

CULINARY TOURISM: FOOD AMONG TOP TRAVELERS' INTERESTS



Instances of architecture, landscape, museums, hospitality are some aspects of what attracts a tourist at a particular travel destination. In the recent times, we see the growing importance of culinary tourism in the economy of tourist hot spots.

Culinary tourism provides the tourists an opportunity to experience the exotic cuisines of a particular place. It is as important for tourists as aspects like accommodation, scenery, climate etc. as the tourists often dine outside. Most of them prefer to sample the local exquisite dishes. It is therefore, a great way to catch the fancy of the visitors.

Food is one of the fastest growing interests among travelers according to the International Culinary Tourism Association. The Association offers the following evidence in support of the tremendous growth in the culinary tourism industry:

The number of consumer requests received via the Association's website continue to grow and are nearly at their 2008 (pre-Recession) level. The number of consumer-oriented restaurant information websites has grown from less than a dozen in 2003 to 173 today. The number of culinary tour operators around the world has grown from just a handful in 2003 to nearly 150 today. The Association's membership has grown to more than 16,000 food and tourism trade professionals since 2003, when the Association was founded.

Culinary tourism definitely comprises of gourmet food but is not limited to it. It aims to provide a memorable experience for the tourists. **Of all foodies, only 8% of them are gourmet food enthusiasts.** Therefore, they clearly comprise the minority.

Culinary tourism is a great way to exchange cultures. To develop the culinary tourism aspect of any destination, a fourfold action plan can be adopted.

Parking Spots - A lack of parking spots can discourage tourists and many would drive away even without taking a second glance. To stop that, the local restaurants should provide ample parking space and advertise it too. Providing valet service is also a good strategy. **Ground Breaking Ideas** - Way of presentation, imagination and novel notions can catch a tourist's attention. **Kedonganan - Jimbaran** is a fishing village in Bali that has been remodelled as a hot seat of culinary tourism. There are 24 cafes dotting the shores of the village that provide seafood delicacies. **Good Relations with the Locals** - It would pay real well to treat the locals nicely. Employing them in the restaurants or collaborating with them would help. This would prompt them to redirect tourists to dining places and thus bring in a boom in business. **Collaboration with Other Restaurants** - It is unwise to regard other restaurants as competition. Instead if many restaurants collaborated with each other to form a chain and entered a business relation, then it would be much more profitable for them.

In places like South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, India, Egypt, Myanmar the culinary tourism industry is gaining rapid popularity. It is an extremely viable option for cultural exchange and economic revival of a place.

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