

# Food tourism, because travelling and eating are two of life's best experiences

Gastronomy and culture represent an important element of differentiation in tourism, especially for those who believe that good experiences should never end. Food or culinary tourism is perhaps one of the most gratifying ways of discovering and feeling the land and its people, its art and crafts, its history, and its culture. It is so wide-ranging that it enables extraordinary experiences and enormous enrichment from a cultural point of view. Gastronomy, when considered as a tourist product, is a great ally for the socio-economic development of a region, and for the tourist, it is a moment of transformation.

The term "food tourism" is relatively recent. In 2001, it was defined by Erik Wolf, in the article "Culinary Tourism: A tasty economic proposition", as "the search for unique and memorable food and drink experiences, both far and near." However, it was between 2012 and 2018 that food tourism gained projection and became a segment of interest in which a whole range of experiences, sensory and practical, linked to gastronomy are included. If on the one hand visits to producers gained space, on the other hand street food continued to make its contribution to making the tourist experience unforgettable. 2018 was the turning point year. According to Hall & Sharples<sup>[1]</sup> food tourism includes "visits to food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations, for which tasting food and/or experiencing the attributes of the specialised food producing region are the main motivating factor for travelling".

[1] Hall, M & Sharples, L. (2003, p. 10). The Consumption of Experiences or the Experience of Consumption? An Introduction to the Tourism of Taste. Food Tourism Around the World. Elsevier, Oxford, UK.



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Gastronomy has become one of the major motivations for tourists and the investment (both time and money) in wine and food experiences has soared to unprecedented levels, which has led food tourism to be considered the big trend of the moment.

To respond to this new trend, new offers have been created at the destination, allowing the experience to be intensified and made unique. Exploring local gastronomy has always been associated with travel and leisure, but the concept of gastronomic tourism has evolved to include many other activities in addition to food and visits to typical and regional restaurants. It is these activities that, on the one hand, position food tourism as a driver of the local economy and, on the other, recognise gastronomy as a pillar of regional identity, transforming it into intangible cultural heritage.

Today, just like the tour packages that offer historical and cultural tours/visits, it is also possible to find tour packages that take us on a gastronomic journey that appeals to all our senses, through experiences in traditional or street food restaurants, through visits to gastronomic establishments or specialty shops. Preferences aside, taking a food tour can be one of the most delicious and sensory ways of getting to know a destination.



It is also possible to follow some regional and/or traditional product routes. Travelling along the wine, coffee, cheese, tea, salt, wine bars or even rice pudding routes is always an added value on any trip. Through them we can understand the history, culture, traditions, and socio-economic evolution of a certain region.

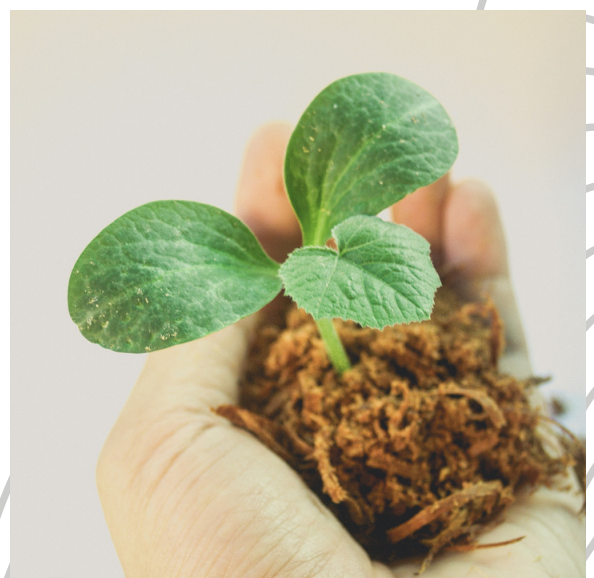
Participating in gastronomic events or festivals can delight anyone who is passionate about combining gastronomy with travel. All over the world there are events and festivals that are true hymns to gastronomy and that make us put all our senses on full alert.



Visiting local fairs and markets is just another activity possible within the scope of food tourism. It allows us to have a closer connection, both with the place we visit and with its people. It is impossible to get to know Barcelona without visiting the Mercat de la Boqueria, all its history, its aromas, flavours, products, and local gastronomy. Who visits Porto and does not pass by the Bulhão Market? One of the most emblematic places in the city, it is worth spending some time and getting to know its history and the restructuring it has undergone over its (almost) two centuries of history. Visiting markets and fairs is an experience that allows you to see and taste different products, learn about the biodiversity of the region, and interact with the local community.

Among the possible activities, as food tourists, we are tempted to visit farms and local producers, and this is an experience that no one should miss. These visits create the possibility to get closer to the food, or the drink, at the first level of its value chain, and this can be transformative. It can make the experience more authentic, more personalised, more enriching. As far as drinks are concerned, this is already common practice, with wine, beer, distillate, fortified and liqueur tastings taking place all over the world. These sessions, usually guided by specialists, allow tourists to get to know the characteristics of the product, its production process and even get some tips on how to harmonise some of these drinks with local gastronomy. But visits to producers don't stop there. There are places where you can harvest honey and understand its production cycle; harvest grapes and produce wines in the traditional way; knead and bake bread; milk sheep and produce cheese; among many other experiences available.

For those who like cooking, taking part in cooking classes is another possible way of getting to know the destination. Close your eyes and imagine yourself making Nan Bread in India; Kimchi in Korea; Chocolates in Belgium; Tapas in Spain; Tamales in Mexico; Pizzas in Italy; Wine in Portugal... Besides being moments of learning about the region and its products, these are also







moments of relaxation, entertainment, and gastronomic tasting. In Portugal, in addition to workshops with producers and in schools, there are also Gastronomic Brotherhoods available to provide this type of experience to groups of tourists.

Those who do gastronomic tourism save some time for museums. All over the world there are museums that can be included in food tours. In Portugal you can visit the Bread Museum, the Cheese Museum, the Olive Oil Museum, the Beer Museum and many wine tasting cellars and estates. In Barcelona, the Xocolata Museum. In Prague, the House of Gingerbread Museum. And many others dotted around the world.



There are countless activities that can be streamlined to provide memorable experiences to tourists. If well organised, guided and presented, they enhance the history, culture, and people of each place. You learn about customs, religious and pagan celebrations and the food associated with each of these festivities. Gastronomy is a way of transmitting values and customs of communities, telling their story and exposing their socio-political organisation.

Food tourism includes all activities that use gastronomy as a unifying element between people, places, and time. So, if on your gastronomic travels, a cook wants to tell you the story behind what she is serving you, listen to her carefully. You will certainly also learn more about the place and the very issues facing the communities. It is guaranteed that if you invest time in listening to people and learning about the ingredients used in the local cuisine; if you allow yourself to gain an insight into the history and culture that gave rise to a particular dish, the act of eating becomes much more meaningful.



If you have read this far, always remember that gastronomy tells the story of a people. Food tourism opens its arms to welcome and recognise that history, as each of us savours our journeys. So, on your next trip, take all your senses with you. This is key to making your experience pleasurable and memorable. Feel. Experience. Invest time. Savour. Become a much richer person.

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