

Chefs' Visibility on the Official South African Tourism Website

Abstract

Andrea GIAMPICCOLI 
Department of Hospitality and Tourism,
Durban University of Technology,
Durban, South Africa, Email,
andrea.giampiccoli@gmail.com
Corresponding author

Erasmus Mzobanzi MNGUNI 
Department of Hospitality and Tourism,
Durban University of Technology,
Durban, South Africa, Email,
erasmus@dut.ac.za

Oliver MTAPURI 
Discipline of Development Studies,
University of KwaZulu Natal, Durban,
South Africa,
E-mail mtapurio@ukzn.ac.za

The objective of this study was to expound on the importance of food tourism as an important tourism sub-sector in which the figure of the chef has become an important marketing tool for destinations. Celebrity chefs enjoy worldwide renown and their image contributes to a destination's tourism potential. A tourism website can act as the tourism window to the country by providing all the necessary travel information necessary for planning the trip. It also serves to market the country by highlighting its attractions, covering all sectors including food tourism. In terms of methodology, this article analyzes the visibility of the figure of the chef and food tourism on South African Tourism website as a secondary source of data and insights. The results show a lack of visibility of chefs (and more generally, the absence of food tourism topics) on the website. The study recommends utilizing the website to enhance and valorize the role of food tourism and especially that of chefs in the country's tourism sector to reflect its burgeoning potential and nature as well as its new-found importance for attracting tourists to destinations. By implication, it emphasizes the fact that chefs do matter in food tourism.

Keywords: Tourism, food tourism, chefs, gastronomy, tourism destinations; internet; websites

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Introduction

While the literature on food tourism – or the relationship between food and tourism – dates back three decades, there has been increased interest in these topics since 2008 (Ellis et al., 2018). Many terminologies are used to define food tourism (Kattiyapornpong et al., 2022; Giampiccoli & Mnguni, 2022) with the most common terms used are 'culinary tourism', 'food tourism' or 'gastronomic tourism' being very similar and also occasionally interchangeable (Ellis et al., 2018: 252). A popular definition is proposed by Hall & Sharples (2003: 10), who describe food tourism as "visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production region are the primary motivating factors for travel". Restaurants and food outlets in general are part of food or gastronomic tourism (Zain et al., 2018) that encompass a variety of activities related to food and beverages, including high-end restaurants, street food and "competition-winning or celebrity chefs [as well as] local chefs" (Kattiyapornpong et al., 2022: 244). Restaurants, and other types of food outlets are the most common travel activities and are projected to increase in popularity (Stone et al., 2020). Given this context, chefs play a relevant role in food tourism. The quality of food is important, and a chef's ability is thus fundamental to success (Mahfud et al., 2019). Hotels and restaurants that are renowned for the quality of their food become international tourist attractions thereby creating a cult out of celebrity chefs who are recognized worldwide (Henderson, 2009: 319). However, tourists are not only attracted to Michelin starred or famous restaurants (Kattiyapornpong et al., 2022) and chefs in all kinds of outlets play a central role in selecting ingredients and recipes, and preparing dishes that attract tourists, thus contributing to a destination's appeal.

This article explores the visibility of chefs on the official South African Tourism (SA Tourism) website. It should be noted that, as reflected on the SA Tourism website, "South African Tourism is the tourism marketing arm of the South African government. Simply put, our job is to promote the country domestically and internationally, whether for leisure, business or events tourism" (South African Tourism, n.d., a). A destination's image is important for attracting tourists in this competitive sector (Li et al., 2021: 1). The internet and websites play a central role in tourism marketing and tourists visit various websites to make their destination decisions (Martínez-González & Álvarez-Albelo, 2021). Official tourism websites are the most common tool used by tourists to search for information (Adel et al., 2021). An effective government website is thus fundamental to food tourism promotion (Adel et al., 2021) as destinations should be made known to tourists through the media and the internet (Ashish & Shelley, 2015). A chef's approach to food and how he/she manages it can also influence tourists' decision-making (see Inwood et al., 2009). A chef plays an important function in igniting appetites and satisfying the food needs of tourists leading to tourists to choose destinations that appeal to their taste buds and a lasting impression of the destination's experience. This article contributes to the literature on food tourism by exploring chefs' visibility on the official SA Tourism website and highlighting the roles played by chefs beyond tourism.

Literature review

The internet and government tourism websites

Food is a central element of tourism experiences (Fountain, 2022) and food tourism is promoted by many countries around the world (Ashish & Shelley, 2015). The use of the internet to promote all aspects of tourism has expanded significantly in recent years (Horng et al., 2010). Tourism is well-suited to marketing via this medium (Yousaf & Xiucheng, 2018) which is a low-cost option that offers easy access and availability around the world. The internet has thus become "the first point of embarkation for tourists" (Yousaf & Xiucheng, 2018: 425). A number of studies (Spinelli, 2021; Baniya & Thapa, 2021;



Shrestha et al., 2021; Choi et al., 2007; Adel et al., 2021; Horng et al., 2010) have analyzed tourism websites. Spinelli (2021) investigated issues relating to sustainability on the official websites of Italian regions, while Baniya & Thapa (2021) examined corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication among small and medium-sized tourism enterprises through their websites. Tourism websites assist tourists to make travel decisions (Shrestha et al., 2021) and are fundamental in promoting destinations. They offer an important first impression of a country's tourism sector and provide a wide array of useful information to travelers such as visa requirements and tourism products (Shrestha et al., 2021). Shrestha et al. (2021) therefore conclude that, a good tourism website is a prerequisite for purposes of marketing a destination and for good governance and business.

Governments around the world use tourism websites to attract tourists (Horng et al., 2010). The official tourism website “plays a primary role” in this regard (Spinelli, 2021) by providing information on cultural and heritage sites, entertainment, dining, and hyperlinks to service providers to enable tourists to plan their trip. The content and characteristics of these websites influence tourists' perceptions of a destination as well as their decision to visit it (Milwood & Crick, 2021). Likewise, it is an important channel through which to advertise gastronomic tourist destinations cultures and cuisine (Horng et al., 2010). Food tourism is represented on various official tourism websites around the world. Horng et al.'s (2010) survey of coverage of gastronomy on all the Asian countries' official tourism websites concluded that an important initial step to promote culinary tourism is to foreground a country's cuisine and food culture (gastronomy) in its advertisements so as to appraise tourists of these features before they arrive at a destination. Malaysia's official tourism website uses “close-up of meal” images to generate interest in the country's cuisine and promote its attractiveness as a tourist destination (Jalis et al., 2014: 104). The Korean Tourism Organization's website presents a comprehensive outline of the country's traditional gastronomy and profiles seasonal cuisine and the chefs that practice traditional culinary styles (Horng et al., 2010). However, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and the Maldives's websites do not mention food related issues such as recipes or chefs. Ashish & Shelley (2015) conclude that the “official tourism websites of SAARC [South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation] nations failed miserably on providing information on food tourism.” In the case of South Africa, the article valorizes food tourism for several reasons. Food tourism contributes a lot to the country's economy through incomes and jobs; it is important for the preservation of the country's diverse cultures undergirded by 11 official languages and associated cultures, and it enhances the tourism experience. Food tourism benefits small and big tourism businesses such as restaurants, hotels and local markets. The country's famous wines and culinary offerings attract tourists and present opportunities for chefs to innovate thereby enriching and adding to the country's gastronomy a global appeal. Food tourism, therefore, presents the country with opportunities to celebrate its rich cultural heritage. Government tourism websites should not only play the role of ‘travel agency’ (which, of course, is also important) but open a window to the country, showcasing its resources and characteristics such as food and beverages, history, landscape, cities and so on. Merely serving as a ‘travel agency’ does not fully enhance a county's tourism potential. Official tourism websites should be colorful, attractive, and well-designed/easy to use and provide a comprehensive array of information.

Chefs in food tourism

The figure of the “Chef, as one of the creative people in tourism development, is a valuable resource” (Mahfud et al., 2019: 1058). Chefs are interpreters of the local territory (UNWTO, 2019) and showcasing the qualities of local chefs is a valuable marketing tool to promote local gastronomies (Adel et al., 2021). Chefs can also contribute to revitalization of the tourism sector. For example, Las Vegas is using food to reinvent itself beyond gambling by highlighting its exceptional restaurants with some having links to renowned chefs (Henderson, 2009). Therefore, high-end cuisine and famous chefs can be central to promoting a destination (Huang et al., 2022). Food tourists gather much of their information from TV shows that feature chefs and gastronomists (University of Central Florida, Online), making celebrity chefs well known and followed locally and internationally. Celebrity chefs and their restaurants are thus potential tourist attractions (Henderson, 2018). Chefs can influence culinary trends and be a source of national pride and inspiration to young chefs (López De La Lama, et al., 2020). They also support local supply chains and produce (Huang et al., 2022). All these attributes make chefs important role players in tourism and beyond.

Celebrity chefs' importance in promoting tourism destinations is well recognized; for example, they and their restaurants have done much to put urban tourism destinations such as New York and Los Angeles on the map (Chen et al., 2017). Many national tourism organizations recognize their value. One example is the Korea Tourism Organization promoting “the country as a culinary destination in collaboration with famous celebrities, including star chefs and movie stars” (Kim et al., 2018: 377). Celebrity chefs are ‘destination ambassadors’ in various destinations, for example, Singapore and Japan. They also have the potential to go beyond promoting a destination to championing good ethics and sustainability (Giousmpasoglou et al., 2020). Celebrity chefs and gourmets are role models for travelers and their restaurants create immense recognition and value for tourism destinations (Demirkol & Cifci, 2020). Celebrity chefs work internationally; for example, western celebrity chefs in Singapore are tourism assets (Henderson, 2018). They also promote street food (Fusté-Forné, 2021) and food trucks (Wessel, 2012).

While a celebrity chef is not necessarily a Michelin starred one, Michelin recognition can enhance the status of a chef and his/her restaurant (Madeira et al., 2022; Batat, 2021). Michelin-starred chefs understand that food tourism involves more than a restaurant's design and recipes; it should also promote the local context (Batat, 2021). Their coverage on television and in food magazines makes such chefs ‘a tourist attraction’; “the lived luxury gastronomic plays a strong role in shaping the perceptions and attitudes of tourists toward the tourism destination” (Batat, 2021: 153). As Batat notes, their “creativity and

ranking [are] a core differentiator” (2021: 160). Michelin starred chefs’ influence is not limited to tourism; they are part of the local development context and are influencers. Luxury gastronomy thus not only promote a destination, but it can also contribute to tourists, society and the local economy’s well-being as well as promote local and native produce (Hjalager & Wahlberg, 2014). For example, the role of chefs in tourism and agriculture is recognized in the South Pacific context (see Oliver & Berno, 2016). The relationship between food and travel brought about agrotourism worldwide as travelers can indulge in farm-to-fork experiences when at destinations abroad (Cărătuș Stanciu, 2015). Chefs can contribute to sustainability and social inclusion (Fernando & Kumarasinghe, 2022; López De La Lama et al., 2020), local identity (Legrand et al., 2020) and in shaping future generations of chefs (Inwood et al., 2009). Their role therefore extends beyond strict tourism. At the same time, each chef has his/her own style, priorities, approach, personality and place identity with the destination (Batat, 2021). Local chefs can be linked to travelers’ desire for an authentic experience (Demirkol & Cifci, 2020), hence, food cultures are associated with important cultures such as indigenous cultures and indigenous ways of living.

However, under some circumstance, chefs’ understanding of food and food tourism can create difficulties. In the South Pacific, for example, local chefs are of the view that only European cuisine is acceptable to tourists; to the extent that they consider local food as inadequate, in other words, “not good enough” (Berno, 2020: 240). Such an approach is counterproductive to local development and to food tourism as many tourists appreciate local food. In contrast, Fernando & Kumarasinghe (2022) found that Sri Lankan chefs tend to promote local food both at home and internationally. This is good practice worthy of emulation in destinations such as South Africa given its abundance of offerings in the food tourism sector both for local and international tourist. It is important to highlight that, while celebrity chefs and luxury gastronomy/restaurants are important in promoting a destination, any type of chef/restaurant can contribute to such. As noted by the Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance and Skist, success does not depend on being a Michelin starred chef (2015). A study on gastronomic tourists’ experiences in Thailand based on an analysis of tourists’ reviews on online platforms revealed that “none of the local and authentic food experiences refers to famous or star-restaurants” (Kattiyapornpong et al., 2022: 250). The 2020 World Food Travel Monitor also concluded that food related tourist activities range from eating in high-end restaurants to patronizing a food cart (Stone et al., 2020:40). For example, street food is now an integral factor in promoting a destination’s image (Cifci et al., 2021). Meal-sharing, is where guests virtually connect to amateur or professional chefs in home restaurants via the internet (Mhlanga, 2022) and is becoming increasingly popular. Meal-sharing, which promotes local people’s welfare and sustainability (Cifci et al., 2021) enable tourists to have a ‘feel’ of the local experience at affordable prices in many destinations (Cifci et al., 2021).

Food tourism in South Africa

In 2006, Du Rand & Heath (2006) observed that, although South Africa has a rich tradition of culinary resources it is still to take advantage of its food tourism potential. However, the good inroads being made in tourism and the emergence of discerning customers has given impetus to South African entrepreneurs and innovative chefs to develop local cuisine (Mnguni & Giampiccoli, 2019). The South African culinary heritage is multicultural, reflecting African, Asian and European influences as the country’s chefs produced a culinary style of its own kind that scaffolds and creates a proud sense of nostalgia and history (Holmes, n.d., online). South Africa boasts a wide variety of food and is thus well-placed to promote food tourism (Mnguni & Giampiccoli, 2022). Indeed, a 2020 study asserts that, South Africa is coming of age and is fast becoming a thrilling example of a gastronomic country in the world and a wine mecca (Garibaldi, 2020). Data on food tourism in South Africa are also encouraging.



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Private Bag X424, Pretoria, 0001, South Africa. Tel: (+27 12) 444 6780; Fax: (+27 12) 444 7927
Private Bag X9154, Cape Town, 8000, South Africa. Tel: (+27 21) 469 5800; Fax: (+27 21) 465 3216

SA Culinary Olympics Team brings home medals

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The Minister of Tourism Mmamoloko Kubayi-Ngubane congratulates South Africa’s Culinary Olympics Team, which showed off its full hand through talent and taste perfections in the biggest international culinary arts competition in Stuttgart, Germany this week.

Team SA returns home tomorrow from the 25th IKA Culinary Olympics with three bronze medals after competing with 2000 chefs from 70 countries.

The Springbok squad, as they are affectionately known, competed in two categories; the Chef’s Table, entailing seven different dishes for twelve people and the Restaurant of Nations, a three-course menu for 110 people.

“South Africa’s participation in this globally acclaimed culinary event has firmly placed the country on the culinary world stage which should be celebrated by all South Africans. We congratulate them for a job well done and are proud of their achievements as they showed off their culinary abilities and highest level of dedication in this renowned competition, under the auspices of the SA Chefs Association (SACA),” said Minister Kubayi-Ngubane.

The Department is particularly thrilled that one of the graduates of our National Youth Training Programme (NYCTP), Sifiso Chiziane, formed part of the 2020 culinary team.

“We partnered with South African Chefs Association in training the youth through NYCTP and Mr Chiziane is one of more than 2400 youth from disadvantaged backgrounds who have been given life changing opportunities through the programme. I hope this serves as motivation to other young chefs in the sector,” said Minister Kubayi-Ngubane.

Mr Chiziane is currently employed at the Johannesburg-based African Pride Restaurant in Melrose Arch and works under the mentorship of Chef Adrian Vigus-Brown.

Over the past 40 years, SACA has scooped bronze, silver and gold medals for the country at the Culinary Olympics, placing South Africa firmly at the forefront of culinary global standards. The public is encouraged to give the team a warm welcome at OR Tambo International Airport as they return home from Germany on Saturday morning at 08:45.



Figure 1. Ministry of Tourism, 2020.

In 2019 wine and food tourism entrepreneurs reported a growth of 60% from the previous year (Correia, 2019, online). South Africa also offers niche localities and different types of food and some exotic. For example, Franschhoek is described as “a fashionable food and wine destination situated in the heart of the Cape Winelands” (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2019: 297) while Halal food tourism could be promoted in a city like Durban (see Bhoola, 2020). Furthermore, the wine tourism sector encourages food tourism anchored in traditional foods through food tourism (Akinola et al., 2020). It is worth noting that, as illustrated in Figure 1, South African chefs are well-respected internationally. The fact that the South African team brought back home medals from the 25th IKA Culinary Olympics in Germany (a prestigious event) is a reflection of the team’s growing acumen and stature given the stiff competition the team encountered as illustrated by the presence of 2,000 competing chefs from 70 countries.

The South African Tourism (SA Tourism) website, food tourism and chefs

The SA Tourism website indicates that “South African Tourism is the tourism marketing arm of the South African government. Simply put, our job is to promote the country domestically and internationally, whether for leisure, business or events tourism” (South African Tourism, n.d., a). As the official tourism website, its role is to provide relevant information to potential business, leisure or event tourists. It should offer up-to-date information on available tourism products, services and activities in line with current tourism market trends. As highlighted in the previous section, food tourism and chefs are important current ‘attractions’ in the tourism market. Chefs, especially (but not only) celebrity chefs, are an ‘exploitable tourism attraction’. It is against this background that this section analyzes the presence of chefs on the SA Tourism website. Table 1 shows the SAT website menu, which guides prospective tourists on the main topics/components of the website and thus creates an important first impression.

Table 1. SA Tourism website menu/sub-menu. Source: South African Tourism (n.d, b)

Discover the perfect holiday	Plan a successful business event	Travel trade partners	Learn more about South African Tourism
Welcome to South Africa	Why South Africa About South Africa Case studies Partners	News	‘Just one page – not sub-menu’
What you need to know People Money Geography Health Facilities Weather Transport Plan your trip	Planning a meeting	Events Events calendar	
Things to do Overview Wildlife safari Breathtaking scenery Sun-soaked coast Active adventure Bustling city life Vibrant culture	Incentives	Research	
Places to go Overview Provinces Big city life Small town charm	Events calendar Highlighted events Events calendar	TGCSA [Tourism Grading Council of South Africa]	
Events	Press centre	Lilizela Tourism Awards	
Get in touch	Get in touch	Get in touch	

The website is divided into four main sections: discover the perfect holiday, plan a successful business event, travel trade partners, and learn more about South African Tourism. The first two essentially aim to attract tourists while the last two relate to business-to-business interactions, business investment, tourism research and SA Tourism corporate issues. It is immediately apparent that ‘food tourism’ (or an item with similar terminology) does not appear on the menu. The page ‘Things to do’ within ‘discover the perfect holiday’ lists a number of attractions such as wildlife safaris and breathtaking scenery. This does not mean that food is not present at all (as discussed below) but it creates the impression that food (and beverages) are not a main attraction. Clicking on “What you need to know” yields more information about the country, including people, money, geography, health, facilities, weather, transport, and planning one’s trip. In addition, the information that is provided is extremely brief. For example, clicking on ‘people’ reveals a small slide with the following:

Table 2. ‘People’ link on SA Tourism website

Population	Languages	Religions
South Africa is home to multi-cultural melting pot of 55 million beautiful people of diverse origins, cultures, languages, and religions.	Although English is widely spoken and is used for informational signage, South Africa celebrates diversity in language with a total of eleven official languages. These languages are Afrikaans, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga and English.	Enshrined in the South African constitution is the right for all people to practice their religion free from persecution. The most practiced religions in South Africa include Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism.

Source: South African Tourism (n.d, c)

More needs to be done for a country that presents itself as a rainbow nation that is rich in people and cultural diversity. The presence of certain categories of the sectors of the tourism industry at the exclusion of others could be considered a reflection

of the importance of the features that are presented. The page on “vibrant culture” presents activities such as bicycle tours and museums as well as items related to food and chefs. For example, “Up close and personal; July 2022” is about Chef Marcus Modimokwane. Other examples include “Marina Appelbaum: Nikos and Old Ducky French Café” and “Xhosa cuisine: a delicious blend of ancient and modern”. The latter contains a ‘food’ tag (see South African Tourism, n.d., d) and clicking on it directs one to various tourism activities/products which do not always focus on food (or chefs) topics. A search for ‘chef’ in the search box on the food ‘tag’ page (see South African Tourism, n.d., e) proposes a few options in a drop-down style (see Figure 1); however, the results (see Figure 2) show various (603) tourism activities/products (South African Tourism, n.d., f).

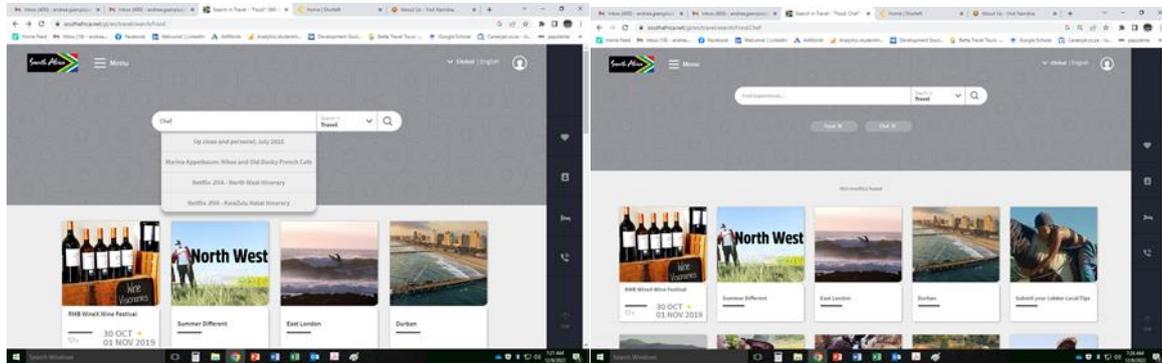


Figure 2. SA Tourism webpage, Search page. Source: South African Tourism (n.d., e).

Figure 3. Results of ‘chef’ word search. Source: South African Tourism (n.d., f)

However, when clicking on some of these products (we clicked on the first five) the word ‘chef’ could not be found despite the fact that the products were part of the result of the word search for ‘chef’. Examples are provided below:

- RMB WineX Wine Festival – no mention of ‘chef’ (South African Tourism, n.d., f)
- Summer Different – no mention of ‘chef’ (South African Tourism, n.d., g)
- Big City Life. East London – no mention of ‘chef’ (South African Tourism, n.d., h)
- Big City Life. Durban – no mention of ‘chef’. (South African Tourism, n.d., i)
- Lekker local Tips – no mention of ‘chef’ (South African Tourism, n.d., l)

This result is certainly somewhat surprising to those with a keen interest on food and chefs. Overall, the website works extremely well. Lastly, we searched for the word ‘chef’ on the travel homepage (see Figure 3).

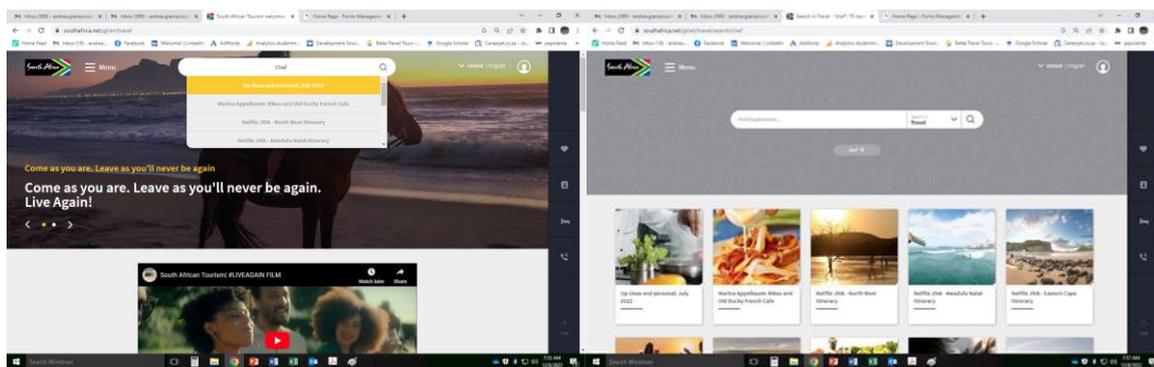


Figure 3. Travel homepage. Source: South African Tourism (n.d., b). Figure 4. Travel homepage, ‘chef’ search results

The results of this search (see Figure 4) show many tourism activities/products in South Africa. Again, the first five, were considered on their use of the word ‘chef’, producing the following results:

- Up close and personal; July 2022 – as noted above, this is about chef Marcus Modimokwane (South African Tourism, n.d., o)
- Marina Appelbaum: Nikos and Old Ducky French Café – as highlighted above, this is about a chef, Marina Appelbaum (South African Tourism, n.d., p)
- Netflix JIVA – The North West Itinerary lists ‘Dinner at Stef’s Table’, described as: “A small intimate restaurant hidden away on the main road of Schoemansville, in a rough-hewn rock building amidst lush greenery. The à la carte menu offers delicious Mediterranean, Asian, and South African dishes with a French touch, lovingly planned and



prepared by co-host and chef, Stef. Only the best quality products as well as fresh herbs from our garden are used” (South African Tourism, n.d., q)

- Netflix JIVA – The KwaZulu-Natal itinerary includes:
 - “Dinner at Skyfall Restaurant, Brahman Hills
At Skyfall Restaurant, each plate is a masterpiece of culinary excellence and beauty with all of the ingredients ethically sourced from the surrounding farms and meticulously presented by their leading chef”
 - Afternoon Cruise
Enjoy a cruise along the Durban Harbour
Dinner at Chef’s Table (South African Tourism, n.d., r)
- Netflix JIVA – The Eastern Cape Itinerary includes Dinner at Muse, Stanley Street
“Muse, where food is seen as an art form and the chefs the artists. This fine-dining restaurant has a relaxed atmosphere and suggests making an evening of the experience” (South African Tourism, n.d., s).

It is evident from these results that chefs (and, indeed, food tourism in general) are not regarded as possible key points in the tourism milieu on the SA Tourism website. While they are not completely absent, the information is extremely difficult to find and when available is largely superficial. This suggests somewhat that South African Tourism is not recognizing the chefs’ full potential in adding to tourism value which is internationally acknowledged and well documented in the literature (see the literature review in this article). Chefs are a big drawcard to many tourism destinations.

Methodology

This article is conceptual in nature and is based on secondary data sources for its composition. Besides a literature review, the article is also based on an in-depth analysis of the SA Tourism website in relation to chefs in particular and food tourism in general.

Results and discussion

The investigation of the SA Tourism website points to inadequate visibility of chefs and food tourism, despite the fact that the literature highlights the important role they play as tourist attractions. The findings point to the website’s failure to showcase the country’s food tourism and its chefs as a marketing tool. For instance, the website has no specific page on food tourism (or, if it does, it is extremely difficult to find), and it contains few references to chefs. The SA Tourism website’s failure to capitalize on the role of chefs and food tourism in general is a missed opportunity to market the country to prospective tourists (especially ‘food tourists’). The literature demonstrates that Michelin as well as non-Michelin starred chefs can attract tourists to a destination. Various official tourism websites around the world recognize the role and potential of food tourism and chefs. For example, Vietnam’s official tourism website’s food page appears first in the ‘highlights’ section (see Vietnam Tourism, n.d.), while Singapore’s devotes an entire section called Eat & Drinks, to food, beverages and chefs, with a link on the top menu. It includes articles about chefs, who are described as ‘passion ambassadors’, including the ‘New Generation of Singaporean Hawkers’ (see Visit Singapore, n.d.).

In South America for instance, there is evidence to show that culinary resources have raised Peru’s stature as a key tourist destination to which the country has committed given the fact that two of the 10 restaurants on the *The World’s 50 Best Restaurants List for 2017* were found in the city of Lima, Peru (Galvez et al., 2017). This therefore, implies that chefs can assist in attracting tourists to destinations, while coverage of their activities and achievements could also attract more young people to the profession. This in turn, encourages more chefs to devise new recipes based on local ingredients. Based on the findings of our investigation, the following recommendations are offered, all of which involve the government as a key facilitator:

- Chefs should play a role in South Africa’s tourism/food tourism management.
- The teaching of food tourism subjects at university level and in chef/culinary schools should be enhanced so that qualified chefs are aware of and prepared for their role in tourism.
- Raise awareness of the value and role of chefs in society. A starting point would be improving their working conditions as this has the potential to also attract more young people to enter the profession.

Most importantly, the SA Tourism website could include a specific, comprehensive section with subpages related to food and beverages that promotes food tourism and chefs (especially, but not only, celebrity chefs) which is consistent with what Horng et al., (2010:78) advocate with respect to the promotion of the gastronomy of a destination before tourists arrive there. To that end, this section of the website could, for example, include:

- **Food & Beverages**
 - **Food in South Africa**
 - Original South African food and beverages
 - South African recipes
 - **Food tourism** (links to various food tourism products and services such as accommodation where food is a relevant attraction – food must be the central element of the offered tourism products or service)
 - **South African chefs**
 - The chefs and their recipes
 - **Fine/Luxury dining**



- The chefs and their recipes
- **Street food/food trucks**
 - The chefs and their recipes
- **Indigenous food/indigenous food restaurants** to showcase/promote the country's various food traditions
 - The chefs and their recipes
- **'Meal-sharing'**
 - The chefs and their recipes
- **Wines**
 - Wine farms/Agritourism
 - Wine producers/brands
- **Beer**
 - Breweries
 - Beer tourism
- **Other beverages**
- **Braai/Shisa nyama** (Barbeque)

A standalone section on the SA Tourism website would improve visibility and easy access to information on food and beverages (or food tourism) that covers the characteristics, products, services and key features of various food styles. Ideally, the section should also highlight specific South African food/food styles such as *Braai/Shisa nyama* (barbeque) which has been identified as having the potential to attract tourists (see Mnguni & Giampiccoli, 2022) and include new food and beverage tourism segments such as beer tourism (see Rogerson, 2015). Assertions that local cuisine is not good enough as observed by Berno (2020) are preposterous because it is by indulging in these local foods that the tourism experience is enhanced and learning of the local food culture takes place.

Conclusion

The article investigated the visibility of the figure of the chef on SA tourism's official tourism website. In contemporary times, chefs have become major figures in promoting destinations. They are also well-positioned to promote local ingredients and improved nutrition. The analysis of the SA Tourism website revealed that chefs, and food tourism in general, are inadequately profiled as the website does not contain specific, easily accessible information on food and beverages and/or chefs. Based on the results, the article proposed that a specific section of the website be devoted to food tourism and chefs. It also made preliminary suggestions for content that could be included. The recommendations are made with the intention of positioning South Africa to benefit and leverage on the value and growing trend in food tourism. Future research could focus on further strategies to improve the SA Tourism website to enhance the country's tourism potential by comparing it with official tourism websites in other countries for best global impact.

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