

The Synergy of Food and Tourism: A New Recipe for Regional Tourism Development

Bipithalal Balakrishnan Nair

*Sol International Hospitality Management, Woosong University, Daejeon, South Korea,
E-mail, bipi.nair@wsu.ac.kr*

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Abstract

Food has become an emerging subject in tourism and leisure activities, with versatile applicability as part of the community culture and visitor's experience. The commercialisation of possessions conveys sustainable growth, identification, geographical and multicultural characteristics of products and services. Food infuses the travel experience, and particular roles of food in tourism might become more important in certain circumstances. The tastes that travellers acquire through food tourism bridge a place's culture and tradition since it provides insight into diverse communities through the lenses of tasting, food processing and eating. As a social process connecting cultures through people, tourism gains considerable advantages through food tourism. Many developing countries in Asia and Africa have enormous potential for food tourism. This conceptual paper evaluates the Durban area's food tourism potential and thus proposes four strategies to promote regional development. These strategies are developed by linking the food with other visitor attractions as a means of economic diversification.

Keywords: Durban tourism; Cuisine; Maize tourism; Agro tourism; regional development

Introduction

Today, food figures prominently in the worldwide tourism industry. Its psychosocial aspects play a crucial role in holiday activity and visitor selection. Food tourism helps to connect the economic, cultural, political, and ecological facets of destinations. Food has a long-standing association with tourism; nevertheless, only lately has it been fully appreciated for its role in the entire holiday experience (Henderson, 2009; Okumus, 2020). Contemporary tourists are much more conscientious, well-qualified, well-travelled and continually striving for more prosperous, more unforgettable experiences. As an aspect of the comprehensive travel experience, food plays a prominent role in consumer purchase behaviour and expertise, tourism products and advocacy efforts and can serve as a powerful tool for destination growth (Henderson, 2019; Bertella, 2020).

Food and drink contribute to the memory of a vacation or travel trip. Tourism contributes to globalisation and other aspects of the cuisine establishment. It requires a compromise between the 'local' and the 'foreign' foods (Hall, 2020; Henderson, 2019); therefore, if used appropriately as a tourist attraction, food can become a pull factor. As one of the successful destinations in food tourism promotion, Thailand offers evidence that promotional strategies can leverage a country's tourism potential (Lunchaprasith & Macleod, 2018). Similarly, Hall (2005) describes the types of food tourism destinations. Some are old, having great cultural and historical significance, with interested tourists invading them year upon year to experience the gastronomic culture. Some unique examples of this kind of tourism include visits to food suppliers, fine dining festivals, restaurants and specific areas linked to foods, sampling special culinary items, making notes on how to prepare a specific meal,

culinary tourist loops, factory/winery/distillery visits, kitchen tours, plantations, wine cellars and other places of interest, such as exhibitions, expositions, and culinary tours.

Foods, particularly those of traditional food cultures, serve as a country's informal ambassadors, focussing international communities on its traditional and cultural background to elicit favourable creativity. Moreover, food tourism can channel and amalgamate various other forms of tourism, such as agrotourism, cultural tourism, ethnic tourism, and spice tourism. Adequate positioning and promotional activities are essential for attaining the preferred outcome. Interestingly, many South Asian and African countries have immense potential for food tourism, which they have yet to explore. South Africa is one example. Durban in South Africa stands out for making a great food impression—precisely, it has been called the best street food city in the world (Nair, 2020; Singh & Bhoola, 2016; Steinmetz, 2018). Compared to Durban cuisine's potential as a crowd puller, the current tourism promotions primarily focus on resources, such as beaches, sports, and culture (KMPG, 2005). Thus, this study focuses on positioning food tourism as one of Durban's critical attractions and discussing its strategies and implications.

This paper identifies the food tourism potential of Durban and suggests four strategies (see Figure 1) for further development. Durban — as a cultural pot of South Africa with a multicultural society and therefore the ethnic cuisines, have significant latent to develop food tourism through ethnic restaurants there. Also, combining food tourism with other spheres of the economy, such as agriculture (especially maize), sports will be a reliable source. Finally, the gastrodiploamacy of Durban is also discussed to position food tourism attributes as a fair practice to win hearts and minds.

Durban tourism

Durban has immense potential to become one of Africa's genuine tourism destinations. Durban is a city in South Africa's far-east, some 600 kilometres from Johannesburg. It is the provincial capital of KwaZulu-Natal and one of the country's most famous seaside resort towns, with excellent beaches and a tropical environment. The city is well-prepared to satisfy visitors' needs and has long been a popular vacation spot for locals. Durban is one of the world's most quickly expanding towns. The harbour is the busiest in South Africa, and it is ranked one of the top ten in the country.

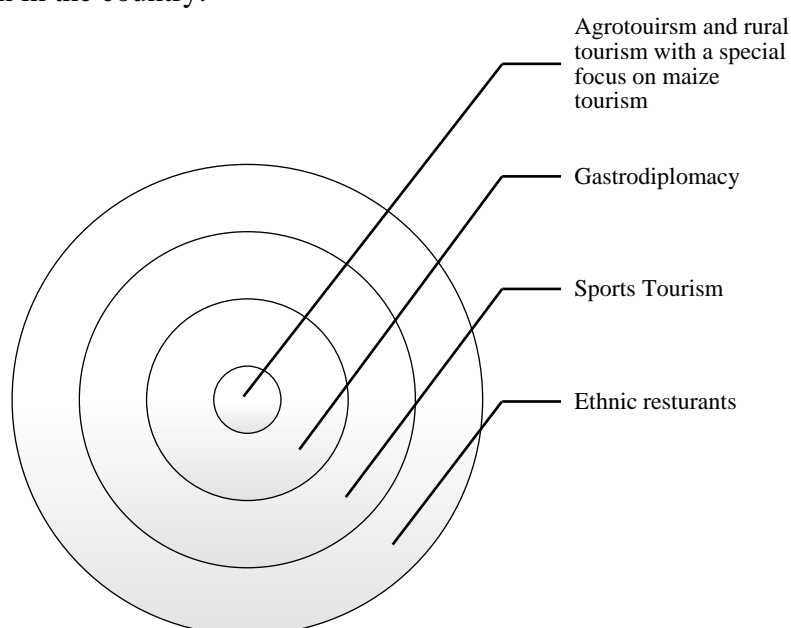


Figure 1: Proposed strategies for food tourism development in Durban (Source: Author)

Situated on the coast, Durban has several beaches and natural ecosystems. With its varied culture, the city's favourable climate makes for year-round tourism. Diverse in many dimensions, people travel from all over the world to witness various ethnic backgrounds. Durban's diversity of cuisine and Indigenous groups, with mostly Indian and Zulu traditions and cultures, well established. Research shows that this renders Durban a 'must visit' destination for national and foreign visitors. Durban is the gateway to 'the Kingdom of the Zulu' (a popular reference to the province of KwaZulu-Natal) (Turco, Swart, Bob & Moodley, 2014) – one among the top 10 destinations in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2019). It has established its reputation as one of South Africa's most successful year-round tourism destinations (Maharaj, Pillay & Sucheran, 2008).

Food tourism as the key strategy for Durban tourism

Positioning food tourism is a strategy for destination development, with Durban's spectrum of food tourism attractions ranges from general to special-interest tourism (SIT). Effectively promoted and established, food tourism could become one of Durban's prominent attractions. Similarly, facilitating food-related activities would benefit agriculture and the destination's tourism sector. Local food enhances and strengthens tourism commodities, while visitors offer a forum for expanding and growing local food goods. According to Hall (2020), building and encouraging culinary tourism is not easy, requiring some long-term strategic planning and efforts. As a crucial element of a country's cultural discourse, food is a strategic instrument to strengthen the foreign profile. While food and tourism are part of a structural network of development, tourism can raise quality products. Based on their biodiversity, ethnic cuisine and specialities, destinations seek to develop more new products and services. This article proposes four strategies for positioning food tourism within Durban tourism's overall development as follows.

Strategy 1: Food tourism and ethnic restaurants

Food tourism primarily deals with the motivation for travel to experience local foods (Long, 2018). It is a common and remunerative industry in domestic and international tourism, with a large effect on food-related businesses. The description, choice, assessment, and interpretation of the cuisines and dishes used in such tourism are cultural dynamics matters. When the tourism industry recognised the potential of food as an attraction and destination, it started to reach past the recognised repertoire of deserving cuisines and include a wider variety of food cultures and ethnic and regional specialisations within those cultures. Neoliberalism, industrialisation, globalisation, and displacement have modelled and changed contemporary society's food consumption (UNWTO, 2017).

Issues of control and influence are present during the description, collection, assessment and perception of culinary traditions and cuisine prominent in tourism. Ethnic foods are a powerful and dominant way of expressing national identity, cultural politics, and history, exhibiting values and traditions. However, selecting the varieties of dishes as a symbol of the nation for a multicultural society is complex. Authenticity, subjectivity, and power are the main aspects of selecting and developing ethnic restaurants.

Long (2018:1) states that "ethnic foods are defined partly by how they differ from the foods of the dominant culture, and their place within that culture reflects a history of being 'other.' Here, the opportunity to develop Durban's food tourism appears." Durban is a culturally rich city with a large assortment of beliefs and practices. English, Scottish, Zulu, Irish, Indian, and other South African cuisines can be found in the region. When visiting Durban, European tourists chose fish, as well as Italian and Portuguese cuisines. Both Indian and American tourists favoured Italian and Western or continental cuisine. While in Durban,

Chinese visitors considered their traditional cuisine to be especially appealing. These visitors were unfamiliar with Durban Indian cuisine (Singh & Bhoola, 2016). Many people deliberately ingest the ‘other’ unsatisfied with the usual; the unusual intrigues them. Modern tourists respect the host community, encouraging eating and enjoying the local foods on the premises. It represents authentic, specific behaviour in the tradition that foodways embody, verifying an encounter by savouring it (Hall, 2020). The cuisine is an effective way to learn about another society. Although food accompanies major social activities, it is also a persuasive phenomenon. Zulu people make up the central ethnic community of Durban, which also has a substantial number of people who can speak English and Indian languages. Indians have also significantly impacted Durban, offering it a diversity of history, cuisine, and religion. If these aspects of cultural diversity can support food tourism development, it will be a great initiative. For Durban, the number of ethnic dishes, mostly Indian, African, and British, will offer visitors (both international and domestic) a means of experiencing the destination’s cultural richness (Maharaj et al., 2008). Tourists and local citizens find numerous ethnic foods and dining outlets which allow interactions between people, to appreciate not only an unforgettable eating experience, separate from their everyday routine but also to develop a greater understanding of a specific country’s food culture and gastronomic identity (Kim & Iwashita, 2015; Kivela & Crofts, 2006).

Strategy 2: With sport tourism

For South Africa, especially for Durban, the sports industry supported by the country’s sports tourism council through various programs such as South Africa Sports Tourism (SAST) as part of a theme-based initiative. It has also been conceptualised to serve as an interconnected body in which current events may receive cohesive transactions funding, suitable sports events, and leisure opportunities can be created to benefit the tourism industry. According to Forno and Graziano (2014), the local food campaign has increasingly been associated with other recent changes in the food movement, such as taking on the complexities of food processing and the importance of local food. This can be seen as an opportunity to market the country’s culinary tourism, successfully implement food exhibitions, promote food-related attractions, and offer to the event attendees.

Strategy 3: Agro- and rural tourism

Liu, Nijkamp and Lin (2017) explain the relationship between gastronomy, food tourism and the agriculture specifics of a destination. They further explain that food delivers the flavours of ingredients, the surrounding cultures and flavour perceptions. The interactions you have and the experiences of the individuals you communicate with will result in economic development. However, the characteristics of gastronomy depend on which agricultural products people use. The strategies that connect the agronomy of a place to food tourism have more significant potential due to a broader framework (Bertella, 2020; Ellis, Park, Kim & Yeoman, 2018; Henderson, 2019). In South Africa and Durban, traditional farming practices, quality assurance, food safety practices, and traditional festivals are associated with harvesting and farming practices, especially grains, oilseed, fruits, and livestock. It requires cooperative strategies to diversify both forms of tourism. Across the globe, farmers have been fostering agritourism initiatives to raise farm profits. They are widening their presence to support more diversified industries as consumers do their farm visits too. Through agritourism, there are advantages such as creating good community bonds and nurturing scholastic acquaintance about agriculture. The corn maize is a common experience that typically takes place outdoors. It is usually part of an agritourism project in which tourists have an opportunity to get up close with farm animals in a healthy, secure, and enjoyable atmosphere (e.g., hayrides, petting zoos,

and picnic areas). In addition to its usage to attract customers, a corn maze may often be used to draw customers to a local farm store (Rutgers, 2020).

Proposing Maize tourism

Maize (corn) is one of South Africa and the KwaZulu-Natal region’s primary producers; it contributes 15 -16% of production (KPMG, 2005). It could be used for the expansion of food tourism by combining agrotourism. It is usually part of an agritourism project in which tourists have an opportunity to get up close with a farm in a healthy, secure, and enjoyable environment. There are many ways to develop maize tourism. For example, activities (hayrides, farm visit), attractions (traditional farmhouses, harvesting techniques), petting zoo and creating picnic areas. There are benefits for developing maize tourism: a) creating supplementary income, b) increased chance for selling the agricultural products, c) selling the farming practices, attractions, experience, and traditions d) seasonal and off seasonal supply.

This paper proposes a five-stage plan to develop Maize tourism as a key attraction (See Figure 2). Step 1: Research and study— to understand maize tourism’s scope and potential. Step 2: Categorisation according to the resources — categorisation of a farm as per the potential for developing innovative products. For instance, Maize tourism as a stand-alone activity or other activities like farm stay, hayrides, petting zoo, recreational and dining areas, heritage and cultural attractions and festivals. Step 3: Planning and development — infrastructure development and sustainability (eco-friendly development). Step 4: Marketing — effective marketing. And finally, Step 5: Launching — launch as a new product or reform the existing one

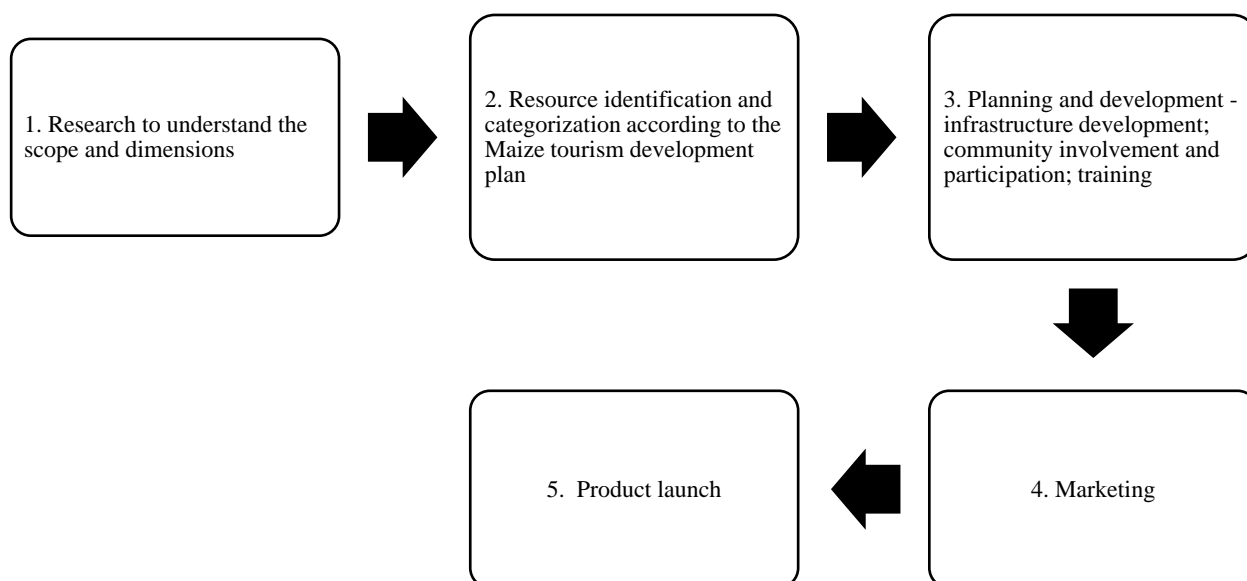


Figure 2: Maize tourism – strategies for development (Source: Author)

Strategy 4: Gastrodiplomacy

Gastrodiplomacy is utilising food as a form of diplomacy to promote foreign ties (Rockower, 2012). Precisely, gastrodiplomacy uses nutritional diplomacy to foster international relations between countries. He further explains how developing nations strive to establish more vital branding and positive credibility. For Durban, historical and multicultural cuisine can become a viable tool to enhance its food-tourism potential through gastrodiplomacy. “Food can function as a non-threatening way to gain favour among and make a connection with a foreign

audience” (Wilson, 2011: 23). According to the gastrodiploacy system, international cultures appeal to different publics. Therefore, utilising Durban’s gastronomic potential by positioning and promoting it through an international gastrodiploacy program can make significant changes in its global tourism image; “gastrodiploacy seeks to create a more oblique emotional connection to culture by using food as a medium for engagement” (Rockower, 2012: 236). In this respect, ‘gastrodiploacy’ is a novel method that could bring Durban cuisines to international platforms. This policy might theoretically raise the country’s export the rich gastronomy internationally is a great deal, diversify its tourist trade and boost its cultural presence in the world.

Destination management organisations (DMOs) can find examples of how successful gastrodiploacy can enhance the destination’s tourism potential. Thailand is the most successful example (Lipscomb, 2019; Rockower, 2012). Durban’s ethnic restaurants, South Africa’s far-reaching diaspora, food events and promotional campaigns can help this initiative. Following the Thai gastrodiploacy model requires strategically executing the global mission. Fernando’s (2019) nine ways of promoting gastrodiploacy and food tourism is useful, and this paper follows that format to formulate Durban’s strategies:

- Promotion of Durban or South African cuisine to the general community
- An incentive program to start ethnic restaurants overseas or to enhance Visiting Friends and Family (VFR) tourism
- Airport promotion—develop an appropriate strategy to introduce to international travellers the experience of Durban cuisine, also possible by creating eye-catching in-flight promotional materials
- South African diaspora can spread the cuisine and create culinary ambassadors
- Ethnic restaurants as information centres
- Public relations networking, digital marketing, promotional activities
- Quality assurance program to ensure quality and authenticity
- Product development and research
- Create a national dish or dishes

Conclusion

Food and cuisine are integral parts of one’s culture, further exhibiting a destination’s culture and identity. Food is an inevitable part of the tourism experience, and, in the current context, food tourism has emerged as special-interest tourism. It involves exploring unforgettable experiences and agritourism encounters that link what the region produces and develops with what the locals prepare and enjoy. The food-tourism growth phase is a city’s efforts to optimise its local food system’s productive capacity through tourism-related activities. For example, food tourism adds its position to heritage protection whilst encouraging creativity with new patterns of food innovation and culinary growth. One of the most significant changes that tourist visits to a small area will create is promoting local agriculture. This can benefit the economy and food supply whilst introducing tourists to local history. Durban is one of the famous South African cities, selected as the world’s best food city in 2019. However, the world has yet to discover Durban’s food tourism map. Considering the existing factors, it is high time to formulate the recipes for Durban culinary tourism. This study analyses Durban’s potential as a food-tourism destination and proposes four strategies for realising it.

First, this paper proposes the ethnic restaurants in Durban as the prime source of food-tourism development. The city’s multi-ethnic context is instrumental in enhancing its identity and becoming a food hub. The historical ties between Britain and India enhance the global opportunity. Durban’s Indian cuisine is among the famous food outlets across the country.

Therefore, it can act as the ambassador for domestic and international tourism. Second, its emergence as a sports-tourism destination can significantly collaborate with the food sector. Conducting exhibitions and trade shows will catalyse and spread Durban cuisines' greatness worldwide. Third, positioning food tourism through agrotourism is an effective strategy. Indeed, agrotourism is directly or indirectly connected with food tourism. The KwaZulu-Natal region is blessed with agricultural resources and heritage. Maize tourism is an innovative approach to combining the region's agronomy with the tourism sector, with a wide range of socio-economic, educational, and cultural benefits. Fourth, this paper suggests developing gastrodiplomacy missions to enhance the destination's food tourism potential by attracting hearts and minds through the stomach.

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