusion

Food events have the potential to become catalysts for positive transformation in both local and global settings, which may be achieved via the adoption of sustainable practices, the promotion of local enterprises, and the cultivation of inclusivity. The convergence of technology and gastronomy is becoming a notable phenomenon that has the capacity to revolutionise the manner in which we connect with food-related occasions. This trend presents novel opportunities for virtual involvement, international cooperation, and heightened levels of engagement. Moreover, food festivals have emerged as a strategic approach in several nations to advance desirable food consumption patterns for diverse policy objectives, with the intention of utilising locally procured food as an alternative to the dependence on global distribution networks. The adoption of local sourcing practices has the potential to provide favourable environmental outcomes, including the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions through the minimisation of “food miles” and the enhancement of the national balance of payments (Çela et al., 2007). Based on Getz’s comprehensive literature review on event tourism (2008), it is evident that culinary events can potentially stimulate positive behavioural change, a key goal for governments and policy makers who may offer public financing to incentivise such a change. Gaining insight into attendees’ experiences at food gatherings and the ensuing effect these events have on their future behaviour can help illuminate the impact of food events on dietary preferences and individual lifestyle changes.

Food events play a crucial role in enhancing the overall tourism experience and are becoming significant factors that motivate independent travel. The following chapters in this book provide a distinct perspective on the aforementioned phenomena, examining the interconnectedness of food, tourism products, and the tourist experience via the use of several case studies from Saudi Arabia and other regions. These case studies have been submitted by writers of various nationalities, and the coverage provides a comprehensive overview that allows readers to understand the world of food events, their historical context, the contemporary landscape, and the challenges and opportunities they present.

03 Local Food and Farmers Markets in Highland Destinations



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Introduction

In highland regions, economic activities such as agriculture, tourism, and local industries significantly contribute to the socio-economic well-being of the community. The aforementioned regions additionally serve as a home for indigenous populations, old customs, and significant events that have played a pivotal role in shaping the distinctive personality of this highland locale. Among these options, local food and farmers' markets possess notable importance. These markets function as significant cultural symbols, providing a window into the area's abundant agricultural legacy, exhibiting unique agricultural products, and safeguarding culinary customs. This chapter examines the role of farmers' markets as a tourist attraction, exploring their relationship to the broader concept of agrotourism. It also delves into the unique characteristics and local food of farmers' markets situated in highland areas.

Farmers' Markets as Tourist Attractions

Food markets have played a significant role in regional trade for many years, serving as venues for farmers to sell their produce and handcrafted products, while also drawing tourists to various settlements (Wallgren, 2006). Historically, food markets frequently encompassed artisanal and pre-owned goods, and were predominantly controlled by merchants engaged in both retail and wholesale activities. The outcome of this development ultimately resulted in the formation of specialised marketplaces in Western Europe and other geographical areas, which are presently referred to as farmers' markets (Kirwan, 2006). The prevalence of farmers' markets has grown significantly in many food settings, establishing itself as a well-recognised phenomenon within the food system (Byker et al., 2012).

According to several authors, a farmer's market is commonly defined as a venue where local cultivators, farmers, and creators of artisanal food products directly sell their goods to customers. Farmers or vendors have the ability to engage in the sale of their own agricultural products, such as crops, livestock, preserved goods, baked items, smoked products, or self-caught seafood, within a certain geographical region. There is a higher probability that farmers who engage in farmers' markets are characterised as small-scale farmers. According to the findings of Wann et al. (1948) and Linstrom (1978), it has been posited that farmers who operate on a big scale frequently encounter unfavourable economic conditions inside farmers' markets. This stems from competition with smaller producers offering niche products and competitive pricing, as well as challenges in meeting consumer expectations for locally grown and artisanal goods.

Additionally, access to resources and prime market locations may be limited for larger operations, exacerbating these economic hurdles. Overall, while farmers' markets offer direct sale opportunities, they present significant challenges for larger farmers. According to Hilchey et al. (1995), farmers' markets have played a significant role in supporting farmers' sustainability by enabling them to remain economically viable. Additionally, these markets have directly contributed to the conservation of open space and the preservation of the rural landscape.

The farmer's market, which is frequently hosted at a publicly accessible location on a consistent schedule, serves as a dynamic centre for the local community. The symbiotic association between a farmer's market and a tourist destination is a mutually advantageous affiliation that amplifies the whole encounter for local communities and tourists alike. Tourists have the opportunity to engage in meaningful interactions with local farmers and artisans by participating in practical and experiential activities that establish a more profound affinity with the visited location. Farmers' markets are sometimes marketed as tourist attractions to highlight the traditional and distinctive characteristics of certain locations, thereby evoking the nostalgic appeal of smaller, interactive retail environments (Beer et al., 2012).

Additionally, farmers' markets frequently exhibit the unique tastes and cultural legacy of the local area. As previously mentioned, the markets showcase items that are obtained and created within the local area, providing customers with a chance to immerse themselves in the culinary spirit of the region. The opportunity to encounter genuine local tastes can be seen as a significant element of a traveller's journey, offering a true link to the location and an opportunity to partake in native cuisine. To increase visitor involvement, farmers' markets frequently incorporate cultural events, live musical performances, and demonstrations conducted by skilled artisans. These activities serve to strengthen the appeal of the market for tourists, establishing a lively and dynamic atmosphere. The market performs a multifaceted role beyond its primary purpose as a commercial space for transactions. It also acts as a platform for various forms of entertainment, cultural exchange, and social interaction.

Typically, the presence of a thriving farmer's market may significantly enhance the appeal of a destination for tourists. Similarly, the market serves as a catalyst for promoting community cohesiveness and ensuring economic sustainability, cultivating a dynamic hub that offers benefits to both local communities and visitors.

Farmers' Markets and Agrotourism

Farmers' markets have a significant correlation with agrotourism due to their substantial reliance on this industry. The term agrotourism is frequently promoted as a beneficial approach for fostering agricultural development and enhancing the economic well-being and overall livelihoods of farmers. The aforementioned tourism niche may be characterised as a hybrid agricultural system that combines farming and tourism components. Its primary objective is to establish markets for agricultural products and services, while simultaneously offering visitors unique travel experiences (Wicks & Merrett 2003; Rogerson & Rogerson 2014). Various terms have been used interchangeably to refer to this system, such as "agricultural tourism," "agritourism," "farm tourism," "farm-based tourism," "farm stays," "vacation farms," "agritainment," and "rural tourism" (Phillip et al., 2010; Kokko, 2011; Schilling et al., 2012; Flanigan et al., 2014).

Phillip et al. (2010) present a conceptual framework known as the "agritourism typology." This framework aims to identify and define the essential features of agritourism, including the presence of a functioning farm, direct engagement with agricultural activities, and the provision of an authentic agricultural experience for tourists. The authors systematically apply this typology to establish various agritourism 'types', which encompass the diverse array of products and offerings discussed in the existing literature. For a visual representation of these types, refer to Figure 3.1. The introduction of the agritourism typology to the existing literature is noteworthy as it offers a valuable framework for distinguishing between various agritourism offerings.

Agritourism Typology

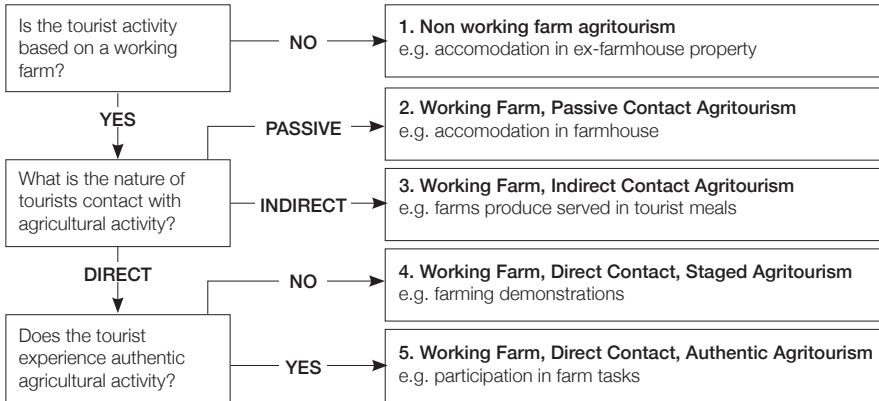


Figure 3.1: Agritourism Typology. Source: Phillip et al. (2010).

The following elucidates the different types of agrotourism that are available for visitors to experience:

Farm Stays: This type of agrotourism involves visitors staying overnight on a working farm. The variety of accommodations available to tourists varies from primitive cabins to guesthouses that offer a higher level of comfort, providing an opportunity for guests to immerse themselves in the daily routines and activities of farm life.

Educational Tours and Workshops: The primary objective is to offer guests valuable educational experiences pertaining to several facets of agriculture. The range of activities offered may encompass organised visits to agricultural establishments, educational sessions focusing on sustainable farming techniques, and showcases of traditional agricultural crafts or proficiencies.

“Pick-Your-Own” Farms: “Pick-your-own” farms provide guests the unique option to personally gather fruits, vegetables, or flowers directly from the fields. This experiential opportunity enables individuals to establish a direct connection with the origin of their sustenance and develop a heightened awareness of the laborious processes involved in its production.

Culinary Tourism: Culinary-oriented agrotourism places emphasis on the gastronomic culture inherent to a particular geographical area. Visitors have the opportunity to engage in culinary sessions that utilise locally procured foods, explore artisanal food producers, and indulge in farm-to-table gastronomy.

Rural Accommodation: In addition to farm stays, agrotourism encompasses many forms of rural lodging, including bed and breakfast establishments, guesthouses, and eco-lodges, which are situated within or in close proximity to agricultural regions.

Agroecotourism: This form of agrotourism places a strong emphasis on the implementation of sustainable and ecologically conscious farming methods. Visitors have the opportunity to engage in various activities such as exploring organic farms, acquiring knowledge about permaculture, and participating in programs that prioritise conservation and biodiversity.

Rural Festivals and Events: Agrotourism includes participation in rural festivals and activities that commemorate local agricultural traditions. Examples of such events encompass harvest festivals, agricultural fairs, and gatherings that highlight the distinctive products and traditions of a particular region.

Agro-Adventure Tourism: Agro-adventure tourism caters to the preferences of travellers wanting more dynamic and engaging experiences. This form of tourism has several options for individuals to partake in activities such as horseback riding, embarking on hikes across agricultural landscapes, or engaging in outdoor farm challenges.

Nilsson (2002) posits that agrotourism may be seen as a viable kind of rural tourism, characterised by its emphasis on soft and non-intrusive activities that prioritise the well-being of individuals and the environment. This form of tourism may be characterised as a blend of contemporary and traditional elements, since it focuses on exploring the local community via an examination of its geographical features, traditions, culture, and customs. The integration of tourism into the agricultural sector has been found to yield favourable outcomes for farmers and the wider agricultural community. One notable benefit is the potential increase in public employment opportunities resulting from the diversification of the local industry base. This diversification necessitates the hiring of additional workers to fulfil various roles such as tour guides, housekeeping attendants, drivers, and tour packaging officers, among others (Hjalager, 1997). A variety of business initiatives are anticipated to be implemented in rural enterprises, including the establishment of homestay accommodations, interpretation centres, and restaurants. This optimistic scenario is expected to result in increased financial rewards for the farmers.

Local Food and Characteristics of Farmers' Markets in Highland Destinations

Characteristics of Farmers' Markets

Highland farmers' markets have distinct attributes that arise from particular geographical, cultural, and agricultural circumstances. Significantly, the altitude and climatic conditions have a role in the lower temperatures and relatively temperate climate observed in highland regions in contrast to low-lying places. Highlands are geographically characterised as locations with elevated topography, encompassing mountainous terrains, elevated mountain plateaus, or lofty hills. The term "highlands" often denotes elevated topography ranging from 300 m (980 feet) to 500-600 m (1,600–2,000 feet) in altitude. However, highlands are typically found within the confines of lower mountain ranges (Highland, 2023). As a consequence of this phenomenon, highland locations frequently exhibit distinctive microclimates and soil compositions, which contribute to the cultivation of a wide array of specialised crops. The highland climate might lead to a distinct assortment of agricultural products in contrast to lowland places, including particular fruits, vegetables, and herbs.

Furthermore, highland farmers' markets have the potential to exhibit locally-crafted goods and artisanal products, in addition to their offerings of fresh fruit. These may encompass handcrafted textiles, ceramics, carpentry, and various other artisanal products made by talented craftsmen from the local area. The inclusion of indigenous populations in market spaces contributes a distinctive aspect to the overall market experience. This variety is evident via the presence of many indigenous tribes, each possessing their own distinct agricultural methods and culinary traditions, which coexist within these regions (Islam et al., 2012). They provide a significant function in the preservation and transmission of farming methods, traditional recipes, culinary skills, and food traditions that are distinct to the specific geographical area. By serving as custodians of this vital cultural information, these marketplaces play a role in safeguarding local identity. The agricultural practices employed in highland regions are frequently characterised by a strong adherence to traditional methods, which have been modified to address the specific challenges posed by the unique topography and climatic conditions of these areas. Terracing is a conventional farming practice commonly utilised in highland settings, which involves the creation of level agricultural fields on steep slopes (Clay et al., 1998). The utilisation of these strategies significantly contributes to the long-term viability and adaptability of highland agricultural systems.

The markets include aesthetically pleasing environments, situated among breathtaking natural scenery, that add an extra level of appeal for anyone visiting them. Visitors have the opportunity to appreciate the beauty of their surroundings while exploring fresh, locally sourced products and enjoying food specific to the region. Highland farmers' markets have a distinctiveness stemming from the intricate interplay of geographical, climatic, cultural, and agricultural elements.

Local Food in Farmers' Markets

Farmers' markets play a key role in communities, serving as both economic and social hubs that embody the local culture and customs of the people. These locations serve as examples of environments in which individuals engage in their routine tasks and responsibilities. As a result, travellers see manifestations of the cultures they seek to explore and appreciate throughout their vacation period (Crespi-Vallbona & Dimitrovski, 2016). There is a growing trend among tourists to actively pursue genuine and distinctive culinary encounters, considering them an essential component of their vacation plans. Highland locations, characterised by their unique farming practices and utilisation of locally sourced ingredients, present a varied and vibrant gastronomic panorama that enthralls the palates of tourists. Local cuisine provides a direct link to the cultural fabric of the highland locality, encompassing a range of traditional recipes and unique ingredients. The importance of local food and farmers' markets in highland destinations is multifaceted and plays a vital role in various aspects of the community and economy, as described below:

i) Preservation of Culinary Heritage: These markets function as dynamic hubs that safeguard traditional culinary practices, ensuring the longevity of time-honoured recipes, cooking methods, and food customs that are exclusive to the area. Consequently, they play a key role in upholding cultural identity and history.

ii) Promotion of Sustainable Agriculture: These markets promote sustainable agriculture by offering a direct platform for local farmers to sell their goods to consumers. This leads to a decrease in the demand for extensive transit and storage, leading to a reduction in carbon emissions and the provision of fresher, more ecologically sustainable food.

iii) Support for Local Farmers and Artisans: The act of directly procuring goods from local farmers and craftsmen serves to directly support their economic sustenance, fostering a thriving agricultural community and promoting the continuation of traditional farming practices. This form of assistance contributes to the establishment of food supply networks that are more robust, which is particularly important during periods of crisis or disruptions.

iv) Promotion of Health and Wellness: Local food markets commonly provide a diverse selection of fresh, seasonal, and frequently organic products, promoting the adoption of a more nutritious dietary pattern. Additionally, they facilitate knowledge dissemination on the advantages of consuming food items that are derived from local producers and undergo minimum processing.

v) Diversification of Food Choices: Farmers' markets serve as platforms for exhibiting a wide array of fruits, vegetables, herbs, and specialised items, therefore fostering an environment that motivates customers to engage in the exploration and integration of a broader assortment of ingredients into their culinary endeavours. Moreover, these markets serve as a medium for cultural interchange, facilitating the sharing of distinct culinary customs among various people in the region. This fosters a sense of comprehension and admiration for the multitude of food cultures present within the locality.

vi) Memorable Food Souvenirs: Regional cuisine items and unique goods serve as significant and unforgettable mementoes. Tourists frequently exhibit a strong desire to procure a memento of their highland encounter, enabling them to reminisce about their gastronomic expedition even beyond their departure.

vii) Tourist Attraction and Destination Marketing: These markets are progressively transforming into tourist destinations, attracting people in search of genuine, locally-made products and distinctive gastronomic encounters. This factor enhances the overall allure and desirability of the highland location for tourists.

The presence of locally sourced food is an important additional attraction for visitors visiting the highland regions. Farmers' markets, commonly recognised as local food events, are integral elements of the local food ecosystem, together enhancing the whole gastronomic and cultural encounter within the region. In the context of highland destinations, local food and farmers' markets play a crucial role in promoting sustainability, enhancing cultural diversity, and fostering economic prosperity. These establishments function as major nodes for community engagement, actively contribute to the preservation of the environment, and play a pivotal role in safeguarding and advancing local gastronomic customs.

Highland Farmers' Markets and Local Food Events in Saudi Arabia

Al-Shayaa et al. (2012) assert that the agricultural industry in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is accorded significant importance, despite its lack of environmental suitability. The nation has been diligently undertaking endeavours through its five-year development plans to enhance its agricultural sector with the aim of guaranteeing food security. As a result of the government's supportive policies, along with the advice provided by the extension service, farmers were able to augment agricultural production and attain a certain level of self-sufficiency.

The rise and expansion of farmers' markets in Saudi Arabia signify an important and revolutionary change in the nation's food delivery framework. The process of development is driven by many variables, including shifts in consumer tastes, governmental interventions, and an increased recognition of the benefits associated with locally sourced agricultural products. Throughout the course of history, Saudi Arabia has exhibited a prosperous agricultural heritage, characterised by the cultivation of a wide range of crops by various populations. For ages, traditional marketplaces, sometimes referred to as "souqs," have played a significant role in many cultures, acting as central locations where local farmers and artisans engage in trading activities. In the last several decades, the country has experienced a swift process of industrialisation and urbanisation. This, along with a diversification of the economy outside the oil sector, has resulted in an increased awareness about the significance of agriculture and its role in guaranteeing food security and diminishing dependence on imports.

Several highland regions in the country have become popular tourism destinations, where local culinary festivals and farmers' markets have emerged as highly recommended attractions. One notable example is the third iteration of the Grape and Seasonal Fruits Festival, which took place in 2022 in Abha, Asir region. During this four-day occasion, growers from various parts of the region convened to exhibit their highest-quality products (see Image 3.1). The festival served as a platform for farmers to exhibit a diverse range of agricultural products, including grapes, pomegranates, peaches, plums, figs, chicks, berries, and strawberries. Its primary objectives were to provide assistance to local growers, enhance the region's reputation as a hub for agricultural excellence, and stimulate tourism and economic prospects. The event occurred simultaneously with the Abha Summer event, resulting in varied economic benefits across many industries and presenting a multitude of investment and employment prospects. The Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture orchestrated the festivals and events with the aim of fostering Saudi farmers, endorsing their goods, and enhancing agricultural output, quality, and competitiveness within Saudi markets.



Image 3.1: Fruits on display at the third edition of the Grape and Seasonal Fruits Festival, Asir Province.
Source: Arab News (2022).

Taif, also referred to as the “City of Roses,” has experienced an increase in the influx of tourists and local people attending its farmers’ markets, mostly due to its advantageous proximity to Mecca and Jeddah. In recent times, there has been a growing trend among tour companies to incorporate a visit to Taif as a supplementary excursion for those doing the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage. This allows pilgrims to immerse themselves in the diverse array of fresh agricultural food, including an assortment of vegetables and herbs that the region has to offer.

Farmers’ markets and local food festivals in highland destinations, such as those in Saudi Arabia, are vibrant manifestations of the region’s abundant agricultural resources and cutting-edge culinary practices. These events provide an opportunity for both local populations and visitors to actively participate in and experience the dynamic cuisine culture that characterises the highlands. These occurrences not only demonstrate the abundance of resources in the region, but also underscore the tenacity and ingenuity of the highland people.

Main Issues and Challenges

This section explores the various difficulties and challenges related to farmers’ markets, local food and food events within the context of highland destinations. One of the limiting factors is the periodic, seasonal fluctuations observed in highland locations which impose restrictions on the accessibility of specific crops and goods. Highland destinations frequently exhibit abbreviated periods of plant growth as a result of lower temperatures and fluctuating climatic circumstances.

This constraint restricts the range of cultivable crops and the temporal window for agricultural activities. The selected sites frequently experience unexpected weather patterns and swings in climate. Severe meteorological phenomena, such as frost, droughts, or excessive precipitation, can exert a substantial influence on agricultural productivity and the overall efficacy of regional farming endeavours. In the dry season, elevated regions may have water supply issues, which might provide obstacles to irrigation practices and the maintenance of stable agricultural production levels. This seasonality can lead to fluctuations in product offerings at farmers’ markets and local food events, affecting both consumers and producers.

According to Al-Zeir (2009), several challenges exist within the agricultural sector of the country that might potentially hinder farm output. These challenges include water scarcity, a dearth of skilled technical workers, issues related to soil and water salinity, the increasing expense of desalination, difficulties in selling agricultural products, as well as the presence of pests and diseases. Furthermore, the difficulty in accessing highland attractions might be attributed to the rough topography and inadequate transportation infrastructure. The aforementioned situation may present logistical challenges for farmers seeking to convey their

produce to markets, as well as for tourists attempting to reach the desired location. The establishment of effective supply networks for agricultural goods in highland regions may provide obstacles. These factors can lead to delays, increased expenses, and potential quality concerns, especially in the case of perishable commodities.

Due to the relatively lower population and visitor influx in some highland destinations in comparison to major urban areas, farmers' markets and local food events in these regions may have a restricted consumer base. This limitation has the potential to impact the sales and income generated by producers operating in these markets. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the cyclical variations in tourism in these particular locations, wherein high seasons witness a greater influx of tourists and off-peak months experience a decline in commercial activity. Som and Al-Shqiarat (2013) argue that demand fluctuations can exert a substantial influence on tourism destinations, particularly those that are climate-dependent, such as highland attractions. The phenomenon of seasonality is well recognised as a significant challenge for highland destinations, posing a threat to their long-term sustainability. Highland destinations can experience prolonged periods of low demand and short periods of high demand.

In relation to local food in highland regions, it is worth noting that these locations may encounter challenges in terms of insufficient infrastructure for the storage, processing, and transportation of food. Consequently, this might result in concerns over the perishability of food items and the management of excess output. Producing food in such areas can sometimes be more resource-intensive, leading to higher production costs. The aforementioned factor has the potential to influence the cost of items obtained from local regions, thereby impacting their affordability for both the local people and tourists.

When considering food events in highland areas, it is worth noting that these places may have challenges in terms of available event venues and facilities required to accommodate large-scale food events. As a result, the size and scope of such gatherings may be restricted. Specifically, outdoor food events are susceptible to unforeseeable weather circumstances, such as precipitation or reduced temperatures, which have the potential to impact the number of attendees and the overall quality of the event. Ensuring that food events adhere to sustainable and ethical methods, such as limiting food waste and boosting local sourcing, may be seen as a crucial consideration for event organisers. The active engagement and support of local communities in food events play a vital role in their overall success since community involvement contributes to the event's authenticity and cultural enrichment.

Notwithstanding these challenges, highland destinations have the potential to effectively address these issues and establish prosperous local food economies and dynamic food events that enhance the region's sustainability and cultural diversity through careful planning, collaborative efforts within the community, and the implementation of strategic initiatives.

Conclusion

In summary, the existence of local food and lively farmers' markets significantly influences the cultural and gastronomic environment of highland regions. The farmers' markets function as vibrant centres, where both local communities and visitors come together to appreciate the highest quality products and interact with the skilled craftsmen and cultivators who are essential to the vitality of these areas. Markets function as both economic platforms and guardians of traditional traditions and heritage varieties. The existing body of literature provides evidence that economic considerations serve as a significant motivation for most farmers and customers to participate in farmers' markets located in highland destinations.

Recognising the interdependence between sustainable agriculture and responsible tourism is of utmost importance. By actively endorsing local farmers and producers, tourists have the opportunity to make a significant contribution towards the preservation of ecological integrity and the sustained vitality of these highland locations. In order to deeply engage with the farmers' markets and local food culture, it is anticipated that visitors will actively embrace the concept of seasonality by attentively acknowledging the fluctuations in produce availability. Additionally, they are encouraged to endorse sustainable practices by actively seeking out farmers and vendors who prioritise sustainable and organic farming techniques. Furthermore, visitors are encouraged to expand their exploration beyond the markets themselves and venture into the surrounding areas.

04

Culinary Celebrations and Rural Revitalisation: The Transformative Role of Food Festivals in Saudi Arabia



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Introduction

Food festivals represent dynamic gatherings that bring together enthusiasts and creators in lively environments (Hall et al., 2004). These events offer opportunities for sampling, gaining insights into how food is produced, and verifying its authenticity, all set in an atmosphere conducive to discovery and enjoyment (Kim, Suh, & Eves, 2010). They provide a stage for visitors to engage with local culinary artisans and immerse themselves in experiences that stimulate the senses and evoke emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and social responses. Furthermore, they promote the exploration of new tastes in a friendly setting (Mason & Paggiaro, 2012; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994), potentially altering long-standing dietary habits. While the satisfaction derived from traditional food retail is well-documented, the unique and enjoyable aspects of buying from food festivals have received less attention.

The global rise in the popularity of food festivals is noteworthy (Spiller, 2012).

These events vary from intimate community meet-ups to major annual gatherings attracting wide audiences. In the United Kingdom (UK), they typically occur between March and October, and around the festive season. A standard festival showcases upwards of thirty vendors, offering a variety of items like regional meats, cheeses, and artisanal chutneys. High levels of interaction are a key feature, with producers inviting attendees to try their offerings, thus enhancing the experience by sharing stories about the food's origins and production methods. Central to these festivals are food tasting and purchasing, often complemented by cooking shows and workshops. Celebrity chef demonstrations inspire new recipes and educate on topics like seasonal and local produce. Workshops offer practical culinary skills and family-oriented activities like children's cooking classes and crafts add to the vibrant atmosphere, often accompanied by music and dance.

Numerous studies have investigated the experiential value of food festivals (e.g., Kim et al., 2010; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012; Sims, 2009). It is argued that local food provides genuine experiences by linking cuisine with its place of origin (Robinson & Clifford, 2012). Sims (2009) noted that consuming local products encompasses more than taste; it involves an appreciation of the food's backstory, which offers a layered experience that connects attendees with local customs and heritage. Moreover, buying directly from the maker imparts a sense of culinary distinction and uniqueness (Spiller, 2012; Baumann, 2005). Studies suggest that food from these festivals is perceived as distinct from identical supermarket products (Spiller, 2012). This chapter seeks to examine the complex role of food festivals, particularly how they act as agents for rural development and contribute to the evolving tourism scene in Saudi Arabia.

Rural Tourism and Food Festivals

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) describes rural tourism as an activity intimately linked with a wide array of offerings, including nature-based activities, agriculture, rural life and culture, angling, and sightseeing. This type of tourism is vital for stimulating local economies and driving social change and its importance is linked to its contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), job creation, and the distribution of tourist demand over time and space. Typically, rural tourism occurs in non-urban areas characterised by low population density, landscapes shaped by agriculture and forestry, and traditional social structures.

Modern rural tourism includes various subtypes like agritourism— which focuses on farm-based activities and communities—as well as ecotourism and nature tourism. These emerging tourism forms offer avenues for revitalising rural areas, providing economic and social development opportunities. By harnessing the unique characteristics of rural regions, Saudi Arabia can diversify its tourism offerings and support sustainable community development, aligning with Vision 2030's broader goals.

Saudi Arabia's tourism sector has seen a notable increase, in line with Vision 2030's objectives to diversify beyond urban leisure and cultural tourism centred on archaeological sites. The country is exploring various alternative forms of tourism that emphasise rural community development. Despite a common perception that Saudi Arabia has a predominantly urban population, many Saudis live in, or have roots in, rural areas. This demographic reality presents unique opportunities for rural destinations, appealing to visitors seeking a break from city life and those visiting friends and relatives.

¹ Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 lays out strategic targets for economic diversification and an increase in competitiveness. It is centred around three main objectives: creating a vibrant society, fostering a thriving economy, and cultivating an ambitious nation. <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/>

The interplay between rural tourism and food festivals is complex and studies like Blichfeldt and Halkier's (2014) on place branding through food festivals in rural Denmark, as well as Kwiatkowski's (2018) analysis of food festivals' impact in rural areas, illustrate this relationship. Blichfeldt and Halkier's (2014) study on a mussel festival in Løgstør, Denmark, shows how such events can brand rural areas and enhance their appeal by showcasing local culinary specialties that attract many tourists.

Kwiatkowski (2018) highlights the significant role of food festivals in rural development. These events, while commercial, help preserve and develop regional identities by promoting local food assets, fostering community cohesion, and linking local resources with wider markets (Kwiatkowski, 2018). This dual role – driving economic activity and preserving culture and identity – is vital in rural areas, where such events can boost tourism and community development. Both studies underscore the symbiotic relationship between rural tourism and food festivals. Food festivals act as catalysts for rural tourism, attracting visitors and providing unique, authentic experiences that reflect local culture and traditions. In turn, the influx of tourists supports local economies and sustains cultural events, creating a cycle of mutual benefit and growth.

Food Festivals: Bridging Culture, Community, and Sustainability

The growing interest in culinary tourism highlights the vital role of food in enhancing tourism sustainability, promoting destinations, supporting local economies, and encouraging eco-friendly practices. Food, as a cultural symbol, offers insight into the traditions and heritage of its origin. This increasing fascination with culinary experiences is reflected in the rising popularity of food festivals.

Food festivals are instrumental in promoting sustainable development. They play a key role in environmental stewardship, economic growth, and social sustainability. Central to community life, they enhance social capital and foster a sense of belonging. These events showcase and promote local, high-quality food products, reflecting the cultural richness of their areas. Beneficial to tourists and locals alike, often in rural settings, these festivals aim to enhance community interaction and bonding (Albala, 2015). Zhang (2009), and Mohi & Wong (2013) highlight these events as opportunities for visitors to indulge in local cuisine and immerse themselves in local culture. Hall and Sharples (2004) identify the motivation behind festival participation as the desire to experience specific regional foods or products.

Food festivals offer multiple benefits to attendees and host communities, especially in rural areas. These festivals contribute to food security by promoting local sourcing of quality ingredients and traditional recipes, offering healthier alternatives to supermarket products. Shortening the food supply chain is also a key aspect of this contribution. Despite the increasing number of food festivals, only a few studies have considered their impact on local communities in rural settings (Ossowska et al., 2023).

Investigating various food festivals globally reveals a trend: most are held in urban rather than rural locations. This urban preference is likely due to easier tourist access, which is economically sensible. However, hosting these events in their authentic, original rural settings could “festivalise” rural areas. This pattern is also seen in Saudi Arabia, where, despite some festivals in rural areas, most are in urban locations.

Food Festivals in Rural Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia, a range of food-centric festivals are celebrated with traditional food playing a central role in many. While there are limited festivals exclusively dedicated to gastronomy, some incorporate this element and some examples include the Jazan Winter Festival, Historic Jeddah Festival, and Aljanadriyah Festival. The Saudi Feast Food Festival (MoC, 2022), however, stands out as the primary event focused on showcasing Saudi Arabian cuisines, representing the culinary heritage of the nation. Held in Riyadh and in Jeddah, it aims to represent the entire country’s culinary traditions.



Image 4.1: A brochure for the Saudi Feast Food Festival. **Source:** x.com/MOCCulinary, 2023.



Image 4.2: Saudi Feast Food Festival. **Source:** Sayidaty.net, 2023.



Image 4.3. An Arab Woman in a traditional outfit enjoying a meal at the Saudi Feast Food Festival.
Source: x.com/MOCCulinary, 2023.



Image 4.4. Saudi woman serving Saudi food to visitors at the Saudi Feast Food Festival.
Source: aljazeera.net, 2022.

Monshi and Scott (2017) noted that Saudi Arabia hosts over 60 food-related events across 12 provinces, celebrating the country's diverse landscape, local cuisines, and culture. Despite a recent focus on agritourism and the rural origins of these festivals, none are actually held in rural areas but in major cities. Predominantly, these events have centred around agricultural crops and honey, aiming to celebrate their harvest and increase their sales. Yet, such types of events where visitors do not experience local cuisines have limited impact on rural communities. Lau and Li (2019) highlight the significant link between food festivals and their locations. The table below shows food related events currently taking place in rural areas.

Event	Location
Honey Festivals	Alaradiyat . Jazan . Taif . Rijal Alma . Aljouf
Mango Festivals	Jazan . Algunfudah . Umluj
Dates and related pastries	Bishah . Alahsa . Algasseem . Almajmaa . Aljouf . Shagra . Almadinah
Figs, grape and Pomegranate	Taif . Albahah
Olives	Aljouf . Albahah
Coffee	Jazan . Albahah
Watermelon	Wadi Aldawaser

Table 1: Food Festivals Across Saudi Arabia. **Source:** Monshi and Scott (2017).

Environmentally, food festivals in Saudi Arabia could showcase the country’s diverse and rich environments, especially in rural areas. Hosting these festivals in rural settings, like agricultural lands or traditional villages, can highlight the unique environmental characteristics of these regions. These rural locales offer authentic backdrops that actively enhance the festival experience, allowing attendees to connect more deeply with the natural and cultural heritage of Saudi Arabia. Socially, situating these festivals in rural areas creates opportunities for meaningful interactions and exchanges. They can act as bridges, bringing together traditional Saudi customs and contemporary global influences in a unique rural setting. This not only fosters a sense of community among local residents, but also offers visitors a chance to experience the authentic rural lifestyle and culinary traditions of Saudi Arabia. Such interactions are not merely between individuals but represent a dialogue between diverse cultures, enriching the festival experience with a variety of flavours and stories.

Ideologically, rural food festivals can significantly influence perceptions of Saudi Arabia, both domestically and internationally. By offering immersive experiences that are deeply rooted in the rural and traditional aspects of Saudi culture, these festivals can strengthen national identity and showcase the country’s commitment to preserving its cultural heritage. Events like the Saudi Feast Food Festival, if held in rural areas, could emphasise the rich agricultural and culinary traditions of the country, fostering a sense of pride and belonging among both local participants and visitors.

The concept of “festivalisation” in rural place-making can be instrumental in redefining the socio-cultural identity of Saudi Arabia’s rural areas. These festivals are not just celebrations of food; they are opportunities to highlight the rural lifestyle and its contributions to the national culture. This approach offers a fresh perspective on the dynamic relationship between festival tourism and the notion of place, particularly in rural settings.

Impact of Food Festivals on Rural Areas

Cultural festivals, especially those centred around food, exert a significant influence on their host communities, impacting them socio-culturally and economically. These events are more than mere celebrations of tradition and cuisine; they act as powerful drivers for local development, community engagement, and sustainable growth. Economically, food festivals make a substantial contribution to local economies, particularly in rural settings. They offer a stage for entrepreneurs and local businesses to display and sell their products, often leading to enhanced business growth. Einarsen and Mykletun (2014) have observed that the success of these festivals is closely linked with their integration into networks of local food and tradition-based institutions. This integration not only boosts local tourism but also positions local food as a major attraction for tourists. Tourists seeking authentic cultural experiences are drawn to local cuisine, which in turn stimulates financial contributions to the local economy. While the economic impact might be more modest in smaller festivals, as Egresi and Kara (2014) have noted, the influence extends beyond immediate financial gains. These festivals often influence future purchasing decisions of tourists based on their positive experiences, thereby having a long-term economic impact. Folgado-Fernández et al. (2017) highlight the importance of small festivals in sustainable destination marketing, emphasising their role in promoting local products and preserving rural traditions.

The sociocultural impacts of food festivals are equally important. De Jong and Varley (2018) note that these festivals contribute to social sustainability by strengthening community bonds. They serve as relational hubs, fostering diverse connections among people with varying motivations and durations, as found by Janiszewska et al. (2022). This aspect of food festivals is crucial in enhancing sustainable social development, as they facilitate interactions among different social groups, thereby fostering a sense of community and shared cultural identity. Baptista Alves et al. (2010) point out that the social benefits of small food festivals often surpass their economic impacts. These events are not just about food; they are celebrations of culture and tradition, playing a vital role in preserving these aspects both locally and nationally.

In addition to the economic and socio-cultural impact, hosting cultural events in rural areas also has environmental significance. Although tourism is often viewed as having a negative impact on the environment, it can lead to increased appreciation of the natural environment in the context of rural areas. Raising awareness among visitors and local communities about the importance of the natural environment is always considered a positive effect of tourism.

Food festivals serve as unique ecosystems where business, society, and culture intersect. They are instrumental in promoting rural values, empowering local communities, and contributing to both economic growth and social sustainability. The impact of these festivals extends far beyond the event itself, influencing future tourism, preserving traditions, and strengthening community bonds. As such, they

are an essential component of sustainable development in rural areas and should be included in communication campaigns aimed at marketing these regions.

Conclusion

The chapter highlights that, at present, food festivals in Saudi Arabia exert a minimal influence on the economic and social aspects of rural regions. As it stands, local culinary offerings are predominantly featured as supplementary activities in broader cultural events, whereas food-related events are primarily orchestrated to boost agricultural sales.

However, the exploration of food festivals in Saudi Arabia reveals a multifaceted and dynamic landscape. These festivals, while currently concentrated in urban areas, hold immense potential for rural development and cultural preservation. As noted earlier, the current state of food festivals in Saudi Arabia, primarily focused on agricultural sales and urban settings, overlooks the rich tapestry of rural culinary traditions and the potential for these events to act as catalysts for rural revitalization and tourism.

The significance of food festivals extends beyond mere gastronomic enjoyment. They are cultural touchstones that celebrate and preserve culinary heritage, foster community engagement, and contribute to the socio-economic fabric of rural areas. The potential for these festivals to act as platforms for showcasing Saudi Arabia's diverse culinary landscape, particularly in rural settings, is immense. By relocating these festivals to rural areas, there is an opportunity to create a more authentic and immersive experience for attendees, while simultaneously contributing to the economic and social vitality of these regions.

The concept of "festivalisation" in rural Saudi Arabia could serve as a strategic tool in the broader context of Vision 2030. By integrating food festivals into the rural tourism strategy, Saudi Arabia can leverage its rich culinary heritage to enhance its tourism offering, diversify its economy, and strengthen its cultural identity. This approach aligns with the global trend towards experiential and sustainable tourism, where visitors seek authentic, culturally rich experiences. Moreover, the environmental aspect of these festivals cannot be overlooked. Hosting them in rural areas would not only highlight the unique environmental characteristics of these regions but also promote sustainable practices in food production and consumption. This aligns with the growing global consciousness around environmental stewardship and sustainable living.

In conclusion, while food festivals in Saudi Arabia currently play a limited role in rural development, there is significant potential for these events to evolve into powerful instruments for cultural preservation, economic growth, and social cohesion. By reimagining these festivals within the rural context, Saudi Arabia can harness their full potential, contributing to the country's cultural richness and sustainable development goals. This shift would not only enhance the appeal of rural areas as tourist destinations but also reinforce the importance of preserving and celebrating the unique culinary traditions of Saudi Arabia.

05

Destination Marketing Through Festivals and Food Tourism



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Introduction

Food-oriented festivals are fundamental to food tourism and have long been acknowledged as a crucial element in determining the competitiveness of a destination (Yang et al., 2020). Tourism destination marketing is currently recognised as a significant component of destination management (Rahman et al., 2020) and destination marketing operators frequently utilise food festivals as a strategic instrument to entice tourists and enhance the promotion of a particular region (Getz, 1991). Food tourism is experiencing substantial expansion for destinations and is considered a lucrative marketing opportunity (Henderson, 2009), given that one-third of tourists' expenditures are allocated to food (Quan & Wang, 2004).

Festivals serve as a significant catalyst for tourism and play a prominent role in the development and marketing plans of numerous destinations. Food is present at the majority of events and festivals and plays a significant role in marketing destinations' food tourism. Using festivals as a component of urban tourism projects is important to facilitate the promotion of urban regions and communities (Harcup, 2000; Pugh & Wood, 2004). The primary objective of food festivals is often to enhance the promotion of local food and culture through the exhibition and sampling of customary food products (Rinaldi, 2017).

The main objective of a tourism marketing strategy is to effectively attract the intended audience of tourists and motivate them to select a certain destination. Marketing is defined as a social and management activity that involves the acquisition of goods and services by people and organisations via the creation and exchange of products and value with others (Kotler et al., 1999). Food tourism provides tourists with opportunities to explore and engage with novel gastronomic experiences, encompassing a wide array of tastes, flavours, and textures. Additionally, it allows for immersion in diverse cultures, traditions, and local culinary customs, hence facilitating authentic encounters with food and beverage offerings (World Food Travel Association, 2019). Therefore, the promotion of food tourism and festivals necessitates dedicated marketing endeavours to effectively appeal to potential tourists. The integration of tourism with local food in marketing campaigns has the potential to generate economic opportunities for local food enterprises, since the significance of local cuisine can significantly influence the overall visitor experience (Hall, 2012). The objective of this chapter is to elucidate the potential of festivals and food tourism as effective marketing tools for promoting a destination.

Festivals, Food Tourism, and Destination Branding

Festivals have the potential to enhance the recognition and strengthen the branding of tourism destinations. Destination branding refers to a set of marketing operations aimed at facilitating the establishment of a distinct and recognizable identity for a particular location. Local festivals can serve as a means for destinations to improve their image. According to Yu, Wang, and Seo (2010), the act of hosting special events like festivals can yield advantages not only in terms of immediate goals, such as revitalising the local economy, but also in the long run by contributing to the development of a destination brand. This identity may be represented by many means such as a name, symbol, logo, word mark, or other visual elements. The primary objective of destination branding is to enable easy identification and differentiation of a place from others.

The primary objective of destination branding is to effectively market a specific location to tourists from various nations (Rahman et al., 2019) by presenting an attractive assortment of tourism offerings and services in a highly refined manner (Rahman et al., 2018, 2021). According to Formica (1998), festivals have the potential to enhance place brand awareness by emphasising and augmenting distinctive attributes of the hosting locality. Deng and Li (2013) argue that the integration of festival brands into destination marketing strategies can result in several benefits. These advantages encompass heightened recommendations, greater management of travel experiences, and a broader range of offerings to accommodate various types of travellers. Hence, it may be argued that this festival serves as a strategic instrument for the purpose of destination branding.

Destination Image

It is expected that the marketing of festivals would positively enhance the destination image. Festivals provide the opportunity to enhance the image of a destination by enhancing the positive perceptions that tourists have of the destination. The destination image encompasses cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects, signifying a collection of diverse individual perceptions pertaining to various attributes of the destination, which may or may not correspond with the objective reality of the destination (Moon et al., 2013). Behavioural image is associated with selecting a location (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999); cognitive image is associated with tourists' beliefs and knowledge regarding the destination; and emotional image is associated with tourists' emotions and sentiments regarding the destination (Caner & Caber, 2019). The concept of overall festival image pertains to the collective impressions and views held by visitors regarding a specific festival (Dalgıç & Birdir, 2020). These impressions are influenced by both cognitive factors, such as the qualities of the location and the organisation of the festival or event, as well as affective factors, including emotions and social components.

The significance of destination image in the tourism industry lies in its ability to bring together travellers' beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions about a particular place (Crompton, 1979). Distinctive food tourism festivals have the potential to enhance the reputation of a location and serve as an effective instrument for governing bodies to communicate the character and essence of a destination and to strategically promote it within the framework of destination branding (Fox, 2007). The use of food may effectively represent the unique attributes of locations, facilitating the communication of place brands to prospective tourists (Lin, Pearson, & Cai, 2011). According to a study conducted by Karim and Chi (2010), it was seen that a positive image led to an increase in both revisit intentions and referrals. Lastly, a favourable reputation for the area can be promoted through the festival's publicity. Potential visitors' perceptions of the host city and its surrounding area can be influenced by festivals (Yeoman et al., 2004).

Word of Mouth Marketing

The primary objective of successful festivals is to ensure that visitors depart the festivals in a more contented state than when they initially arrived, because of their interactions with the services providers or festivals organisers (Rahman et al., 2022). Market researchers have noticed an increased focus on electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) within the context of food tourism and tourists rely on them to get information (Litvin et al., 2018). It is expected that tourists decide to visit festivals based on the information they acquire from e-WOM (Simpson and Siguaw, 2008). According to Cole and Chancellor (2009), individuals who

repeatedly attend events contribute to reduced promotional expenses and increased revenue generation by spreading positive WOM eWOM. Similarly, Gibson and Stewart (2009) found a significant correlation between various techniques employed in the promotion of festivals and the phenomenon of WOM communication. According to Rahman et al., (2022), there are several factors that contribute to achieving successful festivals that would lead to positive WOM:

- **Identifying the right people:** The recruitment process should focus on identifying individuals who possess a strong enthusiasm for engaging with both individuals and food tourism.
- **Establishing standards:** All employees should possess comprehensive knowledge of the fundamental criteria governing service and experience provision.
- **Facilitating the training of the team:** It is important to avoid making assumptions about all employees understanding the desirable treatment of guests. It is imperative that all team members undergo training in order to familiarise themselves with the responsibilities and guests' expectations.
- **Empowering employees:** It is imperative for businesses to have an empowerment policy that provides clear guidelines to all team members regarding what actions are considered permissible actions and limitations when addressing guest concerns or issues.

Online Promotion for Festivals and Food Tourism

The prevalence and increased use of the Internet has had a transformative impact on various aspects of society, including news acquisition, communication methods, consumer behaviour, and decision-making processes. Consequently, this has necessitated the reevaluation and modification of conventional marketing techniques. Online marketing has emerged as a significant, dynamic, and fast-expanding promotion method for tourism enterprises and destinations on a global scale (Chen & Lin, 2019). According to Mkono and Tribe (2017), digital content marketing is often regarded as a crucial component of digital marketing within the context of food tourism and Pulizzi (2012) notes that the concept of digital content marketing is considered a contemporary digital marketing strategy that focuses on delivering superior content to cater to the specific needs of target audiences, with the goal of enhancing customer awareness and engagement with products or services. According to Mauri and Minazzi (2013), tourists tend to rely on prevailing opinions of products found on the Internet or social media.

Due to increased advancements in mobile technology, a growing number of tourists today prefer to use social media platforms on their phones as a way to gain information about different places, which in turn helps in their decision-making processes (Ashley and Tuten, 2015; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). Consequently, marketers have been compelled to explore online marketing strategies in order to effectively reach their intended target audience (Kilgour et al., 2015). Using digital marketing is vital since people around the world are

relying on it to search for unique and shared experiences. According to Malthouse et al. (2013), the implementation of efficient online marketing strategies can contribute to the reduction in expenses associated with acquiring new customers. Additionally, it can facilitate the development of customer-centric product innovations, as well as provide support and improvement to post-purchase activities and the overall quality of services and products.

Experiential Marketing in Festivals and Food Tourism

Food festivals exhibit characteristics that are experiential, intense, and personal in nature, necessitating a significant level of engagement. There has been a growing trend among individuals in their pursuit of happiness, purpose, sensations, and novel sources of fulfilment (Same & Larimo, 2012). Experiential marketing can be distinguished from traditional marketing by its emphasis on delivering value through sensory, emotional, cognitive, and relational aspects. Unlike traditional marketing, which primarily focuses on promoting functional features and benefits, experiential marketing aims to engage customers by stimulating their senses, evoking emotions, encouraging cognitive processes, prompting actions, and fostering connections (Schmitt, 1999). According to Pine and Gilmore (1999), experiential marketing has the potential to evoke emotions among participants through several means. These include enabling individuals to temporarily detach themselves from their everyday world, offering entertainment experiences, providing educational opportunities, and presenting aesthetically pleasing environments or products.

Festival designers can add experiential components to the festivals to enhance their appeal. The experiential component of a festival should be something extremely significant and unforgettable for the consumer to be fully immersed into the experience (Caru & Cova, 2003). According to Sneath et al. (2005), experiential events have the potential to produce immediate effects as well as foster enduring shifts in individuals' attitudes and beliefs. In their study conducted in 2007, Wood and Masterman established a framework that identifies seven features associated with marketing events. These attributes are believed to enhance the overall event experience, and they are:

- **Involvement:** emotional engagement which refers to the level of emotional attachment individuals have towards a brand, event, or experience.
- **Interaction:** the engagement that occurs between individuals and brand ambassadors, fellow guests, exhibitors, and the brand itself.
- **Immersion:** complete sensory immersion, isolated from all other communications.
- **Intensity:** memorable and effectively impactful.
- **Individuality:** encompasses the notions of distinctiveness, personalised

experiences, and tailored chances, with a different encounter for every individual.

- **Innovation:** the generation of novel ideas or concepts that exhibit creativity in terms of their content, spatial arrangement, temporal occurrence, and target audience.

- **Integrity:** a quality that embodies genuineness and authenticity, hence offering tangible advantages and value to the consumer.

Local Food as a Marketing Tool

Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016) stated that local food “can be used by service providers, destinations, regions or countries for marketing activities, such as for restaurant, hotel and destination branding and regional development in general” (p. 177). Numerous nations dedicate substantial efforts towards utilising local food as a promotional instrument, due to its recognized capacity to embody cultural heritage and national identity. It is important to utilise a country’s traditional cuisine as a promotional strategy for a specific location (du Rand & Heath, 2006). The examination of tourists’ patterns of food intake is crucial in the field of destination marketing. The variation in the typology of tourists results in distinct patterns of food and beverage consumption in a given destination, encompassing differences in the manner and motivation behind their consumption, as well as the specific food and beverage items chosen. In the context of food festivals at destinations, it is common for a significant number of tourists to seek out and consume local food in their chosen destination (Kim & Eves, 2012; Sparks, Bowen, & Klag, 2003). However, there is a group of tourists who demonstrate a tendency to reduce their consumption of local food because they are concerned that consuming new food may negatively impact their health (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Hall et al., 2003). It has been observed that a significant number of tourists recognize local food as a prominent factor influencing their choice of destination, overall travel experience, and likelihood of revisiting the same destination. (Ab Karim and Chi, 2010; Silkes et al., 2013).

The growing desire for authentic cuisines has led to the incorporation of regional food into destination marketing and destination brand differentiation. Numerous destinations currently prioritise the utilisation of local gastronomy as a strategic means to enhance their appeal and foster tourism. To this end, they organise a diverse array of events and festivals that serve as platforms to showcase their distinctive culinary traditions (Jalis, Che, & Markwell, 2014; Viljoen et al., 2017). The significance and use of photographs and descriptions of food in destination marketing activities are highly valued by marketers and destination marketing organisations (DMOs) (Dieck, Fountoulaki, & Jung, 2018; Jalis et al., 2014).

Additionally, destination marketing can influence the decision-making of travellers by providing pertinent, timely, and comprehensive information regarding the presentation of cuisine through the use of written and visual materials (Lin et al., 2011). From a marketing standpoint, the festival atmosphere plays a strategic role in enhancing consumer pleasure and eliciting their reactions, as it serves as the setting in which benefits are generated and consumed (Lee et al., 2008).

Festivals in Saudi Arabia

The primary objective of Vision 2030 is to reduce the country's reliance on oil by fostering alternative avenues for economic expansion, with particular emphasis on the tourism sector. The emergence of several festivals in Saudi Arabia represents a significant indicator of this transformative shift. Festivals in Saudi Arabia are currently going through big changes and reaching important goals. People from all over the world who are looking for unique and exceptional forms of festivals can now find them in plenty in the Kingdom, which has become an increasingly popular tourist destination.

The Kingdom is now positioned to become a highly significant hub for festivals and events on a global scale, which will contribute to the accomplishment of the ambitious goal for the nation. A total of 553 entertainment festivals were held in the Kingdom during 2022. In terms of the cultural events and festivals, the country hosted 2,897 cultural events and festivals with 5.5 million visitors in 2022 (annual report of the Ministry of Culture, 2022).

Riyadh functions as the primary political hub of the Kingdom, while also serving as a significant emblem of the nation's vibrant cultural progress. The city of Riyadh has undergone a substantial makeover as part of the Vision 2030 plan, resulting in its successful reinvention as a hub for cultural, entertainment, and socioeconomic progress. Central to this period of change is the Riyadh Season Festival, an occasion that effectively embodies the fundamental nature and aspirations of contemporary Saudi Arabia. The Riyadh Season Festival serves as a forum for individuals from around the world to familiarise themselves with the rich legacy, culture, and accomplishments of Saudi Arabia. International tourists are afforded not just captivating performances and exhibitions, but also the chance to firsthand encounter the hospitality of Saudi Arabia. Festivals are without a question a very effective way to promote Saudi Arabia as a tourist destination.



Festivals: A Way to Discover the Diversity of Local Culture



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Introduction

Festivals, fairs, and carnivals have historically served as significant avenues for social and cultural engagement, facilitating the expression and transmission of shared cultures and values that are fundamental to the perspective of communities that are comparatively localised (Bennett, Taylor, & Woodward, 2014). According to Gursoy, Kim, and Uysal (2004), festivals provide the potential to enhance social and cultural identity, while also fostering the advancement of social cohesion within a certain community. Many destinations use festivals as a strategy to commemorate their unique local culture, with the objective of attracting a larger influx of tourists and providing an immersive experience that allows visitors to gain a deeper understanding of the culture. Festivals are organised within a certain geographic region where locally sourced food or goods are purchased or manufactured. Festivals typically occur once a year for a limited time period. This chapter explores the connections between festivals, cultural history, and identity, ending with an overview of prominent festivals across Saudi Arabia that spotlighted the country's cultural practices and traditions.

Festivals and Local Culture

Festivals have the potential to facilitate the acquisition of cultural knowledge and foster cultural immersion among local people. Finkel and Platt (2020) stated that “festivals have often been bridges between people and places, linking personal geography with collective experiences. The symbolic and affective dimensions of festivals can provoke the re/ negotiation of individual and group identity and place-based heritage through representational displays of meaning” (p. 1).

During festive occasions, attendees get the opportunity to engage with the local communities' food production, sample various dishes, learn about recipes and their preparation methods, see the presentation and rituals associated with the culinary traditions, and gain insights into the many culinary cultures and customs. Festivals serve as a means to enhance the recognition of local culture, culinary traditions, and the distinctive characteristics of the places in which they are held. According to De Bres and Davis (2001), one notable characteristic of various festivals is the observance of two fundamental principles: firstly, the festival ought to serve as a manifestation of the values that are distinct to the particular community in which it takes place; and secondly, the festival should be planned and executed with the explicit purpose of promoting and preserving the local history or culture. Festivals are cultural and social phenomena that serve as a window into the local community's local culture. There are multiple themes of festivals such as culture, food and beverage, music, and sport (Maeng, Jang, & Li, 2016).

De Bres and Davis (2001) noted that festivals can promote place identities in rural areas which helps foster a positive perception of the local community. The inclusion of culture in the tourist “product” is a significant factor that may enhance the appeal and competitiveness of a tourist location (Hennessey et al., 2014). Visitors increasingly seek to explore locations where they can engage in unique experiences such as gastronomy, in addition to enjoying historical, natural, and cultural sites (Dimitrovski, 2016).

Food Festivals and Local Culture

Lewis (1997) mentioned that “food festival has always been a central source of cohesion and cultural meaning for human communities” (p.186). According to Cudny, Korec, and Rouba (2012), festivals serve as a medium through which local citizens may exhibit their cultural heritage, enhance the visibility of the towns hosting these events, and draw in visitors, hence leading to an enhanced standard of living. Food festivals are one of the most popular types of festivals

worldwide, and are public gatherings that are organised with the purpose of commemorating and highlighting certain cuisine items (Fontefrancesco, 2020). Food serves as a medium through which individuals may gain insight into other cultures, enabling them to engage with the «other» not just on an intellectual level but also on a physical and material one (Long, 1998).

The act of consuming locally sourced foods provides individuals with an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding and acquire information pertaining to a certain culture. Food festivals have been identified as a valuable mechanism for the promotion of local goods, allowing them to be distinguished from their counterparts (Cela et al., 2013; Sharples, 2008). Food festivals encompass culinary attributes and the food culture specific to the location in which it is hosted and play a significant role in supporting local communities via the promotion of local culinary culture and the enhancement of domestic agriculture (Mason & Paggiaro, 2012; Seraphin, Gowreesunkar, Zaman, & Bourliatauz-Lajoinie, 2019).

Gastronomy Festivals and Local Culture

Gastronomy festivals serve as a significant incentive for participants to acquire a memorable experience, as they provide opportunities to engage with other cultures and explore novel culinary flavours (Organ et al., 2015). According to Hollons et al. (2014), gastronomy festivals serve several significant purposes. Firstly, they provide an opportunity for both locals and tourists to engage in immersive food experiences and interact with food producers. Secondly, these festivals have the potential to attract a larger number of visitors to the destination. Thirdly, they play a role in educating visitors about the cultural production and local cuisine of the region. Lastly, gastronomy festivals enable residents to promote and showcase their unique place identities. Lee and Arcodia (2011) asserted that gastronomy festivals primarily centre on the exploration and celebration of food, drinks, and cuisine. Food festivals provide the opportunity to partake in delightful, regional gastronomy while concurrently immersing oneself in the local cultural milieu (Zhang, 2009; Mohi and Wong, 2013).

Cultural Heritage Festival and Local Culture

Cultural heritage encompasses the tangible and intangible assets that have been preserved from past generations, which reflect and carry the identity of many social groups within countries, urban or rural areas, and other sites. There is an increased demand for heritage tourism which depends on the utilisation of historic resources. Festivals are often influenced by several local characteristics, including but not limited to cultural and historical aspects, socioeconomic and environmental conditions, culinary offerings, and dietary preferences. These distinctive elements play a significant role in attracting visitors to certain places. The European Travel Commission (2005) reported that:

“Cultural festivals and events are seen as an important part of the marketing of cultural tourism. They offer the tourist additional reasons to visit a place (and) they form an additional reason for cultural tourists to visit a place. They can cause a place to rise on the shortlist of places the tourist has in his or her mindset of attractive destinations. Festivals and events are both effective instruments in attracting first time visitors as well as repeat visitors due to the differential advantage they can offer” (p. 44).

Shankar, Elliott, and Goulding (2001) suggested that cultural spaces play a pivotal role in helping people learn more about their identity, history, and culture. This is achieved through the exchange of narratives and the act of storytelling. Visitors are motivated to attend culture heritage festivals for different reasons such as authenticity (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010), their positive perception of the activities and experiences in the festival (Tanford & Jung, 2017), and festivals services marketing (Chen & Chen, 2010). There are multiple dimensions of heritage festivals, and they are:

- **Playfulness** - According to Lee et al. (2019), playfulness may be characterised as the act of engaging in festive activities with a sense of enjoyment, spontaneity, and without any utilitarian purpose. Engaging in enjoyable and cost-free activities serves as a source of inspiration for those visiting a certain place.
- **The escape** - According to Lee et al. (2019), the term “being out of one’s daily life and responsibility” is used to describe “escape” (p.202). According to Morgan (2008), successful festivals provide attendees with opportunities for engagement in activities that deviate from their routine everyday experiences, facilitating the creation of a distinct and exceptional encounter.
- **Togetherness** - which is defined as a “feeling of belonging to a community” (Lee et al., 2019, p.202). The successful heritage festival is the one that represents the heritage and culture of the community.
- **Placeness** - According to Lee et al. (2019), the term “festival sense of place” refers to the local identity associated with a certain festival location. Placeness encompasses the concept of place attachment, which refers to the enduring emotional bonds formed between visitors and certain locations.

Music Festivals and Local Culture

Music festivals have witnessed a global expansion and notable growth over the last two decades. This phenomenon can be ascribed to a multitude of factors, including the celebration of indigenous and regional cultures, the expanding array of musical genres, and the deliberate deployment of festivals by governmental entities, business partnerships, and non-profit organisations to enhance tourism and stimulate regional development (Gibson & Connell, 2016). Music festivals, akin to other types of festivals, have the potential to foster social cohesiveness and cultivate a sense of belonging within communities. They serve to strengthen social and cultural identity, fostering social cohesiveness through the reinforcement of interpersonal connections within a certain group. When people gather at music festivals because they are all fans of the same band or genre, they experience a unique form of cultural communion.

Music festivals have played a significant role in the promotion of tourism and the facilitation of many participants' sensory experiences, including feelings, thoughts, and sensations (Ballantyne et al., 2014). The activities (such as the program and music quality), authenticity (such as cultural exploration), concessions (such as food and souvenirs), environment (such as amenities and comfort), enjoyment (such as emotional value), and socialisation (such as friendliness and services) are all factors of music festivals that can help visitors understand the culture of the destination (Tanford and Jung, 2017).

Local Agricultural Food Festivals and Local Culture

While food is an essential component of various festivals, agricultural festivals specifically prioritise showcasing agricultural products. These events provide local farming communities with the opportunity to raise awareness and promote their agricultural goods, potentially resulting in future sales (Yuan & Jang, 2008). Agricultural food festivals allow visitors the chance to not only purchase local agricultural products but also get knowledge about the local culture and engage in various leisure activities that provide entertainment. Festival themes in certain rural agricultural communities often revolve around locally produced agricultural products. This is primarily because of the distinctive synergies that exist between agricultural products, local culture, and the development of tourism (Irshad, 2011). Sofield, Mei, and Li (1998) stated that agricultural food festivals have far-reaching effects by preserving the intrinsic and extrinsic traditional and cultural value of the local community's agricultural products.

Cultural Festivals and Local Culture

According to Huang (2017) and Kong (2012), the purpose of cultural festivals is to operate as a way of fostering contact between traditional and modern cultures (Li, 2015; Choi, Imon, & Couto 2020). It is possible for tourists to revitalise and develop a greater understanding of the cultural legacy of a tourist location by participating in the celebration of festivals. According to Suntikul (2018), cultural festivals have developed beyond their original role as sources of enjoyment and now operate as significant mechanisms for encouraging the progress of both national and cultural traditions.

Although festivals can help visitors learn about the local community's culture, it is important to ensure that these festivals are sustainable and do not harm the local culture. Festivals provide an alternate kind of urban leisure for residents, while also offering a cultural experience for tourists with a specific interest in cultural activities. Concerns regarding the sustainability of cultural events have emerged as a major priority for event organisers and stakeholders (Negruşa et al., 2016), as sustainability has been deemed an essential precondition for protecting our shared future (Pronk, 2015). According to Kong (2012), cultural sustainability can be described as the continuous capacity of cultural workers to actively participate in their profession, while also ensuring the preservation of favourable conditions that support their work.

Assessing a cultural festival's impact includes the evaluation of its economic, social, and environmental effects on the local community. The economic ramifications of a festival can be evaluated by considering the direct spending and opportunity cost involved (Andersson and Lundberg, 2013). The assessment of the environmental impact can be conducted through carbon calculations and measuring the ecological footprint (Andersson and Lundberg, 2013; Collins et al., 2009). The social repercussions of community festivals experienced by locals are seen to have six, distinct dimensions: inconvenience, community identity and cohesion, personal frustration, entertainment and socialisation possibilities, communal growth and development, and behavioural consequences (Small, 2007). The social ramifications on a host community encompass various aspects that influence the overall quality of life, resulting in alterations to lifestyle, values, social relationships, and identity (Glasson, Godfrey, & Goodey, 1995; Hall, 2003).

The Impact of Festivals on Local Culture

The adoption of festivals has the potential to contribute significantly to the revitalisation and preservation of local culture. Festivals can serve as a means to enhance local interest and foster participation in cultural experiences and activities. Potential social advantages can arise from festivals, as it provides individuals with a purpose for celebration, serves as a means of acknowledging the passage of time, and facilitates the development of social networks and social capital within communities (Arcodia & Whitford, 2007; Wilks, 2011). According to Duffy and Waitt (2011), it is anticipated that organising festivals will strengthen and augment sentiments of social connection. The community festival framework employs community-oriented festivals as a means to garner attention towards local communities placed inside a specific geographic location (De Bres and Davis, 2001; Duffy, 2000; Jaeger and Mykletun, 2013; Van Winkle, Woosnam, and Mohammed, 2013).

According to Organ, Koenig-Lewis, Palmer, and Probert (2015), festivals and events offer many avenues for fostering social contacts and relationships. As a result, they are expected to have a distinct impact on enhancing the well-being and quality of life of residents. In addition to engendering favourable economic outcomes for local communities, festivals possess the capacity to yield advantageous socio-cultural advantages for host communities (O'Sullivan & Jackson, 2002). The advantages encompass the facilitation of group and family togetherness (Yolal et al., 2012), the promotion of community cohesion (Yolal et al., 2009), the facilitation of socialisation (Saayman, Kruger, & Erasmus, 2012), and the provision of entertainment (Baez & Devesa, 2014). The engagement of individuals residing in a particular area in community festivals is motivated by a range of hedonic and functional factors (Gursoy, Spangenberg, & Rutherford, 2006). These factors encompass amusement, curiosity, knowledge acquisition, aesthetic enjoyment, social interaction, personal development, self-expression, and the desire for social approval (Derrett, 2003).

Festivals have been demonstrated to foster a sense of community by bringing together individuals to commemorate local cultures (Duffy, 2000). Additionally, festivals have the capacity to engage individuals from diverse geographical backgrounds, whose shared interests, hobbies, or fervent support for a particular cause serve as a catalyst for community formation (Mackellar, 2009; Begg, 2011). Festivals have been found to have a beneficial influence on the overall well-being of a community, since they offer individuals a chance to break away from their regular routines and engage in social interactions with their loved ones and other members of the community (Earls, 1993). Lastly, festivals also serve as a means of providing entertainment for a substantial audience.

Role of Festivals in Highlighting Saudi Culture

There are many festivals that take place in Saudi Arabia and which play a role in highlighting the country's culture. Below are some examples that have been instrumental in spotlighting the Kingdom's rich culinary and agricultural heritage.

a) Seasonal Agricultural Products Festival in Taif

Every year, the central area of Taif—located in the Mecca Province of southwest Saudi Arabia—hosts the Seasonal Agricultural Products Festival. The festival highlights a diverse selection of seasonal agricultural products such as apricots, apples, honey, and ghee. Additionally, it features a range of celebratory events that span five consecutive days. The event encompasses a variety of activities, including camel rides and informative presentations on ancient farming methods. The festival and its associated events provide visitors with an excellent opportunity to get knowledge about the agricultural practices in Taif.

b) AIUla Dates Festival

AIUla is leveraging a historical legacy spanning two millennia in the cultivation of date palms. The AIUla Dates Festival serves as a platform for the convergence of date producers, buyers, and investors within the historical context and palm groves of AIUla. The date farms in AIUla are an integral component of a broader agricultural sector that has evolved over thousands of years in the vicinity of the region's historical oasis. This industry encompasses not only date cultivation but also the production of citrus goods and moringa trees.

Over the course of three consecutive weekends, the festival hosts a farmers' market in the early morning hours. This market provides a platform for commercial purchasers to participate in auctions and acquire over 200 tons of various date types that are cultivated by AIUla's local date farmers. Subsequently, the community souq gives attendees the opportunity to purchase indigenous handicrafts or indulge in date-infused cuisine and delicacies prepared by local families and chefs.

c) Rejal Al-Teeb Festival

The festival takes place in Rijal Almaa village. Rijal Almaa, situated in the Asir area in southwest Saudi Arabia, is positioned around 45 km west of Abha and 170 km north of Jazan city. The cultural festival aims to provide insight into the rich cultural heritage of the area, including the habits and traditions of its residents. This is done under the overarching theme of "Nine Centuries of Glory." The festival showcases the prominent symbols, narratives, and artistic expressions of the populace, including the distinctive architectural features of Rijal Almaa village. The festival commemorates the time-honoured practice of adorning oneself with exquisite flower garlands, including a series of activities that highlight the significance of this integral aspect of rural culture.

d) Saudi Feast Food Festival

Saudi cuisine is renowned for its delectable and distinctive dishes, characterised by intricate preparation methods, exquisite flavours, and captivating presentation. The Saudi Feast Food Festival has a significant position among culinary events in the Kingdom and the Arab world due to its innovative concept, diverse sections, extensive coverage, and cultural significance that is linked to the country's national identity. The festival offers a unique opportunity for guests to partake in an immersive encounter aimed at preserving and perpetuating the culinary heritage of Saudi Arabia. This is achieved via the provision of a diverse array of foods originating from different parts of the Kingdom and prepared by both local chefs.

e) Kingdom's Melody Festival

The goal of the three-day festival is to shed light on the Kingdom's rich musical culture, showcasing its historical and cultural ties to the area. The festival provides an educational and emotionally engaging experience that guides attendees through the rich history of Saudi music. Upon entering the venue, attendees are greeted by the sight of entrance walls adorned with photographs depicting renowned composers and singers. This visual display serves to create a vibrant tapestry that effectively showcases the interconnected relationship between these influential figures in the realm of music.

Conclusion

Finally, this chapter contended that festivals are significant in fostering and discovering local cultures. Festivals that concentrate on local culture, food, gastronomy, cultural heritage, local music, agriculture, and others all play a significant role in attracting more visitors and at the same time help them to discover the local culture. Also, these festivals would tell a part of the local communities' culture story. Saudi Arabia during the past five years organised and hosted hundreds of festivals that help local people and tourists to discover the local culture of communities within the kingdom.

07 Culinary Tourism: Experiences and Memory



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Introduction

Travellers and visitors frequent tourist destinations in search of personal fulfilment, lasting impressions, and enduring encounters which transform into memories that endure and impact their future travel decision-making. Thus, providing tourists with unique tourism experiences has become necessary to uphold a sustainable competitive edge.

Tourism destinations offer holistic encounters and unique products that help consumers form distinct memories. One element of tourism that is linked to the notion of memory is the consumption of food. Food is a fundamental component of destination products, offering tourists and visitors an opportunity to experience the culinary delights of a particular region (Ellis et al., 2018; Jeaheng & Han, 2020; Lee, 2023; Mohamed et al., 2021). Along with the active involvement of tourists and visitors in the culinary scene, the tongue retains the sensory perceptions of consumed substances, the nose recalls the various odours and fragrances, and the heart and mind store the encountered experiences within memory. This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of tourists' experiences and memories. It also provides the reader with insights into the role of culinary tourism in the creation of experiential and memorable experiences for travellers.

Tourism Experience and Memory

Tourism encompasses many interactions and settings that contribute to cultivating meaningful and satisfying experiences for individuals engaging in travel activities. Tourism can be conceptualised as an intangible service that relies on diverse service provisions to offer immersive experiences that can create enduring memories. Therefore, destination management organisations, researchers, and businesses focus on understanding experiences and memories that tourists can obtain before, during, and after their visit. The term “experience” is a comprehensive concept that characterises individuals’ emotions and experiences in the course of their daily existence (Caru & Cova, 2006). In addition, the notion of memorable tourism experiences reflects “tourism experiences that are remembered and recalled in a positive manner after the occurrence” (Kim et al., 2012, p. 13).

According to Oh et al. (2007), tourism experiences can be characterised as pleasurable, enduring, and immersive encounters. Memories can be conceptualised as cognitive processes that serve as filtering mechanisms, connecting the individual’s experience with the emotional and perceptual results associated with a tourism encounter (Oh et al., 2007). Experience and memories are linked to one another—what remains of the activity or event that the visitor experiences is a memory that they hold on to. Tourism encounters elicit physical and psychological sensations in travellers that can influence their behavioural intentions (Chen et al., 2022). Within the realm of tourism, the role of memory assumes great significance in comprehending how individuals recollect tourism events that hold personal significance (Kim et al., 2021). Tourism experience and memories have garnered significant interest due to their evident influence on future tourism decision-making and the generation of word-of-mouth regarding a destination (Andrades & Dimanche, 2014; Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2017). When examining the influence of memories on the selection of destinations from a marketing and management standpoint, the recollected encounter is perceived as a comprehensive assessment in hindsight. According to Quinlan Cutler (2015), upon reaching a certain site, the traveller harbours preconceived notions regarding the potential range of experiences that may transpire.

The formation of these notions is shaped by an individual’s social makeup, including their ideas and perspectives that are derived from the media, prior knowledge, expectations, and past travel experiences. This perception positions tourist memories as pivotal in establishing the foundation for fresh preferences and expectations, thereby influencing decision-making processes and fostering a sense of loyalty toward the chosen destination (Agapito, Pinto, & Mendes, 2017). Tourism entails the creation of distinctive and unparalleled experiences; thus, optimising the impact on a traveller’s life has become the desired outcome

for destinations and attractions (Jorgenson et al., 2018). Hence, prior research suggests that tourism enterprises should prioritise this aspect by actively enabling the creation of noteworthy experiences for travellers (Kim, Ritchie, McCormick, 2010). The accepted importance of tourist memories and their use has provided valuable insights to marketers in developing tourism products (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017).

The role of memory holds importance in tourism consumption for both tourists and producers of tourism services. Negative events tend to diminish in memory over time, whereas positive occurrences are more likely to be remembered with greater accuracy (Quinlan, 2015). Therefore, destinations seek to offer tourists excellent services and to leave a positive impact on their experience that can remain in their minds. Tourism experiences are characterised by the presence of factors that influence the regulation of mood states and the motivation to engage in future travel (Kim, Ribeiro, & Li, 2022). Yin et al. (2017) argue that a comprehensive understanding of the function of tourism memory is crucial to enhancing its effectiveness in forecasting individuals' effective moods and behavioural intentions, while Kim et al. (2021) developed a scale for tourism memory composed of seven dimensions – accessibility, trip details, vividness, sensory details, valence, emotional intensity, and sharing. The authors found that the aforementioned characteristics provide support for the dimensional structure, validity, and reliability of the scale. Additionally, it was found that the recollection of tourism experiences has an impact on individuals' intention to revisit and their likelihood to engage in word-of-mouth communication.

There are many tourist patterns and activities that have become significant in impacting visitors' experiences, and food and culinary tourism is one such example. The prevailing evidence indicates that food experiences encountered while travelling tend to leave a longer-lasting impression compared to those encountered inside one's own environment (Stone, Migacz, & Sthapit, 2022). The following section reviews culinary tourism and its role in memory and experience of tourists.

Culinary Tourism: Experience and Memory

Culinary tourism has significantly increased in popularity over the last several decades, attracting a wide range of individuals, including food experts like chefs and food enthusiasts. According to the Market Data Forecast Report (2023), the global market size for culinary tourism was US\$ 1.31 billion in 2022. The report forecasts that the market size will grow and reach US\$ 3.46 billion in 2028. Culinary tourism is growing due to the increase in the number of travellers and tourists who would travel to explore destinations' cuisines during their visits. Food, surpassing all other forms of human expression, serves as a profound embodiment of culture, evokes lasting memories, and serves as a catalyst for storytelling (Henderson, 2006).

Consequently, destinations renowned for their exceptional culinary offerings have initiated curated excursions that guide individuals to the most exceptional places for food and beverages. Culinary tourism has been defined in previous studies as engaging in food-related activities to explore and understand the “other” culture, hence eases the acquisition of cultural information and fosters the transmission of knowledge about the destination and its inhabitants (Horng & Tsai, 2010). Smith and Xiao (2008) indicate that culinary tourism refers to a form of tourism wherein individuals engage in experiences that involve the acquisition of knowledge, appreciation, or consumption of locally branded culinary resources. Previous studies added that culinary tourism pertains to the emphasis on gastronomy as a compelling factor for exploration and a primary, attractive destination for tourists (Long, 2013). Gastronomy and food generally serve as a uniting force that connects individuals across different geographical locations and historical periods, offering valuable insights into the complex interactions between transnational, intercultural, and intracultural identities (Henderso, 2006). For some travellers, the act of experiencing and indulging in local cuisine and beverages serves as a primary motivation for exploring unfamiliar areas. Numerous academic investigations have indicated that a significant proportion of tourists exhibit a preference for cultural encounters such as visits to cultural landmarks. Cultural tourism includes more than just visits to museums, historic buildings, or art galleries—it encompasses a range of experiences, including but not limited to food, gastronomy, and culinary encounters (Yun, Hennessey, & MacDonald, 2011). Long (2013) indicated that the current landscape of culinary tourism encompasses a diverse range of formats and offerings, such as culinary trails, instructional cooking sessions, dining establishments, agricultural retreats, published cookbooks, informative food guides, as well as novel or modified recipes, culinary creations, and even ingredients.

Gastronomy—an integral component of culinary tourism—today represents a burgeoning segment within the broader tourist industry. The attraction towards local and traditional cuisines has emerged as a prevalent and significant factor driving tourists to certain destinations (Hall & Gössling, 2013). Additionally, there are tourist destinations which have become famous for culinary tourism. For instance, Shahrin and Christina (2010) analysed the cuisine of France, Italy, and Thailand, nations renowned for their gastronomic traditions, and found that Italy had a generally positive perception of its cuisine and had the greatest potential for future visitation. The study revealed noteworthy, favourable correlations between food imagery and inclinations to visit. Tourism is a significant avenue for food producers, as it amplifies the worth of their products by creating a tourist encounter. Likewise, culinary experiences enrich tourism by allowing tourists to partake in local cuisine and immerse themselves in the associated culture (Hjalager & Richards, 2002).

Quan and Wang (2004) provide a comprehensive overview of the significance of gastronomy tourism in the promotion, development, and marketing of destinations. They highlight its ability to generate alternative opportunities and enhance the value of food producers located in rural areas. Additionally, the authors emphasise the conversion of diverse and abundant regional foods, as well as the culinary culture, into festivals or food-related activities that serve as attractions for tourists. This approach contributes to the diversification of tourism activities by presenting food as a separate and distinct product. Moreover, the authors argue that gastronomy tourism plays a crucial role in the development of local identities and cultures, while also facilitating the participation of various stakeholders. The preferences for food among tourists may differ while visiting a particular area; yet, the experience of sampling genuine local cuisine is typically regarded as one of the most highly sought-after activities by travellers (Okumus & Cetin, 2018).

Culinary tourism allows tourists to engage in food-related activities that immerse them in the local culture of the destination they are visiting. Previous studies highlighted that the inclusion of local food encounters enhances the overall recollection of tourists' experiences and their overall vacation experience (Quan & Wang, 2004; Henderson, 2009; Sthapit, 2017; Kodas, & Aksoy, 2022). Therefore, culinary tourism as part of tourist trips, would contribute to building the tourist experience and creating memories about the taste and flavour of the destination's gastronomy.

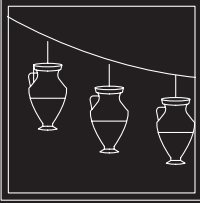
Culinary tourism resources and products may vary based on what the destination offers to tourists in regard to food experience. Smith and Xiao (2008) identified three culinary tourism products, which are farmers' markets, events and festivals, and restaurants. Visitors to tourist destinations frequent farmers' markets to obtain locally fresh-grown products; events and festivals give them a chance to participate in engaging activities; and restaurants offer tourists different cuisines to try. A previous study identified elements that related to food experience at tourist destinations. Stone et al. (2018) identified the key components that contribute to the creation of memorable food, drink, or culinary experiences during travel: the specific food or drink eaten, the location or environment in which the experience takes place, the companions accompanying the traveller, the purpose for the food travel experience, and the presence of touristic features such as novelty and authenticity. The diverse spectrum of notable experiences included a variety of culinary delights, ranging from sophisticated to simple, as well as purposeful encounters and unexpected discoveries. Additionally, it was recommended that tourism operators have the ability to use these components in order to enhance the development of their destination's culinary narrative. More generally, culinary tourism includes events such as consumer shows, food festivals, kitchen shows, festivals, and product launches (Smith & Xiao, 2008) that immerse visitors in a unique cultural and gastronomical practice or activity. Stone et al. (2019) highlighted culinary festivals and tours as memorable experiences because they were designed to create an experience for tourists.

Food memory serves as a crucial component that establishes a connection between historical experiences and contemporary realities by means of commemorating customs and environments associated with personally significant culinary items (Thomé-Ortiz & Moctezuma-Pérez, 2015). Furthermore, food memories often pertain to specific occurrences and may be classified as events—such as when travelling—when seemingly mundane actions like dining might be seen as remarkable due to the food or environment involved (Stone et al., 2019). Turning the experience into a memory for culinary tourism would require aspects that can impact tourists' experiences. Stone et al. (2019) identified three categories of the culinary experience that may lead to memory formation: experience, occasions, and individual traits. Furthermore, they found a possible connection between food/drink experiences and tourist behaviour. For example, travellers exhibit significant interest in attending events and gastronomy festivals that are frequently organised, such as Pizzafest in Naples, Italy, and the Dumpling Festival in Hong Kong (traveltriangle, n.d.).

Finally, the concept of a memorable tourism experience includes the significant moments that visitors encounter throughout their visit to a particular place, and these moments are characterised by the activities they engage in, their emotional responses, and their cognitive reflections (Kim et al., 2012). Culinary tourism experiences can be designed to showcase tourist locations' unique attributes while emphasising the main elements of local culture and the natural environment. In addition, tourism serves as a platform for facilitating cultural exchange, the transmission of culinary traditions, and the interplay of food memory, fostering strong connections between consumers and producers and facilitating familial engagement and community cohesion (Thomé-Ortiz & Moctezuma-Pérez, 2015). Therefore, emerging tourist destinations should embrace culinary tourism as a factor that impacts tourists' experiences and memories. Culinary tourism could be improved in a given destination by developing food activities that attract tourists, such as food festivals, food-related events, and culinary tours. Lastly, discovering the culture and traditions of locals through food has become part of the tourist experience and memory, which would require tourism destination organisations to take initiatives, such as the involvement of all stakeholders to operate and promote culinary activities and preserve the authenticity of food as part of the destination attributes.



Food Tourism Trends



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Introduction

Food tourism, also known as culinary tourism, has emerged as an influential sector in the travel industry (Henderson, 2009). An increasing number of travellers exhibit a growing interest in engaging with local gastronomy throughout their stay in a foreign country. The distinctiveness of regional flavours and the evolution of culinary traditions contribute to the identification of culinary tourism specialties. These regional aromas serve as a unique and defining characteristic of the destination. Food has become a significant part of the travellers' experience, serving as a gateway to the local region and culture. Combining elements from different cuisines is becoming increasingly common to create new tastes, and it has become a trend-setting practice in the culinary world. This chapter looks at past, current, and future trends in food tourism across the Middle East, focusing on the distinction and convergences between conceptualisations of food and tourism.

History of Food and Tourism

The historical connection between tourism and cuisine dates back to ancient times, during which the establishment of trade routes facilitated the exchange of spices, ingredients, and culinary practices across different cultures (Hall et al, 2014). In the Middle Ages, pilgrims embarked on journeys not only for spiritual reasons but also to explore the diverse foods of different regions. The use of transportation in the late 19th and 20th centuries began with the rise of leisure travellers, and varied foods, regions, and culinary cultures became the focal point in visitors' experiences. For example, the European Grand Tour for the elite became famous for exploring different cultures, and people from Europe started sharing and spreading their local cuisines in various countries (Shenoy, 2005). The historical roots of food and tourism connect with each other across the centuries, and the overall landscape they create helps us understand the trends that travellers of the past initiated, the cultural exchanges that occurred (from East to West and vice versa), as well as the culinary practices they shared which set the foundation for the future of the food and tourism industry globally. This section signposts main historical trends in food and tourism across the Middle East.

Culinary and Tourism Trends in the Middle East

The Middle East has significantly influenced the historical correlation between food and travel due to its diverse array of civilisations and culinary traditions. For centuries, the region functioned as a significant economic centre, facilitating trade between Asia, Africa, and Europe (Shenoy, 2005). The convergence of diverse cultures has established the foundation for a dynamic and diverse culinary landscape. The Middle East experienced an enrichment of its culinary practices as a result of the introduction of spices, herbs, and cooking skills facilitated by merchants and tourists via the Silk Road. During the historical period known as the mediaeval Islamic Golden Age, the Middle East emerged as a prominent hub for the interchange of cultural and intellectual ideas (Stanley & Stanley, 2014). Feasts and banquets became customary modes of hospitality within the Middle Eastern context, serving as platforms to exhibit the region's sophisticated culinary customs.

In contemporary times, the Middle East has garnered significant attention as a renowned tourist destination, primarily attributed to its multifaceted and delectable culinary offerings. Lebanon, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates exemplify nations that have wholeheartedly embraced their culinary heritage, adeptly combining ancient flavours with contemporary culinary techniques (Hall & Gössling, 2016). Interest in Middle Eastern food has surged in recent years, primarily due to the widespread availability of online travel guides and visually enticing photographs showcasing delectable culinary offerings. Today, the Middle East serves as a notable illustration of the potential for fruitful collaboration when the realms of history, culture, and gastronomy are together examined.

Traditional Flavors and Modern Twists

Middle Eastern cuisine is currently undergoing dynamic transformations, characterised by the fusion of traditional tastes with contemporary culinary techniques and presentation approaches. Today's culinary landscape caters for individuals with a penchant for culinary authenticity as well as those seeking innovative gastronomic encounters (Park et al, 2019). This is largely thanks to the chefs introducing unconventional textures to conventional dishes and updating traditional flavours through their gastronomical exploration.

Evolutionary Trend in Food

Food trends are marked by distinct eras, each unique in their approach to food and travel but with connections that span across the different time periods.

- **Early Food Tourism Exploration (Ancient Times to 19th Century):** During ancient times, travellers and explorers widened the scope of food tourism, introducing new ingredients to their dishes, creating new recipes, and tasting different regional culinary cultures particularly through journeys across the Silk Road. The European Grand Tour, in which aristocrats partook, was considered a fine example for the inception of food tourism (Richards, 2012).
- **Modernization and Globalization (20th Century to Early 21st Century):** In the 20th century, literature and food tourism merged, and guidebooks like Michelin became a source of information for travellers (Getz et al, 2014). Some famous TV shows and media people, like Anthony Bourdain and Julia Child, started influencing travellers and tourists around the world, which helped further diversify traditional recipes and blend global flavour with local cuisine.
- **Digital Transformation and Social Media Impact (21st Century):** The 21st century transformed information through social media. Influencers and bloggers reshaped food tourism, personalised food experiences became more popular, and different online applications, virtual food tours, and experience sharing changed and set the trend for food tourism.
- **Emphasis on Experiences and Wellness (21st Century):** Environmental awareness, a focus on wellbeing, and increasing concerns related to sustainability became the central areas of discussion in food tourism. New concepts like farm-to-table, “clean” eating, and organic food set the benchmark and trends for tourism. Experiential food services with clean cuisine gained popularity in the 21st century, and people started thinking about their health and wellbeing.

Change in Food Diversification Beyond Traditional Staples

Changes in the types of food available have encouraged travellers to diversify beyond traditional staples. This section highlights various practices that fall under this umbrella.

Global Food Fusion

The current and dynamic phenomenon of multicultural cuisine is significantly transforming food and culinary art. Within the context of food fusion practices, there is a growing trend wherein conventional gastronomic local/international practices are altered by the integration of an array of unique flavours and ingredients (Novelli, 2005). Culinary professionals are presently rediscovering several cultural flavours inside a single culinary creation, exemplified by the use of Peruvian spices in sushi or the incorporation of Korean BBQ elements in tacos. The exploration of global gastronomy not only stimulates the gustatory senses but also exemplifies the progressive advancements occurring within international foods and trends.

Rediscovering Local and Authentic Flavors

Globalisation has significantly changed regional and traditional food practices. This emerging phenomenon justifies the utilisation of locally sourced ingredients and traditional methods to preserve the integrity and genuineness of regional gastronomy (Dixit, 2019). One example is farm-to-table gastronomic tourism, which promotes the use of locally sourced, seasonal components to produce dishes that authentically reflect the distinctive qualities of particular regions. In Italy, for instance, the slow food trend reflects the marriage of locally obtained ingredients with traditional cooking techniques, which help foster a stronger connection between individuals and the origins of their food.

Key Factors Influencing Change in Food Tourism Trends

Costa et al, (2013) identified the following influencing factors in food tourism trends:

Culinary Diversity

Travellers are attracted to places that offer a diverse range of food options due to the presence of varied and multifaceted gastronomic destinations (Croce & Perri, 2017). The unique taste of a region's cuisine is derived from a combination of locally sourced products, time-honoured recipes, and cultural influences. This particular flavour profile serves as an attraction for food enthusiasts seeking authentic and comprehensive culinary experiences. The diverse taste of food and landscape of a destination significantly enhances its appeal to tourists seeking to sample regional cuisines, encompassing both the enjoyment of street food delicacies and the indulgence at upscale dining establishments (Buhalis & Costa, 2006). Singaporean rich tapestry woven from Chinese, US gumbo and jambalaya to beignets, Turkey's kebabs, mezze platters, and baklava, Japan's sushi to tempura, Spain's tapas and paella to Catalan cream desserts have some famous international diversities have travelled around the world.

Social Media and Digital Influences

Contemporary food tourism is significantly impacted by the influence of social media platforms. Instagram, Yelp, and food blogs are digital channels tourists use to explore and engage in discourse about novel food experiences in different destinations across the world (Costa et al, 2013). The combination of user ratings and suggestions, along with the aesthetic appeal of well-presented dishes, has the potential to significantly enhance the reputation and global recognition of a restaurant or food attraction. The process of documenting and sharing dining experiences immediately on social media platforms presents a valuable opportunity for restaurants to effectively engage with potential customers and enhance global awareness of their location.

Sustainability in Food Tourism

Environmental concerns have exerted a strong influence on food tourism. The eco-friendly movement and clean eating behaviours are growing among tourists, who are becoming more inclined towards destinations that actively endorse such activities (Beeton & Morrison, 2018). This also includes a push to support small-scale farmers and producers. Some examples of sustainable food tourism can be seen as the Farm-to-Table Movement in Tuscany, Fish-to-Table in Scandinavia, Zero-Waste Dining in Australia, Permaculture Farm Retreats in Costa Rica, Organic Wine Tours in Napa Valley, Green Dining in Amsterdam, Agrotourism in Greece, and Street Food Sustainability in Bangkok.

Emerging Destinations in Food Tourism

This section discusses a typology of emerging food tourism destinations, building on the work of Shenoy (2005). It addresses the characteristics of emerging food tourism destinations on global and regional scales, as well as in the case of the Middle East more specifically, giving prominent examples from around the world.

Global Gastronomic Hotspots

- a) Culinary Capitals of the World showcases prominent regions or geographical areas recognized for their wide range of food offerings and exceptional quality (Henderson, 2009) – Paris for its sophisticated gastronomic cuisine, Tokyo for its renowned sushi, and Barcelona for its traditional tapas bars.
- b) Exquisite Dining Experiences on a Global Scale become another interest for travellers and draw connoisseurs from various parts of the world (Hall & Gössling, 2016). The Michelin-starred restaurant Osteria Francescana (Modena, Italy) is renowned for its modern Italian cuisine, and Eleven Madison Park (US) is known for its inventive and seasonal tasting menus. The innovative fine dining of elBulli (Catalonia, Spain) was a pioneer in molecular gastronomy, and Narisawa (Tokyo, Japan) was recognized for its innovative approach to sustainability and nature-inspired cuisine. The iconic foods of Le Marais (Paris, France) district is famous for its traditional French bistros, patisseries, and Tsukiji Outer Market (Tokyo, Japan) renowned sushi stalls, fresh seafood, and local specialties, attracting food enthusiasts from around the globe.
- c) International Food Festivals and Events for global gastronomy showcase diverse food traditions, promoting various dishes and becoming a reason for travellers to travel around the world (Stanley & Stanley, 2014). The Taste of London festival, Madrid Fusion, and the World Street Food Congress were some famous festivals that became the reason for travellers to reach these destinations to experience food around the world.

Middle Eastern Culinary Marvels

a) Gastronomic Hotspots in the Middle East are widely recognized for their extraordinary gastronomic offerings, which have a strong appeal to discerning enthusiasts of foods (Croce & Perri, 2017). Every destination offers a distinct gastronomic encounter, encompassing the vibrant street food culture of Beirut for its assortment of mezze and shawarma of Marrakech, where the atmosphere is permeated with the fragrant scents of tagines and spices. Tel Aviv has established itself as a prominent hub for gastronomy due to its unique fusion of modern culinary and customary Middle Eastern outlay. Dubai is widely recognized for its extensive range of regional and international culinary offerings, owing to its prominent position as a cultural intersection. These gastronomic hosts not only exhibit the wide range and intricate nature of Middle Eastern cuisine but also serve as dynamic centres where culinary traditions continuously develop and interact.

b) Middle Eastern Food Festivals hold considerable importance in the promotion of the region's abundant gastronomic diversity (Beeton & Morrison, 2018). The unique Middle Eastern flavour brought festivals together and different chefs, gastronomes, and communities convened during these festivals. Such events as the Taste of Dubai and the Jerusalem Food Festival become famous for stalls abundant with fragrant spices, freshly baked artisanal bread, and savoury stews become popular for international travellers in the Middle Eastern region.

c) Dining in the Desert in the Middle East's diverse and expansive geographical destinations have become an attraction for tourists seeking distinctive experiences (Ellis et al, 2018). The experiences encompass a diverse array of culinary encounters, spanning from dining in serene desert landscapes, admiring urban vistas from towering skyscrapers, and indulging in underwater gastronomy within Dubai. These places constitute a remarkable display of culinary excellence– the Al-Maha Desert Resort in Dubai, for example–offers a remarkable desert dining experience, where individuals may savour Middle Eastern cuisine while being surrounded by the night sky. This unique experience provides an exceptional opportunity for enjoyment and appreciation of the culinary offerings of the region. Similarly, the dining experience at the Atmosphere restaurant in Dubai's Burj Khalifa provides patrons with extraordinary vistas of the urban landscape. These unconventional eating experiences exemplify the Middle East's expertise in seamlessly adding luxurious services, innovative approaches, and authentic local customs to offer tourists indelible and remarkable experiences and memories.

Regional Food Tourism Hubs

This section looks at the characteristics of regional food hubs across the world.

a) Celebrating local flavours, preserving, and promoting them are all significant parts of the food tourism trend (Stanley & Stanley, 2014). One example is from Bologna, Italy, where traditional culinary practices and ingredients are celebrated. From the preparation of Bolognese sauce and handmade pasta, to savouring authentic Parmigiano-Reggiano and prosciutto, Bologna's preservation of its culinary heritage and gastronomic identity became a reason for tourists to visit.

b) Unique culinary traditions in specific regions possess a distinctive culinary culture of an exceptional nature that captivates visitors around the world (Park et al, 2019). The region of the Mediterranean is famous for olive oil, fresh vegetables, and seafood. Greece, for example, is a popular destination among tourists with a keen interest in food due to its delicacies including feta cheese and moussaka.

c) Community-based food tourism initiatives help in exploring the distinctive culinary traditions of a particular region. Portland, Oregon, in the United States exhibits a fine gastronomic culture that emphasises the use of sustainable and locally procured resources. In collaboration with local culinary professionals, farmers, and artisans. "Portland Food Adventures" is an initiative rooted in the community that offers curated culinary excursions and immersive dining experiences. Through active engagement in these programs, travellers have the opportunity to interact with residents, gain insights into the origins of their food, and contribute to the growth and prosperity of small enterprises. Portland has emerged as a highly sought-after destination for gastronomic enthusiasts due to its ability to offer an authentic and locally-oriented experience through a variety of community-driven events.

d) Halal gastronomy in the Middle East has significant importance in Middle Eastern gastronomy and it has become a selling point for visitors all around the world, especially Muslims who wish to abide by Islamic gastronomic rules when they travel. Turkish food markets have become examples of bustling locations that offer a wide selection of delectable and halal dishes.

Challenges and Opportunities

Richards (2012) identified existing challenges in food and tourism trends that can be turned into opportunities.

Overcoming Cultural Barriers

Cultural barriers have significant importance in the context of food tourism, as individuals may face unfamiliar culinary practices and social norms (Getz et al, 2014). The example of a Western guest in Japan who may need knowledge of appropriate norms during a formal Japanese dinner serves as a valuable example. Certain visitors who are foreign to Japan and its culture may not understand the country's social norms— how to use chopsticks and the need to remove their shoes before entering a Japanese home and /or dining room may be unknown rules of conduct that pose challenges to food tourism experiences. Similarly, the Middle Eastern tradition of washing hands before eating and eating with the hands while sitting on the floor could be tough for Western visitors to understand or follow. These challenges could be an opportunity for cultural exchange and advancement because there is a potential for visitors to derive advantages from cultural orientation courses offered by food tourism programs, which are facilitated by local individuals or cultural ambassadors (Shenoy, 2005). The use of effective intercultural communication skills has the potential to enhance the quality of food tourism experiences, fostering a deeper sense of appreciation and respect.

Economic Impacts and Local Development

Visitors improve the economy of the destination country; however, increased tourism also raises a concern for sustainable tourism practices. For example, most islands in Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Cambodia are facing a surge in tourist arrivals, which has unveiled issues such as inadequate waste management practices and heightened strain on indigenous resources. In turn, this has prompted serious questions and concerns regarding the long-term viability of the ecosystem (Henderson, 2009).

A growing emphasis on sustainable tourism throughout the world can benefit the environment and promote sustainable agriculture through collaborative efforts between local governments and communities, thus limiting environmental issues and equitably distributing economic benefits.

Future Trends

The future of food tourism holds several exciting predictions and projections. One notable trend is the rise of immersive culinary experiences driven by advancements in technology. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are anticipated to play a significant role in allowing individuals to virtually explore culinary destinations, try diverse cuisines, and participate in interactive cooking classes from the comfort of their homes. Additionally, the fusion of technology and gastronomy is expected to enhance personalization, with AI-driven food recommendations tailored to individual preferences. As global connectivity increases, the diversity of food choices available to consumers is likely to expand further. The incorporation of sustainability into food tourism is also expected to grow, with an increased focus on eco-friendly dining initiatives, ethical food sourcing, and community involvement.

a) Implications for the Tourism Industry

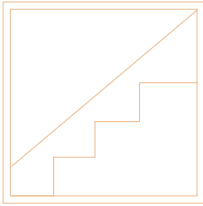
The current state of food tourism will have a tremendous impact on the entire tourism sector. To cater to the changing demands of gastronomy tourists, it is imperative for tourism and destination marketing organisations to effectively use technology. The successful development of innovative platforms for digital food discovery, online reviews, and interactive culinary content necessitates a strong collaboration between the IT and food industries. The influence of sustainability and ethical standards in food tourism will also have implications for the advertising techniques implemented by the firm. As global connectivity increases, the diversity of food choices available to consumers is likely to expand further regarding the preservation of the natural environment, and the facilitation of authentic cultural experiences. Food tourism is expected to transition towards more immersive, technology-driven, and eco-friendly areas in the future, and in order to ensure continuing growth and relevance, tourism stakeholders must embrace these changes.

Conclusion

The gastronomic experiences available in diverse areas are heavily influenced by the convergence of culture, culinary traditions, and economic factors. From the classical beginnings of culinary exploration to the modern mixing of flavours from around the world, the growth of food tourism symbolises a dynamic and ever-changing environment. From Middle Eastern hotspots to international hotspots, the vital role that food plays in establishing a destination, encouraging cross-cultural engagement, and enhancing the local economy have significant importance in food tourism trends. As new culinary destinations emerge, the future of food tourism offers a complex tapestry of experiences that cater to the changing interests of global visitors. This is never never-ending science of food evolution and no one can predict the extent of limitations in gastronomy; the only predictable phenomenon is inevitable, constant change and a continuous increase in the efficiency and effectiveness of food tourism practices globally.

09

Food and Drink Strangest Events and Festivals



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Introduction

Food festivals have caused a notable surge in the number of visitors to the host areas. Moreover, these events have had a direct role in bolstering the local economy by providing a significant boost to various companies that offer services including food and beverage, retail, entertainment, housing, and transport. Culinary festivals and events are public gatherings designed to commemorate and showcase certain cuisine items. The events are accompanied by clear and concise labels that serve to distinguish the specific occasion, the items being marketed, the year in which the festival takes place, and the geographical location where it is held (Fontefrancesco & Zocchi, 2020).

According to Ritchie (1984), landmark events which related to food are characterised as temporary occurrences that are primarily designed to augment the recognition, attractiveness, and economic viability of a tourism destination, both in the immediate and extended time frames. This chapter discusses the strangest food events and festivals that have taken place around the world and their implications within the tourism industry. Food-centric events that incorporate entertainment elements have received less attention and research compared to other types of food and drink events. These events are seldom used as case studies or illustrative examples in scholarly publications (Everett, 2016).

Numerous strange occurrences purportedly trace their origins to an important incident in history, competition, or need, and have since become firmly ingrained within the cultural tapestry of a particular locale and its inhabitants (Cudny, 2016). One such instance is the yearly World Black Pudding Throwing Championships in Ramsbottom, United Kingdom. During this event, participants engage in the act of hurling black puddings towards a stack of Yorkshire puddings positioned atop a plinth towering at a height of 20 feet (Galván, 2014). The primary objective for competitors is to topple the most number of Yorkshire puddings within their capacity. Despite its relatively recent inception in the 1980s, it is widely acknowledged that the longstanding animosity between the regions of Yorkshire and Lancashire finds expression in this competition, with historical roots tracing back to the Wars of the Roses (1455-1485) (Everett, 2016). During this tumultuous, historical period, conventional weaponry was depleted and foodstuffs were reportedly employed as substitutes, further fuelling the battle between the two parties. The subsequent sections in this chapter provide authentic illustrations of unique food events and celebrations associated with competitive and cultural occurrences.

La Tomatina- Spain

The celebration known as La Tomatina is a tomato-throwing food fight in Buñol, Valencia. Despite the city's lack of tomato cultivation, the event—held in August—successfully draws in a substantial number of tourists, reaching tens of thousands in attendance every year. Today, local



*Image 9.1: Attendees at La Tomatina, Spain.
Source: The Telegraph (2016)*

authorities procure tomato crops from the region of Extremadura through imports, given that the agricultural sector of the town mostly revolves around the cultivation of almonds, grapes, and olives, rather than tomatoes.

The initial religious celebration in the period of Franco's dictatorship took place in August 1945. Referred to as La Tomatina, this event involves the collective act of hurling tomatoes and has gained significant popularity as one of Spain's most celebrated events. It is commonly promoted as "The World's Biggest Food Fight" on many online platforms. According to Casarrubios (1993), it is evident that the commencement of the festival was mostly unintentional. It transpired when a group of youthful individuals engaged in the act of hurling tomatoes at the bailiffs, thus resulting in their expulsion from the town under the threat of incarceration.

As a reaction, in 1957, a decision was made to orchestrate the ceremonial interment of the tomato, a notable satirical exhibition, accompanied by communal gatherings and a musical ensemble performing funeral processions. The municipal authorities acquiesced, and in 1959, the celebration of the holiday was granted permission, but with restrictions on the duration allocated for the act of tomato flinging. The aforementioned celebration was then formalised and has been coordinated by the Clavarios of San Luis Beltrán (the patron Saint of the city) since 1975 (Heuvelink, 2005). These organisers took on the responsibility of providing the tomatoes, which had previously been donated by individual participants. In the year 1980, the local government assumed responsibility for the management of the celebration, augmenting the quantity of raw materials to multiple metric tons of tomatoes, and started the promotion of the event. It is worth noting that this festivity does not result in any bodily harm, since the tomatoes employed are very mature and possess a soft consistency (Brisset, 2019).

Chinchilla Watermelon Festival

The primary objective of the Chinchilla Watermelon Festival is to commemorate the significant contribution of Chinchilla, Queensland in the production of about 25% of Australia's melons (Lee & Arcodia, 2011). Additionally, the festival endeavours to



Image 9.2: Visitors at the Chinchilla Watermelon Festival, Australia. **Source:** Queensland Website.

uplift the morale of a community that has been adversely affected by a prolonged period of drought. The event offers a variety of engaging sports, including melon skiing, melon iron man, melon bungee, melon bullseye, pip spitting competition, and melon throwing. The festival was awarded the Queensland Regional Achievement Award for Events and Tourism in 2009. It is a biennial event that spans four days in the town of Chinchilla, Queensland, attracting participants from around Australia.

Chinchilla, located around 300 km from Brisbane, is renowned as the primary hub for melon production in Australia. This rural town transforms into a captivating melon extravaganza, attracting visitors from various corners of the globe to partake in this unique cultural event. In addition to engaging in the recreational activity of “melon skiing” when individuals slide down a slope while wearing hollowed-out watermelons on their feet, and partaking in melon chariot races, the culmination of the world’s largest melon festival is a concluding food battle, wherein copious amounts of melons are utilised (“Chinchilla Melon Festival,” n.d.).

Fremantle Tomato Festival, Italy

During the Tomato Festival in Fremantle's Kings Square, a quantity exceeding 100 kg of tomatoes is available for participants to engage in activities such as throwing, bobbing, and passing (Pepper, 2009). The festival commemorates the longstanding Italian practice of sauce production, which dates back to the establishment of the Fremantle Port. Fremantle boasts a robust Italian population, and the genesis of this event can be traced back to the longstanding practice of families such as the Matassa and Stack families congregating to engage in the collective preparation of spaghetti sauce. In the latter part of February 1995, individuals with a strong interest in sauces congregated beneath the renowned Moreton Bay fig trees located in the Square, with the intention of showcasing their expertise in the craft of sauce production. The Tomato Festival has undergone a transformation throughout time and is currently scheduled to occur between 11.15am and 1.30pm, aligning with the Village Art Market.

The Cheese Rolling Gloucester Competition, United Kingdom

The cheese rolling event is held annually in May atop Copper's Hill, situated in the town of Brockworth in the western region of England. According to Jefferies (2007), the origins of the cheese rolling race may be



Image 9.3: Groups of visitors at the Cheese Rolling Competition in Gloucester. Source: Gloucester Live (2019)

traced back to its earliest documented instance in the early 1800s. The event has individuals engaging in a pursuit of a circular Double Gloucester cheese wheel, which is released by the Master of Ceremonies, along a descending slope with a gradient varying from one metre to two metres (Bradley, 2014). The objective is to be the initial participant to reach the lowest point in order to get possession of the cheese. The cheese used in the occasion has an approximate weight of 3.5 kg. The pursuit of a rapidly moving wheel of cheese at a pace of 70 miles per hour is far less formal in nature when compared to other forms of extreme sports (Horton, 2018).

Goomeri Pumpkin Festival, Australia

The annual event is coordinated by the Gympie Regional Council, with a primary focus on showcasing locally sourced goods and offering visitors the chance to partake in a diverse range of activities such as music performances, cultural exhibitions, and



Image 9.4: Families at the Goomeri Pumpkin Festival in Australia. **Source:** The Courier Mail (2019)

culinary experiences that are representative of the local area (The Grey Nomads, 2023). The Great Australian Pumpkin Roll serves as the main attraction of a festive celebration that originated in 1997. A large number of individuals known as “Pumpkin Rollers” enthusiastically propel their pumpkins down Policeman’s Hill, resulting in the pumpkins racing, splattering, and hurtling down the slope, much to the amusement and satisfaction of the onlookers. In addition to its primary attractions, the festival has a variety of unconventional competitions centred upon pumpkins. It also includes a lively street procession, continuous live entertainment on a designated stage throughout the day, expansive street markets, captivating demonstrations, and an array of exhibits, among several other offerings. The festival offers complimentary admission and camping facilities are provided (The Grey Nomads, n.d.).

Mashed Potato Wrestling, United States

Mashed Potato Wrestling, United States

The majority of potato wrestling competitions are often held in a specially created pool made from hay bales and tarp. This pool is then filled with a substantial amount of potato flakes,



Image 9.5: Participants at the Mashed Potato Festival in Barneville, Minnesota. Source: Star Tribune (2023).

factory waste, and water, often weighing several hundred pounds. Although there may be variations depending on the unique festival being attended, the general rule followed in most tournaments is that the participant who accumulates the greatest number of pins emerges as the winner. One of the most widely recognized potato wrestling events takes place in Barneville, Minnesota, United States during the Potato Day celebration (Everett, 2016). The participants in this crazy food event engage in a competition consisting of two rounds, each lasting three minutes. The ultimate goal is to accumulate the greatest number of three-second pins, with the victor emerging as the champion (ChavezBush, n.d.).

Clean Monday Flour War, Greece

An example of a celebration observed exclusively in Greece is Clean Monday, also known as Pure Monday. The day signifies the commencement of Great Lent, the preeminent period of fasting within the Eastern Christian faith. The Great Lent, which typically lasts



Image 9.6: Clean Monday Flour War, Greece. Source: Rad Season.

for forty days, concludes with Pascha or Easter, the holiest occasion of the year. Clean Monday is a movable feast that does not have a set date. This indicates that it fluctuates annually according to astronomical calculations. Consequently, Clean Monday typically occurs in February or March. Monday marked the conclusion of the carnival season in Greece with the customary “flour war” among the locals. To participate, tourists from throughout Greece and the globe flocked to the fishing village of Galaxidi. Participants employ sacks of baking flour that have been tinted with food colouring as “bombs” through which they “impact” one another in this “flour war.” It appears the “flour war” originated in 1801 as a symbolic act of defiance against the Ottoman Empire, which imposed prohibitions on festivals in Greece at the time. Certain Greek citizens assert that the tradition serves as a source of solace amidst the nation’s ongoing economic crisis (“Greeks let the flour fly in Clean Monday tradition,” 2017).

Battle of the Oranges, Italy

Residents of Ivrea, a city in northern Italy, have been split into nine teams in preparation for the annual Battle of the Oranges. Men, women, and children all take part in a game where they “beat” one other by throwing oranges at them (Oh et al., 2016). Most people are



*Image 9.7: The Battle of Oranges, Ivrea, Northern Italy.
Source: Think in Italian.*

aware of the tale of the evil marquis who attempted to sexually abuse a young woman but was instead decapitated by her (Pagani, 2017), but the festival’s origins are a mystery. It is said that the celebration symbolises the people of the town storming the palace in rebellion after he died. One of the most creative food battles in Europe, the “Battle of the Oranges” is the grand finale of the Carnival of Ivrea (Akturk & Akbaba, 2021).

In ancient times, different fruits and vegetables, such as beans and apples, were used. Because oranges are not a common crop in the area, they were specifically chosen for this recipe. At the festival, people hurl more than 600 tons of oranges, and oranges, which are not fit for human consumption, are utilised in large quantities each year as a source of recycled fertiliser (“Battle of the Oranges,” n.d.).

Summary

Events and festivals that are based on food are often strongly rooted in the culture and community spirit of a place and its people. Allowing people to take part in strange food events is one of the best ways to get away from the normal rules and routines of life. These events encourage rebellious behaviour and are a symbolic reversal of the normal social order. People enjoy the region's typical local foods at food events, which are becoming a symbol of the place. These events are seen as ways for places that might not have flagship sites to stand out. There are additional food events that are more like soft sport tourism and extreme adventure tourism as illustrated in this chapter. For example, The Battle of the Oranges or mashed potato wrestling are considered as extreme adventure tourism events. Finally, this chapter introduced the notion of food sport tourism by providing instances of worldwide food festivals that are associated with food competitions. The act of engaging in food fights and participating in cheese rolling activities exhibits connections to competitive behaviour, while also serving as a symbolic reversal of the conventional social hierarchy.

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