

ANALYSIS OF THE STATE OF CULINARY TOURISM IN BULGARIA

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Abstract

The modern tourist is increasingly looking for a complex tourist product that will not only offer him something new, different, exotic and provoke his intelligent curiosity, but also affect all his senses and perceptions. It is this tourist demand that opens the market niche for the development of wine and culinary tourism. The purpose of this research is to study and establish the state of culinary tourism in Bulgaria. Our studies show that, combined with other types of alternative tourism, culinary tourism can contribute a great deal to increasing the interest of tourists - both domestic and foreign - to tourism in rural areas and, consequently, to the revitalization of these areas. In order to study the state and opportunities for the development of cultural tourism in Bulgaria, a survey was conducted in the period 06.2018 - 07.2018. 100 randomly selected tourists were surveyed. The study was carried out with the help of a travel agency from Plovdiv. The respondents were between 16 and 55 years old. The subject of the study are the seven most clearly identified culinary regions in the country: 1. The stretch of Stara Planina; 2. The Black Sea region; 3. The Danube region, including the arc from Vidin to Silistra; 4. Thrace, the Thracian plain; 5. The region of the Rhodope Mountains; 6. Western Bulgaria; 7. The region of Pirin Macedonia. In each of these culinary areas there is an inherited and distinct unique traditional cuisine, cuisine and food. A SWOT analysis of culinary tourism in these regions was carried out. As the strengths prevail and their influence is almost twice as strong as the weaknesses, and the opportunities for the development of culinary tourism are greater than the threats to it, it can be assumed that these culinary areas have all the necessary conditions for the development of culinary tourism. Tourists' interest in culinary tourism, especially combined with wine tourism, is increasing. The study and the analysis summarize the conclusions and recommendations for the further development of culinary tourism.

Key words: culinary tourism, rural areas, Bulgaria

INTRODUCTION

For millennia, man has wondered what he found in the surrounding countryside. The geographical location - mountainous, seaside or flat - affects the availability of one or the other food. That is why in different regions a specific way of eating is formed and distinguished, regional and national cuisine of individual nations is created, with its specific culinary and taste peculiarities. Formed eating habits of individual peoples have persisted for millennia, gradually changing with the introduction of new crops, fruit trees or animal breeds, new technologies for food preparation. Martinez et al define local food as "food produced, processed and distributed within a geographical boundary that consumers associate with their own community" [8].

Local produce adds authenticity to the tourist experience and provides motivation for visitors to come to a location [13].

The modern tourist is increasingly looking for a complex tourist product that will not only offer him something new, different, exotic and provoke his curiosity and intelligent curiosity, but also affect all his senses and perceptions. It is this tourist demand that opens the market niche for the development of wine and culinary tourism. It focuses on the demand and pleasure of prepared food and drink [7].

Food may also add value to a core tourism product and become the focus for special events. Additionally, food maybe used as a stand-alone niche attraction [6], referred to by tourism writers as gourmet tourism, cuisine tourism, culinary tourism, or food tourism [10].

Culinary tourism is considered to be a subspecies of cultural tourism since part of the knowledge of a culture is the knowledge of the cuisine of that culture. Culinary tourism is also considered to be a subset of rural tourism, since the practice of rural tourism is necessarily linked to the experience of specific local dishes and specialties. It is also traditionally accepted that wine tourism is a subspecies of culinary tourism. This interconnectedness of similar activities must necessarily be the basis for achieving greater impact than these activities - economic and social.

All this puts on the agenda the question of the development of these types of tourism in Bulgaria, moreover, that they take place mainly in rural areas. Rural areas are among the main directions of the European Union's policy, and Bulgaria is facing with high problems regarding the development of rural territory.

All this provokes our research interest in the state and opportunities for the development of culinary tourism in Bulgaria.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to study the status and opportunities for the development of cultural tourism in Bulgaria, a survey was conducted in the period 13.06.2019 - 13.07.2019. A total of 90 randomly selected tourists were interviewed. The questionnaire consists of 10 questions. The study was carried out with the help of the Travel Agency "Veli Kazi Tour" - Plovdiv. The respondents were between 16 and 55 years old. Persons aged 16 to 29 predominate. (40% of the total number of respondents) and persons aged 30 to 45 years. (38% of the total) (Table 1).

The purpose of this study is to investigate and establish the status and development of culinary tourism in Bulgaria. Our studies show that, combined with other types of alternative tourism, culinary tourism can contribute a great deal to increasing the interest of tourists - both domestic and foreign - to tourism in rural areas and, consequently, to the revitalization of these areas.

To determine the object of this study, our previous research on the state and development of culinary tourism in Bulgaria has been used. Based on our study of the peculiarities of traditional cuisine and nutrition in individual regions, culinary zoning of the country has been carried out, it is conditionally divided into 7 culinary regions – 1. Along the Stara Planina Mountain; 2. The Black Sea region; 3. The Danube region, including the rainbow from Vidin to Silistra; 4. Thrace, Thracian Plain; 5. The region of the Rhodope Mountains; 6. Western Bulgaria; 7. The Region of Pirinska Macedonia. It is these culinary areas in the country that are the subject of this research, as they have the necessary conditions for the development of culinary tourism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The information from the processed survey cards makes it possible to draw a number of conclusions about the state and the development of culinary tourism in Bulgaria. When processing the survey data, the following results were obtained: Bulgarian and foreign tourists show interest in our past, traditions and customs, therefore almost every month are organized excursions with certain routes, prefer comfortable and simple places to visit and accommodation. The main requirement is the presence of local cuisine, rich in local specialties and dishes, natural foods and quality drinks. A large number of tourists prefer to participate in the preparation of food. What distinguishes culinary tourists from other types of tourists is that the motivation of culinary tourists to visit certain places is only or mainly the experience of “authentic” local dishes prepared on the spot. Attractive to tourists may be all or only the individual characteristics of the food - its type, origin, history, taste, method of preparation, method of serving, etc. [7]. Bulgarian and foreign tourists show interest in our past, traditions and customs, therefore almost every month are organized excursions with certain routes, prefer comfortable and simple places to visit and accommodation.

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Table 1. Number of respondents by age group

Age	Number of respondents
16-29	26
30-45	23
46-55	19
over 55 years	11

Source: Own calculation.

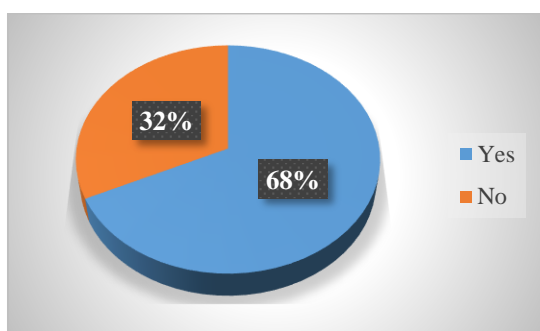


Fig. 1. Is this the first time you have participated in culinary tourism?

Source: Own calculation.

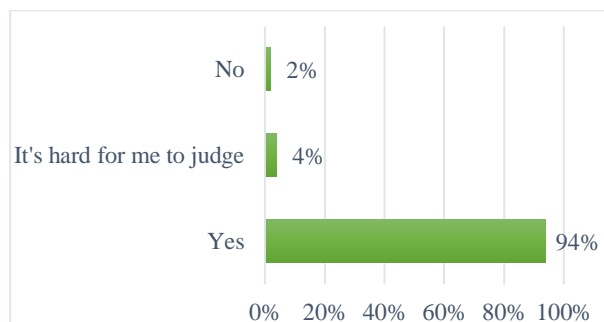


Fig. 2. Do you like traditional dishes and local specialties?

Source: Own calculation.

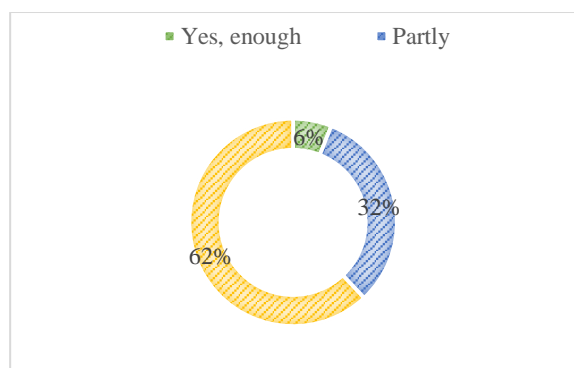


Fig. 3. Is culinary tourism sufficiently advertised and promoted?

Source: Own calculation.

The appropriate geographic position of the country and the wealth of tourist resources, together with preserved traditions in nutrition, favour the development of culinary tourism. Very often it is combined with other types of alternative tourism or with cultural-cognitive one. The survey shows that tourists show strong interest in these permanently established geographic areas where they "produce" and consume typical, unique local dishes. The raw materials for these dishes are only locally produced, from indigenous plant varieties and animal breeds. There are peculiarities in the technology of preparing the dishes that make them unique. A characteristic feature, for example, in the Rhodope cuisine is the total heat treatment of all products for one dish – and basic and spice. This results in the so-so "delicious bouquet" – a unique combination of the tastes of all the local ingredients in the dish, and this gives its unique taste, aroma, composition. Bulgarian cuisine has three very specific foods, which are very popular among foreign tourists and are wanted by them necessarily when they stay in the country. This is yogurt, white brine cheese and Bulgarian savory. All this confirms the unique characteristics of the regional kitchens: Rhodope, Thracian, Dobrudzhanska, Shopska and others.

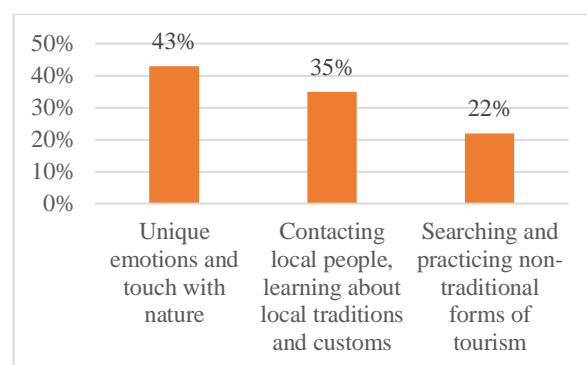


Fig. 4. What are your personal motivations for participating in culinary tours?

Source: Own calculation.

The growing interest in the unique specialties of the individual regional kitchens put the task to preserve not only the recipes for the preparation of local dishes, but also to preserve the local varieties of plant products

and animal breeds. This is a basic prerequisite for the development of culinary tourism.

Increasingly food is used in development initiatives to strengthen tourism destinations, and to create linkages of benefit to both the food production industry and the tourism industry [1], [5].

As noted by Du Rand and Heath the roots of food tourism lie in agriculture, culture and tourism” in that agriculture provides the product (food), culture offers the historical setting and authenticity, and tourism should provide infrastructure and services to combine all three components into a food tourism experience [2].

In the settlements in Bulgaria there are concentrated numerous architectural and cultural-historical monuments, national parks and reserves, predisposing to the combination of culinary tourism and other types of specialized tourism (ecological, rural, Hunting, cultural-cognitive, religious, etc.) [9].

A large proportion of respondents (30%) Be introduced to the specific destination for culinary tourism through acquaintances and the Internet. More than half of the respondents are familiar with the local unique nature, customs and culinary specialities, which provoked them to choose places in Bulgaria as routes for culinary tourism. The popularity and interest in culinary tourism is increasingly growing, in search of unique emotions from touching the nature and contact with local people, traditions and customs. It is therefore necessary to promote this type of tourism with much more expanded advertising. It is necessary to develop and conduct an aggressive marketing strategy that will contribute to the development of other alternative forms of tourism – eco, rural, wine, adventure, cultural, etc.

SWOT analysis of culinary tourism in Bulgaria

The analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the culinary tourism in Bulgaria as well as the opportunities and threats for its development was carried out through a SWOT analysis.

Table 2. SWOT analysis of culinary tourism in Bulgaria

Strengths	Weaknesses
Tourist product, associated with one of the oldest traditions of the Bulgarian territory/wine/and the Bulgarian culinary dishes	No good infrastructure and urban planning in small settlements; Lack of good tourist markings; The local population is at a low level of education;
Year-round accessibility; Focus on relatively solvent tourists;	Migration of population from villages to cities;
Traditions in welcoming Bulgarian and foreign tourists;	In remote settlements there is no basic infrastructure such as roads, water and sanitation;
Ecologically clean environment;	There are no services in smaller municipalities-banks, ATMs;
Opportunities for qualification and retraining of personnel in tourism;	Tourist information centres do not work effectively.
Conditions for conducting different types of tourism;	No new additional services and attractions;
Attractive villages with private rooms and family hotels;	
Preserved local traditions, customs; Historical and architectural monuments;	
Opportunities	Threats
The development of alternative forms of tourism in all seasons of the year;	Unfocused targeting of the tourist product, leading to low efficiency;
To develop new culinary routes related to the lifestyle and customs of the local population; Attracting investors in the culinary areas;	Offering of low quality wine and gourmet tourist product;
Creating a content-rich tourist product, linking wine and gourmet tourism, both modern and in accordance with the established traditions;	
Clear positioning of the product through micro-targeting of the selected target markets, which know Bulgarian wines and food;	
Use the capabilities of communication media to create an emotional connection between product, destination and user;	
Providing support to tourists from target markets/Russia, Ukraine and Belarus/;	

Source: Own calculation.

The lack of specific statistics on this type of tourism does not allow an accurate assessment of its condition and development. The development of culinary tourism has been associated with the popular philosophy in recent decades to "flee" from unhealthy diets, but to prefer local, traditional for the region, locally produced food products.

From the analysis it becomes clear that culinary tourism in Bulgaria still does not have much experience, have established diverse, complementary activities, attractions and entertainments that enrich the main tourist product. The more complex, the better the product of culinary tourism. A part of the identified weaknesses of culinary tourism are determined first by the socio-economic situation – poor infrastructure, lack of financial resources for its modernisation and renewal; Projects are not being developed on the ground; Not encourage entrepreneurship, low level of information provision of tourist sites, etc. Another part of the weaknesses of the culinary tourism is conditional on the insufficient professional qualification of the managers and staff in the sector. Threats to the development of culinary tourism can be an increase in taxes and fees, the emergence of strong competition, Poor road infrastructure, etc.

The economic and social benefits of the development of culinary tourism are: improvement of regional infrastructure; Supporting the development of tourism-related industries; Additional income for the local population; Promoting cultural diversity, preserving national heritage. In general, tourism has a multiplier effect and "...its growth stimulates the growth of other economic sectors" [11].

Culinary tourism is a niche market that has emerged in the hospitality industry in recent years. The most important element in servicing the tourist has not been displayed as a leading motive, stimulating the tourist to travel. But recently, there are more and more people willing to receive unique food and drinks in attractive conditions. Culinary art can be a factor to order culinary tourism

among other types of tourism-holiday, ecological, health, spa, etc.

The various initiatives surrounding the development and implementation of food and tourism associations range from culinary tourism strategies to the integration of food into national tourism strategies. Integral to this is the establishment of food and tourism networks, tourism web sites and marketing initiatives dedicated to food, the development of culinary events including festivals, documentation of culinary heritage, and food related activities such as dedicated food tours and cooking holidays [3, 4].

The role of culinary tourism, which could fill the gaps between winter and summer tourist seasons, is particularly important. The traditional Bulgarian dishes can bring as many foreign guests as our ski resorts. Tripe soup, the native Mesna skara\Mix grilled, Banitsa, Shopska salad, Haidushki chevermeta, Rakiaand selected wines entice tourists to rest in Bulgaria. It is necessary to specify which resources related to wine tourism are unique regions and have a high attractiveness; Which events and holidays are best recorded in the national and local tradition and can be successfully integrated into the product of culinary tourism; How to enrich and diversify the product of culinary tourism, to increase its quality and attractiveness; How to attract new or higher solvent tourists. Good tourism management based on initiatives such as the creation of culinary routes could be an alternative for implementing strategies aimed at the social and economic development and promotion of particular areas, for example turning typical food from rural areas in certain regions into a marketable attraction [12].

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the SWOT analysis of the state of culinary tourism, the following can be summed up: since the strengths and their influence are dominated by almost twice as strong as the weaknesses, and also the opportunities for improving The state of culinary tourism is better than its threats, it can be assumed that the separate culinary

areas have conditions for the development of culinary tourism. Peculiarities of the regional gastronomy put the task, to preserve not only the recipes for the preparation of traditional and unique local dishes, but also to preserve the local varieties of plant products and animal breeds. Culinary tourism practice 11.7% of tourists, and the willing to do so are more than 15% of tourists. Culinary tourism would combine exceptionally well with wine tourism.

For further development of the cult tourism in Bulgaria it is necessary:

To specify which resources related to the development of culinary tourism are unique for the individual region and possess high attractiveness;

-To specify events and holidays related to culinary resources and the production of culinary products and dishes that fit best in the national and local tradition and can successfully integrate into the product of culinary tourism.

-To enrich and diversify the product of culinary tourism, to increase its quality and attractiveness. To attract new or higher solvent tourists;

-To improve the existing and create new Internet portals of the Bulgarian culinary tourism, for improvement of its information provision;

-Effective use of financial resources under European programmes to stimulate the cultivation of authentic, indigenous crop varieties and animal breeds and the production of typical local dishes;

-Development of specialized curricula and organization of training of professionals in the field of culinary tourism;

-Organizing culinary seminars and conferences, integrated wine and culinary courses, combined wine tasting with cheeses or sausages;

-More active participation in international tourism fairs and exhibitions.

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