

Ethnic food as Tourist Attraction in Bundelkhand Region of India

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Abstract : The focus of the current paper is that culinary tourist or the tourist for whom food tourism is an important, if not primary, reason influencing his travel behavior. The empirical objectives of this paper concerned identifying the underlying dimensions of food tourism, developing a conceptual framework that explains participation in food tourism, and finally identifying the variables that predict membership in these food tourist segments. This paper also describes that Bundelkhand region is the Ideal Place for ethnic food lovers.

Keywords: Culinary Tourism, Culinary Tourists, Ethnic Foods, Bundelkhand Region

Introduction

Dining out is a growing form of leisure where meals are consumed not out of necessity but for pleasure, and the atmosphere and occasion are part of the leisure experience as much as the food itself. A recent profile of the tourists by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Travel and Tourism Industries (OTTI) shows that dining in restaurants was ranked as the second most favorite activity by the overseas visitors to the U.S. and the number one favorite recreational/ leisure activity by U.S. travelers visiting international destinations. The growth of eating out as a form of consumption and the market forces of globalization have made the food products and cuisines from all over the world more accessible. This has stimulated the emergence of food as a theme in magazines (Cuisine, Gourmet Traveler, Food and Travel), radio shows (Chef's Table, Splendid Table), and television, particularly cable television, with food shows focusing on travel and travel shows on food. In fact, the popularity of twenty-four hour television channels, such as the Food Network devoted to food and the place that food comes from, intertwines food with tourism so much that quite often it is hard to determine whether one is watching a food show or a travel show. From an economic point of view, nearly 100% of tourists spend money on food at their destination. Data shows that more than two-thirds of table-service restaurant operators reported that tourists are important to their business, with check sizes of US\$25 or above coming from tourists (National Restaurant Association, 2002). In Jamaica, for example, the daily expenditure on food by the tourist is five times greater than that of the average Jamaican (Belisle, 1984). According to Pyo, Uysal, and McLellan (1991), among all possible areas of expenditures while traveling, tourists are least likely to make cuts in their food budget. All these suggest that tourists' food

consumption makes a substantial contribution to the local restaurants, dining places, the food industry, and thereby the destination's economy.

Problem Statement

The market for culinary tourism to India is growing as the country's culinary traditions continue to garner increasing international attention. Cooking classes, both formal and included in home stays, is a favorite activity among foreign visitors. India's broad culinary culture reflects influences of Persian, Middle Eastern, Central Asian and Southeast Asian cuisines. India is home to a multidimensional and eclectic mix of cultures resulting in a variety of food traditions. There is no single dish that represents the country; rather, Indian culinary traditions vary greatly from region to region.

Food has been viewed as a necessary element of survival, and probably as a component of another attraction such as food in festivals, but has hardly been studied as an attraction or as a tourist recreational activity by itself (Smith, 1983). Food and dining is typically lumped together with accommodations in an assemblage of tourism statistics (Selwood, 2003). In general, food has been the overlooked, unsung component and largely a terra incognita of tourism research. Studies in tourism where food has been the focus of research have mainly been case studies (Boniface, 2003; Hall, Sharples, Mitchell, Macionis, & Cambourne, 2003; Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Telfer & Hashimoto, 2003) and ethnographies (Long, 1998, 2004).

These studies have contributed to the field by providing analysis of the relationship between food and tourism with practical examples of success stories of cities and countries that have used culinary tourism as a positioning strategy. In addition, they have attempted to define the parameters within which to study food in tourism. In connection to ethnic food tourism their no study previously done in the study area.

Objectives of the Study

The empirical objectives of the Research Paper are outlined as follows:

Objectives:

1. To determine the underlying dimensions of food tourism;
2. To formulate and test a conceptual framework to identify the variables that explains participation in food tourism;
3. to highlight the ethnic food in Bundelkhand Region.

Dimensions of Food Tourism

Culinary Tourism as Special Interest Tourism

The growth of special interest tourism is seen as a reflection of the increasing diversity of leisure interests of the early twenty-first century leisure society (Douglas, Douglas, & Derret, 2001). Post-modern tourism is slowly moving away from the 'Four S's of Tourism' (sun, sand, sex, and surf), to being a part of an overall lifestyle that corresponds to people's daily lives and activities (Hobson &

Dietrich, 1994). The growth of culinary tourism is seen as an outcome of a trend where people spend much less time cooking, but choose to pursue their interest in food as a part of a leisure experience such as watching cooking shows, dining out and the like (Sharples, 2003).

Food Consumption and the Social Sciences

Ritchie & Zins (1978) list food as one of the components of cultural tourism, implying that food is representative of a culture. One of the dominant approaches in the social sciences used to explain food consumption is the cultural approach, with the others being the economic and the psychological. Food theorists in the disciplines of anthropology, discursive psychology, and sociology have contributed significantly with their disciplinary perspectives on food consumption.

Anthropology, specifically social anthropology, accounts for the majority of cultural studies on food. The symbolic structuralist perspective analyzes food consumption as a psychological and behavioral system that originates in the human brain and how food transforms from a natural object to a cultural one (Levi-Strauss, 1966). The cultural materialistic perspective of Douglas (1975) examines the role of food as a code conveying information about social events and social relations and the commonalities of the structure of each meal across culture. The discipline of discursive psychology, food sociology in particular, inspects how foods and food preparation rituals of a given society represent a linguistic system, conveying social information that helps create and maintain its social identity (Barthes, 1973).

Gastronomic Tourism

According to Zelinsky (1985) eating at ethnic and regional cuisine restaurants is a form of gastronomic tourism, implying that a person need not be a tourist in the conventional sense to take part in food tourism. However, Zelinsky's study is limited in its approach in that it confines itself to just one activity: eating at ethnic restaurants. The study's contribution to the literature lies in being the first to identify and define this form of tourism, thus laying the foundations for future research.

Concepts of Participation in Food Tourism

I. Food Neophobia

The concept of food Neophobia has been used widely in the food and nutrition literature to understand why people have the propensity to avoid or approach novel, unfamiliar, and foreign foods. Based on Otis' (1984) findings that a person's willingness to taste new food is significantly and positively related to how adventurous one thinks he is, Pliner and Hobden, (1992) conceptualized food Neophobia as a personal trait and defined it as "the reluctance to eat and/ or avoidance of novel foods." Studies in food and nutrition have demonstrated significant gender and age differences regarding this trait, with men being more food Neophobia than women, and older people more Neophobia than younger people (Hobden & Pliner, 1995; Otis, 1984; Pliner, Eng, & Krishnan, 1995; Pliner & Hobden, 1992; Pliner & Melo, 1997; Pliner, Pelchat, & Grabski, 1993; Ritchey,

Frank, Hursti, & Tuorila, 2003; Tuorila, Lahteenmaki, Pohjalainen, & Lotti, 2001).

II. Variety-seeking Tendency

The concept of variety-seeking is borrowed from the consumer behavior literature. It is defined as the consumer's inherent desire for variety due to factors such as changes in tastes, changes in constraints, and changes in feasible alternatives (McAlister & Pessemier, 1982). In general, the concept of variety-seeking is identified as an offshoot of the need for stimulation, and is acknowledged as an underlying explanatory variable for the consumption of hedonic products like food, vacations, entertainment gadgets, and the like (Ratner, Kahn, & Kahneman, 1999).

III. Hedonic Consumption

Hedonic consumption is a concept borrowed from the consumer behavior literature, and is defined as, "those facets of consumer behavior that relate to the multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one's experiences with the products" (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982, p.92). The hallmark of hedonically valuable experience lies in the aesthetic or the physical enjoyment it provides, resulting in increased arousal, heightened involvement, perceived freedom, fantasy fulfillment, and escapism (Bloch & Richins, 1983; Hopkinson & Pujari, 1999). With respect to food, hedonic attitudes of consumption involve an emphasis on taste of food, a preference for cultural eating practices, a desire for complex, cultural dishes or a desire for elaborate and extravagant foods, and a focus on the cultural practice of eating food as well as the end benefits (LeBel, 2000; Wansink, Sonka, & Cheney, 2002, p.356). Further, it is not just purely a physiological sensation, such as the pleasure felt on having a rich dessert or drinking alcohol. It is also a social pleasure, which for example, occurs while having food and drinks with friends and family, emotional pleasure (e.g. food that evoke pleasant memories), and intellectual pleasure, such as cooking a fine meal, appreciating finer foods, and consuming beverages (LeBel, 2000).

IV. Enduring Involvement with Food Related Activities

The concept of enduring involvement, used in the social psychology and marketing literatures for more than 45 years, is considered as an influential determinant of consumer behavior and as a mediator of purchases and participation (Havitz & Dimanche, 1999). In the last decade, leisure, recreation and tourism researchers have identified this construct as an important variable that helps understand participation in leisure activities and tourists' vacation behavior (Dimanche, Havitz & Howard 1991; Havitz & Dimanche 1999; Kyle, et al, 2004; McIntyre & Pigram, 1992). Owing to the large number of studies examining this concept, there are several definitions of involvement, both in consumer behavior and leisure and tourism studies. In general, leisure involvement is defined as "an unobservable state of motivation, arousal or interest towards a recreational activity or associated product, evoked by a particular stimulus or situation and has drive properties" (Havitz & Dimanche, 1999, p.123).

Ethnic Food in Bundelkhand Region

Located in the northern region of the state, Bundelkhand district shares itself between Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. In M.P., the larger landmass of Bundelkhand, it takes in a few cities and then slopes down into the Indo-Gangetic plain. Dignity reigns at Gwalior, art at Khajuraho and history at Orchha. Smaller towns such as Sagar and Damoh also fall within the district's boundaries. They each have a singular culinary specialty to their credit. Heart of Bundelkhand Jhansi is famous for Ethnic Sweet Khaja (Made from Refined Floor and dipped in sugar syrup) and Gwalior is famous for its gajjak (Indian confectionary generally made with finely ground sesame seeds and jaggery). Katangi, a small town near Sagar, and Orai (Jalaun) is known for its huge gulab jamuns (ball-shaped Indian sweet made of cooked and thickened milk dunked in sugar syrup) Banda is famous for Son Halwa (Also made from Refined floor and lots of Clarified Butter and also Sugar). But, this is the region of rolling hills and valleys. It is the sprawling forest lands of Panna and its surrounding areas that contribute largely to what gets slotted as a distinct, independent whole – Bundelkhandi cuisine. It is a cuisine that has evolved from the food choices of its historic rulers and the reality of the geoclimatic availability of ingredients. It evolved from an amalgamation of Rajput Jain history and the reality of living in a forest where meat-eating is an essential part of life. Changing geographies have had an impact on the cuisine. While jowar (known as jundi in Bundelkhand) was once the significant cereal, wheat has now taken over. An extensive consumption of various millets grown on these lands forms the bases of the cuisine. Wheat and milk are the major local inputs and used generously. Thanks to the in-flow of various rivers, fish is another major ingredient. Also, the forest lands provide myriad meats: deer, wild boar, lamb and chicken. Today, the cuisine lives on in the kitchens of Bundelkhand various tribes.

Simple but Robust Flavors

The cuisine brought down by generations of Bundelkhandi people today lives on only in the very heart of its forest lands. It is the adivasis who retain both the styles as well as the flavors. Historically, Bundelkhand fare traces its deep ancestral roots down to Jain culinary practices. This, of course, comes from the fact that the Chandela Rajputs, who gave Bundelkhand its shape and place on the map, were Jains. Jain food was the cuisine of the royal kitchens and maintained its supremacy for almost five centuries of Chandela rule. Obviously, the culinary practices steeped deep into civilian households and merged with their local flavors. Then, came the Mughals with meats, Jain vegetarianism was gently submerged. But, instead of dying out and fading to obscurity, it rejuvenated itself in the form of a new cuisine that became a *mélange* of the previous Jain styles and the newer meat flavors. Today, this is largely Bundelkhandi cuisine. The uniqueness still comes from the preparation style. Traditional Bundelkhandi cuisine, alive in adivasi village homes, predominantly uses the clay pot. The earthen vessel is placed over firewood and allowed to slow cook till the vegetables and meats have released their aromas and tenderize in their own juices. Even today, homes that lie deep in the forest lands, slow cook their meals in clay pots. Of course, villagers

today have moved on to wooden and even kerosene stoves. While modes have changed, the tastes still linger.

Tourist Experiences:

Based on the survey responses of 100 tourists visiting the four Major tourist attractions of Bundelkhand, the analyses revealed that food tourism is composed of four dimensions or classes of activities. These include dining at restaurants known for local cuisines, purchasing local food products, consuming local beverages, and dining at familiar chain restaurants and franchises. The conceptual variables significant in explaining participation in food tourism were food neophobia, variety-seeking, and social bonding. The socio demographic variables that effect participation in food tourism were age, gender, education, and income.

Segmentation of tourists revealed the presence of three clusters: the culinary tourist, the experiential tourist, and the general tourist. The culinary tourist was identified as the tourist who, at the destination, frequently dines and purchases local food, consumes local beverages, dines at high-class restaurants, and rarely eats at franchisee restaurants. In addition, the culinary tourist segment was more educated, earned higher income than the other two segments, and was characterized by its variety-seeking tendency towards food and absence of food neophobia.

Conclusion

The purpose of the Paper was to gain an understanding of food tourism and empirically identify the special interest tourist for whom food is an important part of the travel experience. Due to lack of previous empirical evidence on what activities constitute food tourism, one of the objectives of this dissertation was to identify those activities. This Paper identified the activities that comprise food tourism and its underlying dimensions. Further, the tourists were segmented based on their participation in food tourism and the characteristics of the culinary tourist were identified.

Based on the literature review, the concepts that are associated with food tourism were delineated and a conceptual model was constructed for identifying the variables that explain participation in food tourism. The significance of variety- seeking, food neophobia, hedonism, and enduring involvement in explaining food tourism were tested.

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