

GASTRONOMIC TOURISM AND THE POTENTIAL OF TOURIST DEVELOPMENT IN A COUNTRY

GENERAL

The definition of the word tourism comes from the French “tour”, that means circular. A journey to a destination and back. The term has prevailed, and is being used with the same root by almost every language around the world.

As tourists we can define people travelling for business or scientific purposes, since through their journeys they can combine their work with entertainment, and spiritual relaxation.

Specialised forms of tourism, have preceded mass tourism and its new alternative forms. They have been acting however, as complimentary to the mass tourism.

Whereas the alternative ones, appeared in the last few decades, as a response to the change of motives by the tourists, with a general focus on the ones related to ecology and environment.

Alternative forms are part of the specialised forms, where tourists often decide how the journey is organised and executed. The main focus is autonomy of choice, and small tours with a limited use of mass tourism services.

GASTRONOMY AS A TOURIST PRODUCT

In a 2009 study by “ΣΕΤΕ” the following results have been presented:

Gastronomy as a product, is promoted beyond the combination of good food and wine or other beverages, by participation in cooking lessons, buying local produce, visiting local food markets and production facilities (wineries,cheeseries etc), food festivals etc.

The relation between gastronomy and tourism is a quite a complex one, since food is part of the travelling experience in many ways:

- The offering of good cuisine is a pleasurable, cultural experience of a country's identity, and as such, an important part of the tourist's satisfaction, regardless of their interest in specialised gastronomy.
- The number of consumers interested in local gastronomy is on a steady increase, even though it may not be their main travelling motive.
- There is a number of tourists focused on experiencing gastronomic activities, discovering new tastes, and enjoying local or high level gastronomy, in combination with the cultural/historical traditions of their destination. Specialised businesses(tour-guides,hotels etc) are focusing on covering this increasing interest in gastronomic journeys.
- Some forms of tourism, like the well-being and farm tourism, promote the occupation in forms of gastronomy like dietary cuisine, healthy-cooking and cultivation of local produce.

The terms used on searching quality food destinations are “food tourism”, “gastronomy tourism”, “culinary tourism”. The prevailing one is “gastronomy tourism”.

The Greek word “Γαστρονομία” is defined by the art of quality cooking, the set of rules in choosing the right ingredients, and the production of viands focused on taste and presentation. It also relates to every activity on cooking and the enjoyment of food. On the other hand, “Culinaria” is a reference to the local cuisine and recipes of a country, the produce and cooking techniques that define the region.

According to the “World Food Travel Association”, Gastronomic tourism (Culinary or food tourism) is focused on the discovery of particular or unique experiences in food and drink. Countries with a long historical tradition in Gastronomy and rich cuisine, like France Italy and Spain, are promoting their gastronomic identity.

UNESCO has included French food in its catalogue of “Intangible Cultural Inheritance” recognising as a ritual for the “celebration of important moments in the life of people and groups”. UNESCO has also recognised that French cuisine is an important mix of fun and gastronomy, where French people gather around a table and share quality food and accompanied by the corresponding wine (UNESCO 2010).

In the last few years, there's been an increase in the promotion of gastronomic enjoyment offered in certain destinations, and complete travel packages are being offered to travellers, in combination with a full network of activities related to food and nutrition. It includes the distribution of food, its preparation, production and presentation. Also the cultural significance, and the symbolisms of its consumption.

According to this approach in the definition of gastronomic tourism, we can also include besides restaurants and wineries, the cooking guides, cooking accessory stores, food stores, cooking tv-shows, commercials, tours of food production facilities, festivals dedicated to certain products etc. According to the bibliography (Fields,2002, Richards, 2002, Scarpato, 2002), the role of gastronomy and tourism is symbiotic. In the sense that a destination offers the food, recipes, techniques and the cultural base that makes gastronomy the ideal product for tourist consumption.

I will attempt to categorise gastronomy in the following:

1. National or local cuisine in restaurants.

A gastronomic package is offered at a destination. Between the European countries, France and Italy have a long experience of offering complete gastronomic experiences, through the “trattories” and “osterias” (Italy), or bistros and brasseries (France). Greece has representative restaurants called taverns, but they operate with an individual mindset, instead of a strategic plan or a collective policy. That is a disadvantage.

2. National or local cuisine in Hotel restaurants

In Greece, following the initiative of the “Hotel Association of Greece”, the program “Greek Breakfast” is in effect. This initiative has started in 2010, is based on the fact that breakfast is considered an important meal of a vacation, as it provides the necessary energy for the beginning of the day. The goal of the initiative is to enrich breakfast offered in Greek hotels with local produce, and traditional viands of each Greek location. Also, purpose of the initiative is to give every visitor the opportunity to experience the gastronomic wealth of Greece. To taste in their breakfast the countless Greek products and viands that are the base of the Mediterranean

diet.

The basis of Greek breakfast, as offered in Greek hotels, consists of the main ingredients of Mediterranean diet, like bread, croutons, olive oil, honey, yogurt, olives, cheese and cured meat products, fresh vegetables, legumes, pies, pastries and fresh fruit.

The base of this nutrition is dependent on the location, ground composition, produce and cultural relations-trading of each Greek territory.

3. International restaurant brands of exceptional gastronomy

In the last few decades, popular Chefs made famous from TV-cooking shows, have been opening restaurants in various places around the world. These restaurants are named after their owners, and operate in popular tourist locations. In fact, the presence of a gastronomic brand in a country or location, ensures publicity and induction into the global gastronomic map.

4. National or local cuisine in air plane flights

Airlines offer to their passengers food, drink, snacks, and often local products promoting their place of origin. For example Aegean airlines, through the initiative “Discover Greek cuisine”, offers to the passengers the opportunity to taste a meal inspired by traditional recipes of the Greek islands. All the international travellers have the opportunity to experience a Greek cuisine meal, and all the Business Class passengers can choose between two hot meals. The domestic flight Business class passengers can enjoy a cold meal. The menu includes recipes by a famous chef that are inspired by traditional Greek recipes and products.

5. Manufacturing and Cultivation of produce places, open to tour guides.

This activity refers to the visitation of places that produce food and drinks (wineries, breweries, olive oil refineries, cheeseries etc). During the tour, the visitor can observe and experience the production of a product, taste it, use some of the tools, and finally buy the product directly from its place of origin.

Some of the first industries to open their doors to visitors were wineries (France, Italy etc). These businesses have invested a significant amount of money, transforming their factories into tour-friendly establishments.

6. Cultural routes and sightseeing tours.

Due to the increased interest of the visitors in experiencing local gastronomy and wine culture, sightseeing tours are often offered by tourist guides in various locations.

These routes, are a complete package that combines visits to wineries, breweries, local manufacturing facilities of cheese and meat, organic farms, meals and dinners in traditional restaurants etc.

The tours vary in subject, duration, cost and season of the year. Their promoters are usually local, municipal or national organisations of tourism, and also business associations (wineries unions etc). One of the most established routes in Greece, is the “Wine Route”.

7. Specialised Tour operator programs.

The travellers interested in gastronomic tours, can either organise their own trip (using the

information offered by tour organisations), or participate in an organised tour by specialised tour operators. A program like that includes a great variety of activities, like gastronomic seminars by popular authors or journalists, tours in food markets and local food production workshops, meals in wineries, sightseeing tours, cooking shows by famous chefs, visits to organic farms, dinners in award-winning restaurants etc. Greece doesn't currently have such a program.

8. Food Storytelling

That term relates refers to the association of cooking recipes and related products, to folklore myths and legends, historical moments, the geography and cultural inheritance of a place and its people. The narration allows the better understanding of interaction between people and the environment. Many historical places, monuments etc. narrate the history of a recipe either predominantly, or auxiliary in tourist promotion.

An example is the Château de Chantilly in France, that promotes the famous crème and its history that relates to the castle on its webpage.

9. Gastronomic Events

These are events dedicated to gastronomy, and are attended by locals and tourists. They vary in shape and subject, and could be gastronomic festivals in select restaurants and hotels of a town or wider area, festivities after the harvest of farm produce, or celebrations dedicated to certain products (wine, eggplants, sardine etc). Also cooking competitions and demonstrations.

Greece holds annual festivities in certain parts of the country, like the Tomato, Sardine or Suma festivals.

10. Gastronomy Museums or ones dedicated to certain products

Throughout Europe and the rest of the world, there's gastronomy museums and thematic museums dedicated to the production of certain products(chocolate, bread, wine, tea etc). Greece operates since 2004, "the museum of Greek gastronomy" along with smaller thematic ones, usually part of vineyards or wineries, that are not government funded or promoted, but operate independently. Some examples are the Wine Museum in Attica-Athens, and the Bread Museum in Amfikleia.

There's also museums that are part of a thematic network, built and funded by the Cultural Foundation of Pireaus bank. They are dedicated to certain products, like the Olive and Oil Museum in Sparta, and the Museum of industrial olive oil in Lesvos, and ofcourse the Mastiha Museum in Chios.

Conclusion

The importance of Greek gastronomy to the Greek tourist products, is observable as much as gastronomic tourism is extended and becoming a pillar of tourist development, that can in the following years upgrade the complete tourist experience. It is calculated, that three million European travellers are using gastronomy as a basic criteria for choosing their vacation location, instead of the sun and sea. And that number is doubled if we include American tourists.

They mainly consist of males and females between 30 and 50years old, with established careers, highly educated in relation to the average tourist, and usually travel in small groups in order to have a more focused learning experience.

Proposals for Greece

An important branding tool for Greek gastronomy is the internet. An extensive promotion plan is under development, based on an online portal, where the visitor (Greek or foreign) can easily locate the gastronomic product of a country(or local area),while funding, mainly from the private sector is being proposed-looked for.

The enrichment of the tourist experience, that is undoubtedly related to the promotion of gastronomic treasures in the country, will offer many benefits to Greek tourism, and will create promotion opportunities, extension of the tourist season, and focused targeting of wealthy tourists, giving rise to the profits of the tourist sector.

The bet for the Greek tourism sector, is the successful delivery of the vision to the gastronomic practice, from hotel managers and restaurateurs to merchants and winemakers.