

An Exploratory Study Linking Turkish Regional Food with Cultural Destinations

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Abstract

Food and tourism may be considered as two interrelated elements that bring people and cultures together on many different occasions. Research indicates that food could be viewed as a peak touristic experience and a major tourist attraction. The main purpose of this paper is to identify and evaluate the significance of food tourism for Turkey and to create a number of innovative regional food related itineraries that would be replicable. Four main results emerged from the analysis of the interviews. The major recommendations from the study include developing an action list for the Turkish Ministry of Tourism, developing new food tourism itineraries and creating an official food guide. The findings of the study could be used as a base for further exploring the application of new technologies in food destination sectors.

Key words: Food tourism, Turkey, regional cuisines, innovation

Introduction

Food and tourism may be considered as two inter-related elements which bring people and cultures together in many different ways. Food as an important cultural category for many people, could also serve as a significant destination marketing tool in tourism. Within this frame, this type of tourism is commonly being referred to as Food Tourism, Culinary Tourism or Gastronomic Tourism in the related literature. In her study, Santich (2004) refers to these modes of tourism by mentioning travelers who are motivated to travel by an interest in eating and drinking and enriches her explanations by giving examples of Gastronomic Tourism from France, Canada, Australia and Italy.

Research also indicates that food could be seen as a peak touristic experience and the main tourist attraction (Quan & Wang, 2004). Plummer et al. (2005) mentioned that food and beverage tourism is now being considered as a vital part of the cultural tourism market. Cohen & Aviali (2004) also discussed this subject while considering the roles of food in tourism as both an attraction and an impediment. In relation to this, Henderson (2009) believes that the importance of the profound roles of food brings possible competitive advantages to a destination. These roles include being a kind of tourist attraction, playing a role in tourist decision making and satisfaction, being a destination development tool, and adding to the destination's image

Considering the relationship between food and tourism, Telfer and Hashimoto (2002) mentioned the importance of incorporating local food and beverages into the tourism product. Beer et al. (2002) also highlight the regional food cultures and gave examples of several regions in Britain and Portugal which contributed to the development of rural tourism. Some researchers believe that local cuisines are in direct relation with the destination's intangible heritage while agreeing food could also be used in attracting tourists to several destinations in supporting sustainable tourism development (Okumus et al., 2007). Tourism's multiplier effect is also significant for different nations and its positive contributions to other related industries

in the economy at the local, regional, national and international levels.

Being seen as one of the most important "pull" factors in the literature, a destination's image is known to be essential in attracting tourists along with the individuals' motivation for travel (Fields, 2002). The role of "Food" in Destination Marketing has been discussed by multiple authors in the relevant literature (Okumus et al. 2007; Henderson, 2009). Fox (2007) mentioned the success of the tourist destinations and linked this with the gastronomic identity. Richards (2002) identifies gastronomy as a tourism marketing tool and gives examples from Portugal while linking this with the brand image. It is also believed that food tourism is vital in the branding of a country or a destination (Henderson, 2009). Okumus et al. (2007) highlight the destination marketing literature and assert that each destination should differentiate itself from other destinations through tangible and intangible distinctiveness.

2 Turkey as a Food Destination

Turkey occupies a unique location being at the crossroads of East, West and the Mediterranean and through the development of a rich and diverse gastronomic heritage developed over time, it may be regarded as a hub for culinary tourists.

Many researchers, food critics and culinary experts admire the rich selection of dishes expressed through unique regional cuisine specialties. In relation to this, numerous books have been written and well-respected gourmets have tasted Turkish foods not only in restaurants, but also in home-style food from street vendors. "Turkish Delight" and "Turkish Coffee" are also world renowned delicacies.

The variety and the scope of Turkish cuisine are commonly discussed in written and visual media. Many internet based resources mention the rich culinary culture in Turkey and give different examples from regional cuisines. However in a recent study, Okumus et al. (2007) addressed the fact that some countries do not utilize the potential opportunities food tourism

provide. In a detailed content analysis it was found that diverse regional cuisines in Turkey were not mentioned in the official promotional materials for Turkey and, therefore, Turkey has not used food as a strong marker of cultural identity as compared, for example, to Hong Kong (Okumus et al., 2007)

Due to the fact that Turkey has a rich flora and fauna, four distinctive seasons, seven diverse geographical regions where countless ingredients are grown, food tourism should be used as an important tool in marketing Turkey as a premier tourism destination for those interested in food and culture.

3 Innovation in Marketing a Tourism Destination

Recently, the literature on tourism innovation identifies that product or service innovations could be considered influential factors in the purchase decisions of tourists Hjalager (2010). The same study also highlighted the importance of process innovations while identifying Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as having the potential to give the greatest competitive advantage for the tourism industry (Zelenka 2009; Hjalager 2010).

Many researchers have also discussed the impacts of globalization, rapid developments in information technologies and the internet and the resultant effects on the tourism industries (Avramovic, 2010; Mack et al., 2008). Boyne & Hall (2004) discussed the role of the internet in promoting food tourism initiatives in rural areas. Machlouzarides (2010) illustrates the importance of electronic marketing in destination marketing and shows the effects of an integrated marketing model at the official level through a case study of Cyprus. The role of governments in tourism marketing is clearly critical, especially the role of information technology and tourism destination marketing. There has been a rapid rise in Destination Marketing Systems (DMS) often through the use of promoting publicity by internet use including personalized design of travel itineraries.

The main purpose of this paper is to identify and evaluate the significance of food tourism for Turkey while integrating the prominent regional cuisines into proposed travel itineraries as an innovative illustration of a cultural tourism product. The secondary purpose of this paper is to prepare a base for identifying the role of innovation in distributing tourism products. Following Hjalager's (2010) approach, itineraries created could also be regarded as product or service innovations. Value could be added through process innovations by integrating electronic marketing strategies and the use of social media which would then provide competitive advantages to the Turkish food tourism industry.

The extant literature suggests that there is a need for further research in this area which suggests that collaboration between industry and academia in creating a better understanding of the benefits of food tourism (Henderson, 2009). Hence this exploratory research paper was written by academicians and a professional from the tourism industry in proposing an innovative tourism product. As a partial result of this project, considering different interests of the tourists, two sample itineraries are proposed in this paper and several others could be developed by using similar methods and the quality of the tourism products could be improved and widened by considering the innovative scope for future studies.

4 Methodology

A qualitative research method was used for this study. Interviews were conducted with key decision makers and content experts from the culinary world both in Turkey and the US to enable an in-depth analysis of the topic. Possible interviewee names from the culinary world were identified by using professional and personal networks. Researchers carefully selected the interviewees considering their interest in and knowledge of Turkish cuisine, history and geography.

Three interview sessions were conducted with: (a) a famous food critic and restaurateur in San Francisco, USA, (b) a master chef and restaurateur in Istanbul,

Turkey and (c) a renowned pastry chef in Cesme, Izmir, Turkey. Each interview session lasted around thirty minutes. One interview in the US was completed face-to-face; the other two were telephone interviews. The questions asked during the interviews were geared to scrutinize the importance of food tourism in Turkey including: (a) the geographic regions of Turkey which could be beneficial in utilizing food tourism, (b) the regional food and cultural specialties of Turkey, (c) food types to be used as a marketing tool, (d) potential issues and (e) recommendations to tour operators in developing a food tourism based itinerary in Turkey. Furthermore, spontaneous dialogues between the interviewers and interviewees took place regarding Turkish food which provided valuable information on newly generated ideas and individual expert opinions about the topic. Thus, all of these interpretations have been reflected while designing the different travel itineraries.

5 Data Analyses and Results

Detailed notes were taken during the interviews. The notes, conversations and recommendations made were studied in view of the corresponding literature, and analyzed by using individual interpretation. The researchers followed the common practice of reporting the findings of qualitative research in categories with common points addressed by the interviewees being identified and then divided into themes (Horsburgh, 2003). At the end of the process four categories emerged including: (a) regional cuisines and food cultures, (b) flavors based on the uniqueness of local ingredients, (c) food types and (d) demonstration of regional cuisines. Findings of all categories are listed below.

Regional Cuisines and Food Cultures

Regional cuisines and specific food cultures of various regions were discussed in all interviews. Two of the three interviewees mentioned the importance of Southeastern and Eastern Mediterranean cuisines over the historical timeline while mentioning unique ingredients such as “Dried Flaked Red Chili Pepper”

from Urfa and the Maras region and the uses and preparation of “Pomegranate Molasses”.

Flavors based on Uniqueness of Local Ingredients

Natural and fresh ingredients in the dishes especially in the rural settings were the main points in all interviews. Different cooking methods used by different regions were also discussed by all the interviewees along with the seasonality of the ingredients.

Food Types and Serving Styles

The importance of local market foods, unique desserts, “meze” style dishes, home-style cooking and street foods in Turkey were highlighted in all interviews.

Demonstration of Regional Cuisines

Two out of three of the interviewees emphasized the importance of “Hands on Experience” in regards to learning about regional cuisines. One interviewee pointed out the role of a reliable “Food Guide” as an important means of communication. One other interviewee stated the idea of forming an “Institute” of Regional Foods in Istanbul, Turkey which could serve to promote Turkish Cuisine.

6 Proposed Sample Itinerary Highlighting the Importance of Regional Food Cultures

The interviews conducted with the participants helped the researchers to understand the topic in detail. Based on the categories identified and in lieu of the recommendations made by the interviewees, considering the varying needs and budgets of tourists, two sample travel itineraries have been developed to promote destinations in Turkey which will emphasize regional cuisines and cultures. Those itineraries do not only reflect the input obtained from the interviews, but also combine the expertise and recommendations of a tour operator who also serves as one of the co-authors of this paper. The sample itineraries cover Turkey from the Northwest to Central Anatolia, Eastern Mediterranean to the Southeastern region. Considering the recom-

mendations made, similar itineraries could be customized by covering different geographical regions and could be modified according to the individual needs. Both Table 1 and Table 2 show the sample itineraries in detail.

Table 1: *Sample Itinerary 1 (a condensed itinerary designed for wider set of tourists with a limited time and budget).*

7 Day Food and Culture Tour to Istanbul-Izmir-Ephesus-Alacati-Pamukkale

Day 1: Arrival in Istanbul

Morning arrival to Istanbul. Half day guided city tour in the afternoon. Welcome dinner at a “Meyhane” while sampling traditional appetizers and the drink “Raki”.

Day 2: Topkapi Palace and Cooking Class (Optional)

Visit Topkapi Palace (residence of the Ottoman Sultans). Visit the palace kitchens as well as the “Harem” and the Treasury section as important cultural icons. Lunch will be at the restaurant at the palace and “Ottoman Cuisine” specialties will be sampled. Optional cooking class for those who are interested. Free time for “Independent Discovery” and experiencing the beauties of the Sultanahmet Area. Sunset Cruise on the “Bosphorus” followed by a local seafood dinner.

Day 3: Spice Market and Ciya

Visit the world famous “Spice Market.” Then take the public ferry to “Kadikoy” where tourists explore the local market and lunch at “Ciya Sofrasi” Meet Chef Musa and optional cooking class in the afternoon.

Day 4: Hagia Sophia and Street Food

Visit “Blue Mosque” “Hagia Sophia” and rich street food delicacies of Istanbul including “Doner” Sandwich at Istiklal Street, fried mussels in “Beyoglu Cicek Pasaji” “Gulluoglu Baklava” for different types of baklava.

Day 5 : Izmir – Ephesus -Alacati

Early morning flight to Izmir. Continue and visit “Ephesus” Lunch at famous “Yandim Cavus” “Cop Sis” kebab. Continue to Alacati for shopping and visit a local farmers market in the late afternoon. Check in at the “Imren Han” hotel and Meet Chef Kayhan for traditional desert specialties including “Sakizli Muhallebi” and many others. Dinner includes discovering local restaurants of Alacati.

Day 6 :Pamukkale

Early departure for “Pamukkale” visit the ruins of “Hierapolis”. Lunch at a local restaurant with regional specialties. Optional time for the “Baths” and shopping in the afternoon.

Day 7: Fly from Denizli to Istanbul and home.

Table 2: *Sample Itinerary 2 (Extended Itinerary designed for gourmet tourists for a longer duration).***15 Day Food and Culture Tour to Istanbul-Izmir-Pamukkale-Konya-Cappadocia-Adana-Antakya-Gaziantep****Day 1: Arrival in Istanbul**

Welcome dinner at a “Meyhane” with sample traditional appetizers and the drink “Raki”

Day 2: Topkapi Palace and Cooking Class

Visit the Topkapi Palace (residence of Ottoman Sultans). Visit the Palace kitchens as well as the “Harem” and the “Treasury” section. Lunch will be at a restaurant at the Palace, specializing in Ottoman cuisine.

Afternoon, a half day cooking class learning to cook 3 dishes such as “Ispanakli Borek” (phyllo dough pastry with spinach and feta), “Hunkar Begendi” (roasted eggplant puree topped with chunks of lamb), “Irmik Helva” (semolina halva). Sunset cruise on the Bosphorus, followed by local seafood dinner.

Day 3: Spice Market and Ciya

Visit the world famous “Spice Market”. Then take the public ferry to Kadikoy where tourists will explore the local market there and have lunch at Ciya Sofrasi. Meet Chef Musa and cooking class in the afternoon

Day 4: Haghia Sophia and Street Food

Visit the Blue Mosque, Haghia Sophia and explore the street food of Istanbul. Visit Istiklal Street for a “Doner” sandwich, fried mussels in Beyoglu Cicek Pasaj, Gulluoglu Baklava for different types of baklava.

Day 5: Izmir- Ephesus - Kusadasi

Early morning flight to Izmir. Continue and visit “Ephesus” and the ruins. Lunch at famous “Yandim Cavus” “Cop Sis” kebab. Continue to “Kusadasi” for shopping and try local specialties for dinner escorted by a local guide.

Day 6: Pamukkale – Konya

Early bus departure for “Pamukkale” visit “Hierapolis”. Lunch at a local restaurant with regional specialties. Spend some time in the town of Pamukkale and depart for Konya. Dinner at the hotel in Konya.

Day 7: Konya

Visit “Mevlana” Museum and “Mevlana Cultural Center” Famous Konya Tandir Kebab” for lunch. See examples from the famous “Seljuk” architecture in the afternoon. Dinner at a local restaurant.

Day 8: Cappadocia

Early departure by bus. Lunch at an old Greek house where local women will prepare borek, meatballs, rice and baklava. In the afternoon, visit Goreme Open Air museum and explore the Early Christian churches carved into the rocks.

Stay at a boutique hotel carved into the rocks.

Dinner will be in Urgup where the local “Testi Kebab” (kebab cooked in amphora shaped claypot) will be tasted.

Day 9: Cooking Class and Wine tasting

Early morning hot air ballooning followed by brunch consisting of home made bread, local cheese and jams.

Hike through Zelve Valley. Then pottery atelier where locals have been making pottery since the Neolithic times.

Lunch will be at a small village restaurant where all the dishes are cooked in claypot in a “tandoori” style oven.

Cooking class will be in “Uchisar” making different specialties including Bulgur soup with tomato broth and “Manti” (Turkish style ravioli filled with ground meat, served with garlic yogurt on top)

Before dinner, a Cappadocian wine tasting.

Day 10: Adana

Continue to Adana in a chartered bus. Adana is especially famous for its kebab. Visit a farmers market, “Salgam” (turnip juice) and “pickle” shops. You will taste local deserts such as “Halka Tatli” and “Karakus”. Dinner will be at a traditional Kebab restaurant where you will enjoy “Adana Kebab” and local appetizers.

Day 11: Antakya (Antioch)

Continue to Antakya by chartered bus. Lunch at a restaurant in “Harbiye” specializing in local cuisine. Antakya cuisine is influenced also by Syrian and Lebanese cultures. See that “pomegranate molasses” is widely used as well as all kinds of bulgur. Tour of in Harbiye to see the local silk producers and olive oil soap stores. Visit the Senkoy village and have tea with locals and learn how to make zaa’tar spice mixture.

Day 12: Antakya

Visit Antioch Mosaic Museum to see the 2nd century old mosaics. Walk in the market area to see the local produce as well as the spice special to Antakya. Try the famous “Kunefe” desert and hummus and za’atar bread.

Day 13: Gaziantep:

Continue to Gaziantep in a chartered bus. Lunch at a local home and meet the talented home chefs. Late afternoon walk in the marketplace to see the coppersmith masters. Visit the famous “Baklava” stores. Dinner will be at the “Imam Cagdas” restaurant with local delicacies.

Day 14: Gaziantep:

Continue to explore the culinary treasures of Gaziantep. Try “Nohut Durum” (chickpea wrapped in a local lavash with sumac), “Liver Kebab” and “Katmer” (desert). Visit a store specializing in chili peppers and learn about the differences in “Urfu” pepper and “Maras” pepper. Dinner will be at a restaurant serving traditional Gaziantep cuisine.

Day 15: Fly from Gaziantep to Istanbul and home

7 Recommendations and Potential Implications

The interview sessions provided in-depth information in relation with the topic and were very helpful in putting an innovative tourism product together. Based on the recommendations made by the interviewees and after studying the related literature, an action list could be prepared including: (a) making a recommendation to the Ministry of Tourism in Turkey to increase the content of Food Tourism related materials, (b) developing new “Food Tourism Guide” including itineraries under the guidance of Ministry of Tourism while covering seven geographic regions of Turkey, (c) promoting the official “Food Guide” which covers the regional cuisines of Turkey in detail while illustrating the specialties in detail. (d) increasing the number of educational resources in relation with “Food Tourism.” (e) exploring the role of innovation in marketing a tourism destination (f) potential incorporation of the use of social media in promoting Turkish cuisine and culture.

As mentioned earlier, the study was designed to bring academicians and practitioners together. This is a preliminary study, seeking to develop more de-

tailed innovative gastronomic travel itineraries in the future and application of this study could serve as a framework. Promoting and selling a destination could also be the partial scope of the itineraries while incorporating innovative technology use in the future. The role of ICT and DMS should be examined in order to have a better understanding of developing and marketing the tourism products. For example by considering the characteristics of the global “foodie” travelers and examining similar tools available worldwide, an online itinerary builder could be developed at the official tourism website of Turkey. Such an attempt may accelerate the integration process of the electronic marketing strategies. But even some points mentioned in this current study could be beneficial for other researchers or practitioners in further developing more innovative tourism products or even research instruments. New itineraries could then be developed and marketed through the government by using innovation after understanding the importance of subject matter for Turkey. It is believed that such a new approach would not only create an awareness of Turkish culinary tourism in the academic literature and media, but also would create an agenda for others who would be involved in this area in the future.

8 Limitations

This was an exploratory study hence the results were preliminary in nature. Therefore the limitations could be tied to the number and quality of the interviewee

responses, the limited representation from the different segments of the culinary world and the generalizability of the results. Further research will be conducted while exploring the role of using innovative technologies in developing the “Food Tourism” sector in Turkey.

Raziskava o povezanosti turške regionalne kulinarike in destinacij kulturnega turizma

Povzetek

Na kulinariko in turizem lahko gledamo kot na tesno povezana elementa, ki ob mnogih različnih priložnostih povezujejo ljudi in kulture. Raziskave so pokazale, da lahko na kulinariko gledamo kot na najmočnejšo turistično doživetje in pomembnejšo turistično atrakcijo. Glavni namen članka je določiti in oceniti pomen kulinaričnega turizma za Turčijo in zasnovati številne inovativne itinerarije, povezane z regionalno kulinariko, po katerih bi se lahko zgledovali tudi drugod. Na podlagi intervjujev smo prišli do štirih novih spoznanj. Študija priporoča, da turško ministrstvo za turizem pripravi seznam ukrepov, zasnuje nove turistične itinerarije, povezane s kulinariko, in izda uradni kulinarični vodnik. Spoznanja, pridobljena v študiji, lahko služijo kot osnova za nadaljnje raziskave o rabi novih tehnologij v sektorjih, ki se ukvarjajo s kulinaričnimi destinacijami.

Ključne besede: kulinarični turizem, Turčija, regionalna kulinarika, inovacija

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