



## Progress in Tourism Management

## What is food tourism?

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## ABSTRACT

Food tourism or food and tourism has emerged as a major theme for recent tourism research. This paper critically reviews and evaluates this growing subject area of tourism research thus identifies the core concepts associated with food tourism as major research themes, perspectives, and disciplinary approaches. Using the process of cognitive mapping this paper discovers that the literature on food tourism is dominated by five themes: *motivation, culture, authenticity, management and marketing, and destination orientation*. The authors conceptualise food tourism research from a cultural anthropology perspective, given that much of the literature on food tourism defines cuisine as place and is used in many forms and interactions with tourists.

## 1. Introduction

Since Belisle's (1983) exploration of food and tourism, the subject of food tourism, or the close relationship between food and tourism, has been a visible tourism research area for the past three decades, but its unprecedented growth and popularisation in the tourism literature has witnessed in the more recent years (2008–2015). This increased prominence is demonstrated through a series of recent special issues of tourism academic journals such as the special edition of *Journal of Heritage Tourism* (2013) concerning food heritage, and the special edition of *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism* (2014) exploring food and tourism synergies. Major international publications such as the United Nations World Tourism Organisation's (2012) *Global Report on Food Tourism*, and popular academic books such as *Food Tourism around the World* (Hall, Sharples, Michell, Macionis, & Cambourne, 2003), *Foodies & Food Tourism* (Getz, Robinson, Andersson, & Vujicic, 2014), and *The Future of Food Tourism* (Yeoman, McMahon-Beattie, Fields, Albrecht, & Meethan, 2015) further illustrate this point. It is also important to note that there have been increasing numbers of major international conferences exploring food and tourism including: 2005 Second International Conference on Culinary Tourism held in San Francisco, 2013 World Food Tourism Conference held in Gothenburg, and 2015 World Food Travel Summit and Expo in Portugal. All these scholarly and industrial activities further illustrate the increased interest in food and tourism. Whilst food tourism represents a growing

field of tourism research, there remains much debate over what this phenomenon is, hence this paper is to critically review the literature and conceptualise food tourism.

What is food tourism? As a starting point, from a definition perspective Hall and Sharples (2003, p.10) provides an excellent preliminary understanding of food in tourism which is the major motivation, describing 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 factor for travel”. Many authors such as Chang and Yuan (2011), Park, Reisinger, and Kang (2008), Presenza and Iocca (2012), Sanchez-Canizares and Lopez-Guzman (2012), and Smith and Costello (2009) are seen to adopt this definition. As food tourism literature began to develop, the field experienced a shift, that is, a ‘cultural turn’ from those early management-focussed studies to more wholesome and exploratory discussions of food and culture (Everett, 2012). Not only did the frequency or volume of the studies significantly increase, but so did the variety of research approaches and concepts being explored.

Despite the invaluable previous attempt of Henderson (2009) which is the only existing review of food tourism literature, the authors find that his approach lacks a holistic view of food tourism as an area of tourism research in its own right. Therefore, the authors urge that there exists a critical gap in a wholesome understanding of food tourism literature especially for the following research aspects: its definitions,

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perspectives, approaches, themes, and conceptualisation. Food as a tourism research subject appears likely to increase in prominence. It can further be assumed that there will be a continuing growth in studies considering the cultural, social, geographical and political significance of food in various tourism and business contexts. A timely research on synthesis and critical review of literature is necessary to assess the progress and evolution of research on food tourism in order to establish what the phenomena is. This paper has two research objectives in order to answer the research question, ‘what is food tourism?’: (1) to critically appraise and review the literature in order to identify the series of concepts that represent the issues, themes and discourses of the subject; (2) to conceptualise food tourism using the process of cognitive mapping in order to construct a meaning about the nature of food tourism.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. A critical review

For a comprehensive understanding of food tourism as a subject area of tourism research, this paper conducted a critical review of peer-reviewed academic journal articles published in numerous international tourism and hospitality journals and systematically analysed them. The peer-reviewed journal articles were considered one of the best sources of information for this study, as they provide the most current, stable and reliable academic source of information. Furthermore, these journal articles are a cost-effective means of information collection, as well as providing a method that remains unaffected and unaltered by the process of research, or presence of the researcher (Bowen, 2009).

Data was obtained from international tourism and hospitality journals listed by the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) of the Australian Research Council (ARC). There are many journal ranking systems used in critical literature review studies, but the ERA ranked journals were only included in the research given that Hall (2011) highlighted the significance of this Australian national government body in terms of bibliometric analysis, journal ranking and the assessment of research quality in tourism and hospitality. While some previous studies of literature review on other tourism subjects, for example residents' attitudes to tourism (Nunkoo, Smith, & Ramkissoon, 2013) and Chinese outbound tourism (Jin & Wang, 2016), mainly reviewed a selection of so-called top-tier journals of relevant subject areas, this study attempts to more exclusively cover a segment of around 50 tourism and hospitality journals listed by the ERA. It is noted that other tourism and hospitality journals written in other languages other than English, and those deemed inappropriate (e.g., Gambling Research, Service Industries Journal) were excluded from the list of journals.

This study takes the form of a qualitative systematic review, referring to a review that follows a certain protocol or system when conducting research, using a more scientific approach (Sandelowski, 2008), as such it ensures the most accurate and thorough image of academic tourism literature discussing food and tourism. This form of review is preferable in this case over other qualitative literature reviews as Dixon-Woods (2011) argues that the systematic review reduces certain issues (e.g., arguments of objectivity) often associated with general literature reviews, as a set of rules are followed when gathering and analysing information, thus limiting researchers' bias.

The systematic review process refers to the process of both information collection, as well as information analysis (Sandelowski, 2008). For this study, the systematic review process was implemented in the search of the ERA listed tourism and hospitality journals in order to collect every article relevant to the field of food tourism using a list of key words: cuisine, culinary tourism, food and tourism, food consumption, food production, food tourism, gastronomy tourism, gastronomy, and taste tourism. Exclusions were made for articles that dealt singularly with hospitality, agriculture, wine and beer, and any other subjects where food was a minor point of discussion. Where possible, the journal search engine was utilised using these key words, and if this

was not an option, each volume and issue was meticulously examined to obtain relevant articles. Articles were included based on the presence of any of the key words in the title or abstract of each article; this indicating whether the topic was a significant part of the overall article. Only those articles published during the chosen time frame (1994–2017) were included for this time frame represented the period in which the highest concentration of food tourism articles were published. A total of 164 articles were gathered and used for analysis.

While the selected journals were systematically searched through to obtain relevant journal articles, so too were the articles in these journals, in order to extract required information. Each paper was read in full, and information extracted and noted throughout, as well as notes made on reflection as the reading process continued. The collected research data was recorded in a specially created database. The first stage of data analysis that is a critical review provides an overview of issues and discourses in the food tourism literature taken by various perspectives and disciplinary approaches, and the finding of concepts engaged in food tourism literature is a basis of the second stage of cognitive mapping analysis.

### 2.2. Cognitive maps

The second objective of this paper is to conceptualise food tourism using the process of cognitive maps. Cognitive maps (also known as mental maps, mind maps or cognitive models) are a type of mental processing composed of a series of psychological transformations by which an individual can acquire, code, store, recall and decode information about the relative locations and attributes of phenomena in their everyday or metaphorical spatial environment (Eden & Ackerman, 1998). Applied as a research methodology they are used to represent cognition of the researched thoughts through a series of links or pictures. Jones (1993, p. 17) addressed cognitive map

*is a collection of ideas (concepts) and relationships in the form of a map. Ideas are expressed by short phrases which encapsulate a single notion and, where appropriate, its opposite. The relationships between ideas are described by linking them together in either a causal or connotative manner*

These are short phrases or words which represent a verb in which linked through as ‘cause/effect’, ‘means/end’ or ‘how/why’, meaning a cognitive map is a representation of a particular person's perceptions about a situation in the terms. This method is well documented in the qualitative research literature (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2008), however the application of cognitive mapping is bastardized by researchers based upon their own skills and research philosophies (Yeoman, 2004).

#### 2.2.1. Decision explorer

A Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) approach assists in the automation processing of processing data, speeding and capturing the concepts (Grzegorz, 2014). A CADQAS approach helps the researcher view the relationships of the phenomena and data through the ability to trace and track the data. DECISION EXPLORER (DE) is an interactive tool for assisting and clarifying problems using the principles of cognitive mapping within the realm of CADQAS. DE allows a visual display and analysis of cognitive maps in such a manner that it permits ‘multiple viewpoints’, ‘holding of concepts’, ‘tracing of concepts’ and a ‘causal relationship management’. DE is a rich interactive tool that allows for the movement of concepts and connections in order to make sense of the concepts and phenomena of food tourism. This allows the researcher to draw conclusions and attribute meaning based upon the patterns of concepts emerging from the literature review. This approach to qualitative model building has been used by a number of studies in tourism including policy making (Farsari, Butler, & Szivas, 2011), sustainable tourism (Meliadou et al., 2012), family tourism (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2014) and demography (Yeoman, Hsu,

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