



FOOD TOURISM IN DEPTH



Despite fears that communities are succumbing to McDonaldization and cultural homogenization, a new trend - culinary tourism - is emerging. **Chadi Chidiac**, managing partner of PROTOCOL explains

Food tourism or culinary tourism is defined by the International Culinary Tourism Association (ICTA) as “the pursuit of unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences”. A tourist, by definition, is someone who travels for pleasure and for most, an element of that experience is experimenting with and enjoying food. While this has always been broadly accepted as a part of the mass tourism model, recent research conducted by PROTOCOL has identified culinary tourists as an important demographic in their own right. Despite the aggressive expansion and proliferation

of fast-food chains worldwide, the latest trends point to a newfound appreciation of a destination’s culinary offerings and a desire to experience them.

On an international level, there are many countries still building their culinary heritage, such as Canada and Australia for example, that face challenges not found in well-established destinations, like China and Spain. Canada remains relatively young as a culinary destination, characterized by an amalgamation of cultural influences. However, the country, like some others in a similar position, is making great strides in boosting its market share of culinary tourists by capitalizing on those challenges. This includes celebrating and promoting the country’s diverse culinary heritage, which owes much to its immigrant population.

Above the Line (AtL) media indicates that food is clearly becoming increasingly prominent and profitable in popular culture, yielding both a wider audience and hefty profits. Celebrity chefs began competing with Hollywood stars decades ago, confirming what has become a well-established trend and the rising popularity of cooking magazines, paving the way for the birth of the food celebrity. Celebrity chefs have paved the way for what is known as the ‘Delia effect’, named after the British presenter of TV cookery programs, Delia Smith, whose 1998 show, ‘How to Cook’, led to an extra 1.3 million eggs being sold in Britain, each time it aired. Gordon Ramsay’s famed ‘Hell’s Kitchen’, complete with his bouts of bad temper and Jamie Oliver’s

focus on wholesome school dinners, have all shifted our focus towards good quality food.

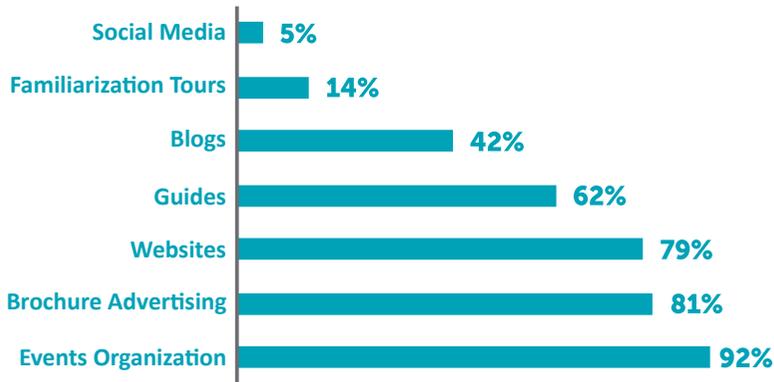
While some countries like France and Italy have a firmly established gastronomic legacy, tourists with an interest in culinary experiences are often keen to try out new food in cultures with a lower profile. Their demand for homegrown culinary experiences is having a positive impact on local economies. The rise of globalization is another factor that has increased demand over the past decade for ‘authentic, experience-based’ tourism, with local culinary traditions seen as a key part of such a package.

In a recent survey, PROTOCOL looked at food’s impact on tourism by surveying 1000 arrivals from 29 markets visiting Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey and Yemen. The four Middle Eastern destinations were chosen on the grounds that tourists would have had the opportunity to try out the cuisine in their own countries before sampling dishes in their place of origin.

Objectivity

Three key performance indicators (KPIs) were used to gather and analyze results: a tourist’s main recollections from their trip; whether they’ve tried the dishes associated with the country they visited back home; and the names of three items of local cuisine they tried, regardless of whether or not they liked the taste. PROTOCOL found that 95 percent of those surveyed gave a positive response in at least two of the indicators,

MARKETING & PROMOTION



with food featuring particularly strongly in the first KPI, suggesting that the cuisine in the countries featured left visitors with good memories that they took home.

The survey also showed that Lebanese cuisine ranked top for cuisine tried by tourists back home, followed by food from Turkey (2nd), Egypt (3rd) and Yemen (4th). The results of the second KPI followed suit. However, rankings were reversed when it came to citing dishes tried, with Yemeni cuisine taking the top spot, followed by dishes from Egypt (2nd), Turkey (3rd) and Lebanon (4th). A lack of opportunity to sample cuisines before visiting a country meant a sizeable number of tourists tried dishes for the first time during their trip. On other occasions, respondents were unsure of a food type's country of origin, such as humus.

Significantly, almost 89 percent of respondents considered gastronomy and culinary heritage as a strategic element and deciding factor in defining the brand and image of their destination.

Marketing and promotion

PROTOCOL consulted a number of organizations and strategists, including ministries and associations that formulate capture plans for tourism. Findings revealed that 68 percent of them carry out marketing plans or promotion campaigns based on food tourism. The public relations and promotional tools most used by entities are: events organization (used by 92 percent of those surveyed); leaflets and brochure advertising (81 percent); and websites dedicated to food tourism (79 percent). Playing a smaller part in strategy are: promotional tools, such as tourism guides (62 percent); online blogs (42 percent); and familiarization tours for journalists and tour operators (14 percent). Just five percent of polled organizations said they used social networking as a promotional tool for culinary tourism.

Consensus and conclusion

PROTOCOL's findings highlighted the need for destinations to formulate strategies aimed at establishing development



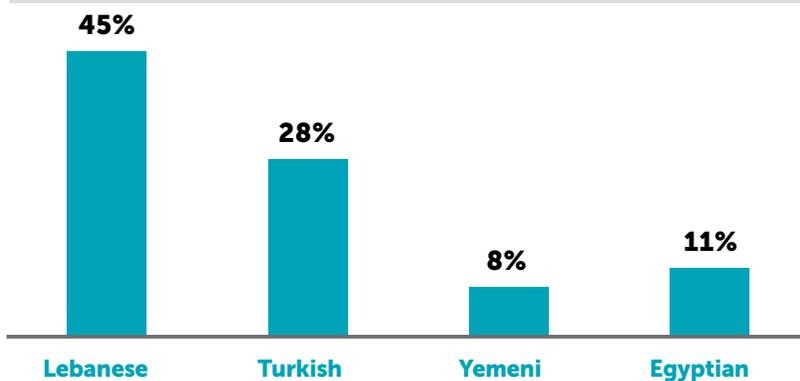
Taleb Rifai
Secretary-General
UNWTO

“ Food tourism is also an important vehicle for development, with locally sourced produce ensuring tourist dollars are invested back into the community, allowing other businesses to thrive ”

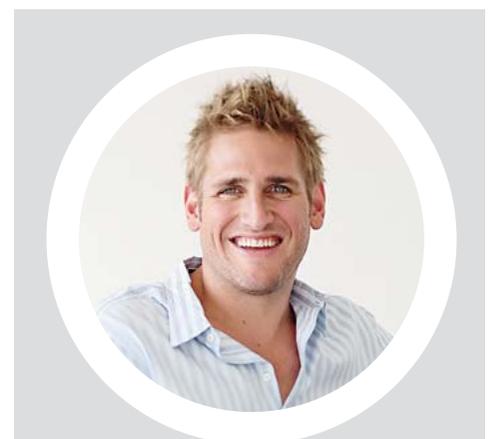
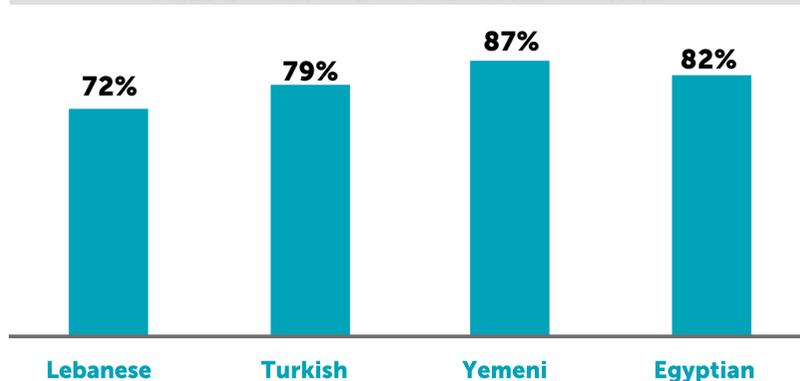
guidelines and creating gastronomic-oriented tourism products. In the field of marketing and promotion, it also found that destinations needed to seize the opportunities that gastronomy presented to create a strategy based on an authenticity-driven image and brand identity.

Key factors cited are: bringing chefs on board as interpreters of the territory; the development of high-quality and credible promotional tools, such as food guides; the patronage of events with media exposure and public relations.

TRIED THE VISITED COUNTRY'S FOOD IN HOMELAND



TRIED LOCAL FOOD OF THE VISITED COUNTRY



Chef Curtis Stone

“ The beautiful thing about Australian food production is that a lot of it is family owned and operated. Produce is commonly mass-produced these days with little love or respect for consumers, animals or the environment, so I enjoy using produce from smaller producers who can control quality ”