Food and Tourism

Michelin, Moussaka and McDonald's

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Introduction

Drawing on a wide variety of source material, Kim *et al* (2009a) show that food is a critical and substantial part of any holiday; a part that may even constitute one third of tourist expenditures. Furthermore, Kim *et al* (2009b, p. 52) voice a widely held belief when they claim that "food is one of the most important elements in tourists' destination choice and travelers' decision-making". As such, perceptions of food as a key reason to travel and to visit a specific destination permeate many influential texts on food and tourism (e.g. Game, 1991; Hall *et al*., 2003; Henderson, 2009; Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Kim *et al*, 2009a; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Westering, 1999) and some claim that food tourism will become even more important in future. For example, Kim *et al* (2009b, p. 54) boldly state that "the desire to travel and taste unique and authentic dishes is becoming one of the biggest paradigms in the tourism industry". As evident in this statement, research on food tourism does not only relate to food as substances composed of carbohydrates, fats, proteins and water that people eat for nutritional purposes. On the contrary, terms such as gastronomy, culinary heritage, uniqueness, authenticity etc. find their way into practically all discussions of food tourism, thus suggesting that the main focus of most research on food tourism is not food *per se*, but something that is, perhaps, more broadly defined. The purpose of this paper is to discuss what food tourism is (not). In order to illustrate and exemplify the complex and multi-facetted nature of food tourism, in this paper, we use a series of vignettes. A vignette is a short, impressionistic scene that focuses on one dimension of a topic and/or gives particular insight into a character, idea or setting. As such, vignettes are neither 'real data'; nor fiction. Instead, they qualify as simplified short stories about a topic (in our case food tourism) that emphasize one dimension of the topic. For example, in order to exemplify that existing tourism research emphasizes food as a peak experience more than simply as a matter of food as something people (have to) eat for nutritional purposes, the following vignette might be helpful:

> For quite some years, you and your husband have looked forward to the holidays you'd enjoy when holidays would no longer be 'for the children's sake'. And now that time has finally come! Last night you arrived at the 15th century Renaissance castle near Cortona in Tuscany and today, your 6 days packaged tour starts with a tour to the local market, a wine tour with private wine tasting and a visit to a truly authentic restaurant in the picturesque Tuscan countryside and tomorrow, together with 24 other guests, you have cooking classes with a Michelin-star chef. Although you've always taken a keen interest in cooking and the culinary arts, at the welcome reception last night, you were both impressed and rather intimidated by the other guests' extensive knowledge on, and experience with, gastronomy across the globe. Apparently, your husband has the same feeling as he asks you: "Are you sure this is, like, our sort of people?"

Lacy and Douglass (2002, p. 8) claim that "every tourist is a voyeuring gourmand". The main character in the vignette above (we will call her Anne) certainly seems to qualify as such a gourmand as it is not food as a nutritional substance that she has come to Tuscany to experience. On the contrary, gastronomy, local produce and authentic culinary delights seem to be the critical reasons why Anne is in Tuscany and hence, she seems to be classifiable as a 'gastronomy tourist' due to the fact that food qualifies as a main reason for Anne's traveling (Murray, 2010) – at least in the context of the one holiday project mentioned above. Furthermore, the fact that Anne has come to Tuscany to experience 'gastronomy', instead of simply food or cooking, suggests that she is in Tuscany to learn about the *art* of 'finer' cooking and eating (Kivela & Crotts, 2006). Moulin (1997) suggests that gastronomy is an expression of culture and accordingly, food is a tourist experience that adds beyond what tourists gain by visually gazing at the destination (Dann & Jacobsen, 2003). However, as exemplified in the vignette above, some food experiences (and especially those qualifying as authentic gastronomic experiences) are often seen as 'better' than other touristic food experiences. For example, few would argue that a visit to a McDonald's in Tuscany qualifies as an expression of Tuscan culture; let alone as a memorable culinary experience. But whereas Anne's trip to Tuscany has the potential to provide insight into Tuscan culture through food experiences, it is obviously highly value-laden to claim that this is 'more' food tourism than a visit to McDonald's. Furthermore, as Anne's husband's comment indicates, not only are some touristic food experiences seemingly 'better' than others, but accumulation of food experiences may even be considered to make tourists move up a 'food travel career ladder'. Although value-laden judgments seem to underlie much of the literature on food tourism, these judgments are predominantly implicit

in nature and thus, they are rarely subject to discussion. In order to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of food tourism, the purpose of this discussion paper is to discuss what food tourism actually ***is***. Accordingly, the paper critically examines whether there is more to food tourism than that which is at the center of Anne's tour to Tuscany. In particular, the paper discusses those incidents that include both food and tourism, albeit have little in common with Anne's trip to Tuscany.

Is food tourism a matter of authenticity?

The first vignette focused on touristic food experiences that were, presumably, both authentic and gastronomic. However, a critical question is whether both of these elements need to be integral parts of the holiday in order for it to qualify as food tourism. The following vignette (which could take place four months after the Tuscany gastronomy holiday, when Anne goes on her next holiday) might add to this discussion:

> Today it's your 24th wedding anniversary and early this morning, your husband asked you to pack a weekend bag and to please hurry as the two of you would have to catch the Copenhagen-Stockholm morning flight. Apparently, almost four months ago your husband booked the flight as well as accommodation at a five star Stockholm hotel and furthermore, he also booked a table at Stockholm's finest restaurant. Having arrived safely and having enjoyed Stockholm today, by now, you immerse yourself into the sublime food and grand wines at Stockholm's finest restaurant. No wonder why the chef's French cuisine has made this restaurant one of the top five restaurants in Scandinavia, you think, while you enjoy the chef's fusion of beef and oysters along with the Cheval Blanc '89.

Apparently, the visit to Stockholm's 'finest restaurant' was a critical element of Anne's husband's vacation decision-making process from the start, thus suggesting that this gastronomic experience is a key reason to go to Stockholm. However, there is not much, if any, authentic Stockholm cooking or expression of the Swedish culture in the chef's French cuisine, regardless of the supreme quality of the food. In the context of this short-break, Anne seems to belong to the 'globalized gastronomy tourist' segment. The globalized gastronomy tourist travels, at least partially, in order to have gastronomic experiences; without necessarily wishing to taste local dishes or local produce. However, Anne and her husband certainly qualify as gastronomy tourists during their short-break in Stockholm. Accordingly, food tourism is *not* always a matter of authentic expressions of local culture. On the contrary, the gastronomy tourist *may* travel the world in order to visit Michelin star restaurants that all offer French, not

local, cuisine. Consequently, search for, and interest in, authentic and local culinary products and meals are *not* necessarily a prerequisite in order for tourism to be labeled food tourism.

The reflections above do *not* mean that food tourism is the same as 'fine dining' tourism. On the contrary, most of us are able to come up with numerous examples of tourists that are not particularly interested in 'finer gastronomy', albeit they are extremely interested in eating as, and with, the locals and with that acquire a sense of authenticity. The following vignette seeks to exemplify this situation (which could be an experience Anne's daughter Beth had when she was a young backpacker):

> This is it – this is the real thing, you think, while you look at all the different people and items that surround you in this hawker centre in Kuala Lumpur. Thank God you didn't go straight on to study at the university as your parents wanted you to! During this year of backpacking you've learnt so much about yourself and about all the fascinating cultures that exist – stuff you only get to know off the beaten track, not at universities. As you and your three (for the time being) companion travelers make your orders at the hawkers' stall, you can't help thinking that this is something your parents would never experience on their summer holiday packaged tours. Great that Lonely Planet mentioned this place as one of the truly authentic and unspoiled places backpackers simply need to experience.

In the vignette, Beth takes an interest in eating as, and with, the locals, thus literally taking in the local culture. As such, Beth has an, at least to her, authentic but hardly gastronomic food experience. Beth's food experience in Kuala Lumpur has much in common with the food experiences Reynolds (1993) focuses on when he argues that the cuisine of other countries is both accessible and affordable for the tourist and that food is perhaps one of the last areas of authenticity that is open to all tourists. In the same vein, Westering (1999, p. 77) argues that food is "that part of cultural heritage that can, literally, be internalized and digested". Nonetheless, whereas the first two vignettes related to 'living to eat', a hawker's stall in Kuala Lumpur relates at least as much, and potentially more, to 'eating to live' (i.e. food as substances composed of carbohydrates, fats, proteins and water that both locals and backpackers eat for nutritional purposes). However, food experiences at hawker's stalls certainly qualify as authentic experiences for most backpackers. For example, in his seminal paper on backpackers, Sørensen (2003, p. 862) quotes the expression that 'to have authentic experiences require two things: More time and less money'. Consequently, 'living to eat' which seems to be an

integral part of most discussions of gastronomy (and wine) tourism is ***not*** a prerequisite in order to define tourism as food tourism. On the contrary, Beth qualifies as a food tourist ***not*** because of any explicated interest in gastronomy *per se*, but because she uses food as a way to internalized and digest cultural heritage; without this heritage having to qualify as gastronomy. As such, Beth represents *one* type of food tourists (i.e. the authenticity seeking food tourist). Nonetheless, food tourism also relates to food tourists that do not seek authentic expressions of local culture (exemplified by Anne's gastronomic experience in Stockholm).

Markets – extraordinary or everyday authenticity

In accordance with Beth's food experiences in the hawker center in Kuala Lumpur, many authors mention trips to local markets as an excellent opportunity to experience local culinary heritage and thus, local food markets are often considered to be one of the best ways to experience local food as well as local living (e.g. Hall et al, 2003; Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Long, 2004). The following vignette with Anne illustrates why local markets are often emphasized as a 'must do' for the tourist, who is interested in both gastronomy and local, authentic food:

> Both you and your husband really enjoyed the trip to the local market that was the first pre-arranged activity you engaged in during your 6 days gastronomy stay in Tuscany. However, the Michelin-star chef you later had cooking classes with warned you that although almost every town in Tuscany and Umbria has a weekly market, the quality and variety of food on offer at these markets differ tremendously. Furthermore, he mentioned that the Montepulciano market is his personal favorite. As a result, the one day you have 'off' during the 6 days stay, you and your husband rented a car and drove to Montepulciano early in the morning and arrived there in due time to enjoy the morning start at the market. The market is breathtaking, crowded with (you assume) local townspeople and in front of their trucks vendors set up whole shops – some with vegetables and cheese and one even has a whole cooked pig on display; selling freshly made porchetta sandwiches. You feel really excited as you experience the market food with all of your senses – How great it would be if this was where you did your everyday grocery shopping instead of at that antiseptic and odourless supermarket back home.

As evident in the vignette above, Anne considers the market to not only be interesting, but to also be in sharp contrast to 'at home grocery shopping behavior' and especially she contrasts the visit to the market with the, perhaps

not grey, but certainly 'odourless' supermarket (Game, 1991) back home. However, albeit many tourists buy groceries during the holidays, shopping for groceries does not necessarily include trips to the local markets. The following vignette, which also relates to Anne's holiday in Tuscany, illustrates touristic, non-market grocery shopping:

> At the end of your 6 days packaged gastronomy stay Tuscany, you decided to make a two days stop-over in Florence before you head back home. Walking around town, you pass a local supermarket and your husband asks "shouldn't we take a look inside and see if they have some of that wonderful cheese we had in that restaurant – Pecorino or what was it called?" Having entered the supermarket, you're quite surprised to see how wide the vegetable and cured meat section is. Finally, as you try your best to speak Italian with the lady at the check-out, she praises the products you've bought – especially the cheese that she tells you is 'the' taste of Tuscany.

Across the literature dedicated to the study of the roles food and gastronomy play in tourism, very few lines are devoted to supermarkets. However, supermarkets are, indeed, a place where one can spot culture; and in particular food culture. Hence, if the gastronomy or food tourist takes an interest in what locals do or do not eat, the supermarket seems to be a perfect place to observe these issues. After all, the supermarket offers a window into the material lives of the local people and the material stuff they, literally, take in. The 'voyering grocery shopper' may even engage in 'retail anthropology' in order to get a glimpse of everyday life of a place. Consequently, supermarkets may act as tourist attractions, or at the least, they may provide food experiences off the beaten track. As such, super markets may provide food experiences that are at least as authentic as visits to the local market – even if it turns out that the locals buy Coca-Cola, Danone and Pringles. As super markets play a crucial role in relation to food culture in many parts of the world, a visit to a super market *does* qualify as an expression of local culture – regardless of the potential 'westernalisation' of the product assortment and/or the outlet itself. Consequently, both visits to local markets and to supermarkets may qualify as food tourism on equal terms.

Do tourists really choose when it comes to eating?

A type of tourists that is largely overlooked in the food tourism literature is the tourist, who is not especially interested in food and who, at least in specific touristic contexts, only sees food as a nutrition. In order to illustrate who this tourist is, we may turn to the following episode (which could be an experience Beth, Anne's daughter, had last summer):

> You and your husband have rented a derelict farm in Sweden for a fortnight. You spent all yesterday doing the packaging (including getting the last laundry done and rushing to the supermarket for diapers 5 minutes before closing hours), taking care of your two toddlers and trying to answer a never-ending flow of 'red flag' emails from work. Furthermore, you had to buy tons of groceries to bring along – both because neither the toddlers, nor your husband like foreign (and especially Swedish) food and because food in Sweden is simply ridiculously expensive. Your Volvo estate car is more than crammed – as you figured out halfway during your eight hours drive when one of the children soiled his diaper for the fifth time and the other one got car sick and vomited all over the back seat. Any optimistic plan to arrive at the farm before supper time has vanished into thin (or soiled diaper, vomit inflicted) air. As you see the Golden Arches up a front in the distant, you turn to your husband and ask: "Would McDonald's do?".

Accounts such as the one above are largely ignored in the food tourism literature. Furthermore, insofar the literature discusses tourists that behave as Beth does in this vignette, they are typically considered as 'neophobic' (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Fischler, 1988) and somewhat ignorant mass tourists with little interest in 'the other' and/or with substantial needs for 'environmental bubbles' and ontological security (Cohen, 1972; Giddens, 1984; Wickens, 2002). Nonetheless, a few researchers (e.g. Henderson, 2009) acknowledge that some tourists may have more casual attitudes towards food than the culinary or gastronomy tourists. The food tourist is generally perceived to be highly involved in choices pertaining to what; where; how; and when to eat. For example, Cohen and Avieli (2004, p. 758) argue that the roles of food and taste "may be repetitive and routinized in the individual's everyday life; but it increases in importance in the often novel, unaccustomed, and strange situations, in which tourists find themselves on a trip". However, somewhat implicitly Cohen and Avieli's (2004) discharge the many situations during a holiday that may not be especially novel, unaccustomed or strange. The vignette above acknowledges the existence of tourists that are not particularly interested in these matters; instead they simply need to have something to eat. As such, the vignette pertains to the fact that we all have to eat – even when we take on the role as tourists; albeit we do *not* have to take a special interest in food during our holidays. Wickens (2002) would probably define Beth as a tourist in need of ontological security and Cohen (1972) is likely to argue that Beth's positive attitude towards McDonald's relates to her need for 'something familiar'. In the same vein, Westering (1999, p. 76) would probably interpret Beth's behavior on the basis of the idea that "almost unconsciously we carry

with us our gastronomic heritage". However, as the vignette on Beth's food experiences in Kuala Lumpur showed it would be simplistic to classify Beth as neophobic or as a person to whom ontological security is particularly important. Instead, it seems that Beth is simply not especially interested in food in the context of the one specific meal occasion emphasized in the vignette above. Nevertheless, like the supermarket visit in Florence, we cannot know whether Beth's visit to a Swedish McDonald's might turn into a memorable food experience. For example, the McDonald's visit could potentially be an expression of Swedish youth culture and thus, a window to a Swedish subculture that Beth would otherwise not see. Hence, even a visit to McDonald's may qualify as food tourism insofar it expresses, at least some part of, local living, food consumption and culture.

Why typologies rarely work

As the vignettes above testify, context is essential for understanding tourists' behavior in relation to food and this is further amplified in the last vignette with Anne and Beth – present time:

> The last year has been hectic and by now, you just want to get away from it all. You've just been on the phone with your daughter (Beth), who's newly divorced and tired to her bones – career, two toddlers and a very tight budget in the aftermath of the divorce. She's really down, so the two of you talked about going away for the upcoming Easter holidays. Although you've enjoyed both last summer's gastronomy tour to Tuscany and your recent short-break in Stockholm, by now you just want to get away from your hectic everyday life and spend some quality time with your husband, daughter and two grandchildren. So does your daughter, but although she's travelled the world as a backpacker in the past (before she met that cheeky rascal), you've promised her to book an all-inclusive stay at a resort with a decent pool – it doesn't matter where, just as long as it is sunny. However, while surfing the internet for the all-inclusive packaged tour, you come across the banner ad 'Provence – the gastronomic time of your life' and you think 'this summer ... … …'.

An account like this questions typologies on food tourism as they tend to lock people up in static categories that are unable to explain the versatile nature of tourists' relationship to food: that it varies across holidays all depending on one's life phase, travel companions or other situational factors surrounding the holiday. Hence demand for food experiences, like for other types of holiday experiences, is highly dependent upon the every-day life of the tourists. This means that sometimes extensions of and sometimes contrasts to every-day

food consumption is high in demand (Quan & Wang, 2004). It is, however, risky to assume that peak experiences naturally follow from contrasts to every-day consumption – the every-day foodie on a gourmet weekend in Stockholm would prove this wrong as elements of extensions of everyday behavior is clearly present here. Hence significant food experiences may equally well be the result of extensions and contrasts to every-day food consumption. Not just across holidays, but also within the same holiday may the consumption of food vary, as that which was intended to be 'eating to live' for nutritional purposes, may turn out to be a highly appreciated food experience. In other words, food as a supporting experience, perhaps even a non-experience, may change into a peak experience (ibid.) all depending on offers the tourist happens to come across, the service encountered, the social rapport with travel companions and a multitude of other contextual factors. Taken together this questions the usefulness of food tourist typologies.

Concluding remarks - defining criteria of food tourism

Food is a neutral term and hence, in order to be a food tourist perhaps one does not need to be particularly interested in gastronomy, dining or local produce? Unfortunately, this would mean that all tourists are food tourists all the time, thus broadening the concept of food tourism to such an extent that is becomes meaningless. On the other hand, the current state of affairs, according to which in- and exclusion of both food stuff and tourists in/from the literature is based on a series of highly implicit criteria does not render a prosperous future for food tourism research either. In order to compensate for these deficits, we need to explicate some of the criteria that might be useful in order to further define what food tourism is. Firstly, the paper has established that food may be 'the reason to go' and thereby the peak experience sought for, but perhaps more often on selected, short break, holidays than in general. Moreover, accidental food experience not deliberately sought for may become a significant part of the overall holiday experience and so 'reasons to go' do not necessarily determine the significance of food during the holiday. This points to a second criteria of food tourism – that it is context dependent, in that it depends both on the offers, services and social settings of the specific locale visited and on the life situation of the individual tourist which makes familiar respectively unfamiliar food experiences more or less attractive. Thirdly, food tourism may be gastronomic tourism but 'finer cooking' is only one among several types of food and food preparations that can constitute the basis of food tourism. Finally, food tourism may be a means of obtaining insight into the local culture visited, in general and in their culinary traditions in particular.

However, it may just as well be a search for food experiences with no local attachment but of particularly high standard or ingenuity.

Cohen & Avieli (2004:756) argue that "there are hardly any detailed studies of the actual eating practices of tourists". Therefore if we wish for food tourism to be a research area in its own right, detailed studies of the actual eating practices and lines of reasoning underlying these practices are needed among different tourist segments. Likewise food consumption in travelling groups (i.e. partners, families with children and groups of friends) need further attention in that food consumption, including decision-making, purchasing, preparation and eating, may be a means of social bonding and thereby a salient reason why tourists choose to spend time on food on holidays. Such research would give us more nuanced insight into what food tourism actually is than this discussion paper has been able to provide.

Questions / Exercises

1. Drawing on three definitions of food tourism, please discuss what food tourism is. If you find that it is not enough to draw on those three definitions, you may choose to come up with a fourth (and better) definition.
2. Use 10 minutes to describe your consumption of food in relation to your last holiday. In your description you should consider: whether food played a role in relation to choice of holiday destination and choice of activities during the holiday; the amount of time and money spent on purchasing food, preparing food, going to restaurants; the discussions on food with your travel companions. Please write no more than half a page about this. On this basis establish whether food played a significant role during your last holiday.
3. Please pool all of your half page descriptions and try to group them in one or more meaningful way(s). Think carefully about the criteria you use when you do this.
4. Food is often said to provide tourists with authentic experiences of the destination visited. On the basis of a nuanced understanding of authenticity, discuss what types of authenticity, if any, are involved in the vignettes represented above.
5. Relate the authenticity discussion of question no. 4 to your own experiences with food and tourism and discuss whether, and if so what types of, authenticity applies to your holiday related food experiences.
6. Based on your discussions of questions 1-5, list at least three lessons that are to be learned for a tourism destination that wishes to market itself on food.

Readings to get you started:

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