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THE ROLE OF CULTURAL AND GASTRONOMIC TOURISM IN DESTINATION CHOICE: A LITERATURE REVIEW AND A SMALL POLL

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Abstract: Cultural and gastronomic tourism play an important role in the development of modern cities, attracting travellers with their atmosphere and traditions. This article reviews selected research on gastronomy and cultural tourism in destination choice and presents the results of a small informal poll (21 respondents) on what influences respondents' travel choices. All respondents (100%) selected local food as an influence, followed by prices (86%), other factors (62%), cultural attractions (57%) and reviews (48%). Because the poll was small, informal and not representative, the results are exploratory.

Keywords: cultural tourism, gastronomic tourism, destination choice, poll, literature review.

Introduction

Travel along the Great Silk Road has changed significantly today. People no longer travel just to look at ancient buildings. Modern tourists want to feel the atmosphere of a place through its culture, traditions, and, of course, food. Samarkand is a prime example of this combination. On the one hand, there are world-famous monuments (Registan Square, Gur-e-Amir, Shah-i-Zinda), and on the other hand, rich gastronomic traditions (the famous Samarkand bread/non, authentic Uzbek plov, aromatic spices, and tea house culture). The aim of this article is to examine how cultural attractions and gastronomy influence travel destination choices, using published research and a small poll. Research question: What do poll respondents say influences their travel choices, and how does gastronomy compare with cultural attractions and other factors?

2. Literature Review

Wondirad and Verheye (2023) examined whether gastronomy determines visitors' choice of holiday destination, noting that, despite the large number of studies on gastronomy, there was little evidence on how far it actually shapes this choice. Using an online survey of 205 respondents from 45 countries, they found that gastronomy was one of the key factors in destination choice for 87% of participants, and especially so for Asian and African tourists. The authors argue that food is not merely a complement to a trip but a core part of a destination's image and product, and

they call on destination management organisations and catering businesses to cooperate in developing gastronomic tourism.

Sutiadiningsih et al. (2023) used the Theory of Planned Behavior to explore why tourists choose traditional food as a reason for their travel. Applying structural equation modelling to data from 345 Vietnamese and Indonesian tourists, they found that attitude toward consuming traditional food and perceived control over it influence the intention to choose gastronomy as a travel motive, whereas subjective norms did not. The authors suggest that governments and tourism practitioners should develop gastronomic tourism and design promotion programmes that take tourist behaviour into account. Moral-Cuadra et al. (2023) developed an integrated model of gastronomic tourism to help public and private stakeholders improve tourists' gastronomic experience and satisfaction. Using structural equation modelling on a sample of 710 tourists who visited Córdoba, Spain, they found that gastronomic motivations, gastronomic experience and destination satisfaction directly influence loyalty towards a destination. However, gastronomic satisfaction alone was not sufficient: the authors emphasise that elements such as safety, hospitality and cleanliness cannot be overlooked if destinations want tourists to return or recommend the place to others. Galati et al. (2023) segmented culinary tourists in Italy, a country known worldwide for its culinary specialties, to examine whether growing sensitivity to environmental and social issues shapes specific groups of culinary tourists. Their results show that sustainability plays a key role in culinary destination choice and that food-sustainability motivations can define a distinct target group. The findings offer guidance for hospitality and tourism managers who wish to meet these expectations.

Ardelean and Badulescu (2022) offer a conceptual analysis of the cultural tourism market and the profile of the cultural tourist. They divide the market into niche segments, including tangible and intangible heritage, city breaks, food and wine tastings, community tourism and religious tourism, and note that tourists often combine a primary and a secondary motivation. The authors also point out that the generational component appears particularly relevant to the tourist profile. Several of the studies reviewed concentrate on particular countries or cities, and gastronomy and cultural tourism are often examined separately. The present article adds a small poll that asks respondents about cultural attractions and gastronomy alongside other factors in the same question.

3. Methodology

This study uses a descriptive, exploratory design that combines a review of five published empirical and conceptual studies with the results of a small informal poll. The poll asked one question: "What influences your choice of trip?" Five response options were offered: cultural attractions, local food, prices, reviews and other factors. Respondents could select any number of options. The poll was shared in a messaging-app channel of about 30 members, and 21 members responded. No data on respondents' age, location or other characteristics were collected. Votes for each option were counted, and percentages were calculated from the 21 respondents. Because respondents could select several options, the votes total 74, more than the number of respondents, and the percentages do not add up to 100%. No statistical tests were conducted. All 21 respondents (100%) selected local food as an influence on their

choice of trip. Prices were selected by 18 respondents (86%), other factors by 13 (62%), cultural attractions by 12 (57%) and reviews by 10 (48%). The full distribution is shown in Table 1.

Response option	Votes	Share of respondents
It influences my choice: cultural attractions	12	57%
It influences my choice: local food	21	100%
It influences my choice: prices	18	86%
It influences my choice: reviews	10	48%
It influences my choice: other factors	13	62%

Table 1. Results of the poll “What influences your choice of trip?” (n = 21; multiple answers allowed).

5. Discussion

The studies reviewed broadly agree that food is an important motivation for travel and is linked to a destination’s culture (Wondirad & Verheye, 2023; Sutiadiningsih et al., 2023; Ardelean & Badulescu, 2022). The poll results point in the same direction: all 21 respondents selected local food as an influence on their choice of trip, while cultural attractions were selected by 12. However, the poll does not show why respondents chose each option, or whether food would decide an actual trip. The reviewed studies also differ in how much attention they give to the wider conditions of a trip. Moral-Cuadra et al. (2023) show that safety, hospitality and cleanliness matter alongside gastronomic satisfaction, whereas the other studies appear to focus mainly on food-related motivations. The 18 respondents who selected prices suggest that practical factors may also play a role. Finally, several of the studies rely on specific samples, such as tourists in Córdoba, in Italy, or in Indonesia and Vietnam, so their findings cannot be applied directly to other places, such as historic cities like Samarkand.

6. Conclusion

The poll results show that among the 21 respondents, local food was the most frequently selected influence on travel choices (100%), followed by prices (86%), other factors (62%), cultural attractions (57%) and reviews (48%). Taken together, the reviewed studies and the poll suggest that gastronomy can be an important part of a destination’s attractiveness, but the literature indicates that it works best together with general comfort and safety (Moral-Cuadra et al., 2023). Future research should use a larger sample, record respondents’ age and country of origin, and take into account the specific features of historic destinations such as Samarkand.

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