



VI. INTERNATIONAL
GASTRONOMY



TOURISM STUDIES CONGRESS

PROCEEDINGS
BOOK

AFYONKARAHISAR
6-9 October 2022

**VI. INTERNATIONAL GASTRONOMY
TOURISM STUDIES CONGRESS**

PROCEEDINGS BOOK

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PRESENTATION

Afyonkarahisar is a tourism paradise with its approximately 5 thousand years of history, archaeological remains, thermal water sources, open-air temples, fairy chimneys, natural beauties, and local cuisine. These lands have always come to the fore with many features throughout history on which the foundations of the Republic of Turkey were laid. Afyonkarahisar Castle, which has a history of thousands of years and is the most important witness of the rich past of the city, the Ulu Mosque, one of the unique works of the Seljuk Period, and the Old Afyon Houses built in the later periods, and the historical streets looking like an open-air museum display how deep-rooted the city has been. In addition to these, Afyonkarahisar is one of the important gastronomy destinations of Turkey with its culinary culture, history, and traditional food industry. In this way, Afyonkarahisar was awarded the title of Gastronomy City in 2019 within the scope of UNESCO Creative Cities Network.,

Today, there is a need for detailed studies on the gastronomy field due to the benefits it provides to the field of tourism. Improving the quality of facilities and services in gastronomy tourism, becoming an international brand, diversifying, and improving products and services, increasing the quality in every component of the tourism value chain, and supporting development processes within the framework of the sustainability principle are the common basic principles of all stakeholders operating in the field. With the 6th International Gastronomy Tourism Studies Congress, it was aimed to determine the strategies and policies for the destinations that have significant advantages in gastronomic tourism and are open to development, and it was hoped to contribute to the literature and the sector on the application side.

Several distinct studies on the gastronomy field were presented and evaluated at the congress, attended by nearly 200 academicians from 20 different countries, between 6-9 October 2022. Therefore, I would like to thank all the researchers who contributed to the 6th International Gastronomy Tourism Studies Congress with their studies. I would like to express my gratitude to the members of the congress advisory board, the members of the scientific board, all the members of the executive board who contributed to the full execution of the congress, and to all the audience who listened to the papers with interest, made evaluations, asked questions, and made comments at all stages of the congress. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude and respect to the administrators of our province, Afyonkarahisar Mayor Mehmet Zeybek, and municipal employees who contributed to the organization of this congress in our city along with the Rector of Afyon Kocatepe University, Prof. Dr. Mehmet Karakaş and the members of the university.

Prof. Dr. İsa SAĞBAŞ

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WHAT MAKES A MEMORABLE FOOD TOUR EXPERIENCE? INSIGHTS FROM THE ROME FOOD TOUR SUNSET

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ABSTRACT

Providing a memorable tourism experience is a leading concern for tourism businesses worldwide. Therefore, it is crucial to examine what makes an experience memorable. Given the scarce literature concerning food tours, this study aims to identify the main components of a memorable food tour experience. A total of 111 online reviews of the best food city and food tour in the World - the Rome Food Tour Sunset - was collected. Findings reveal seven critical components of tourists' memorable food tour experience: The tour guide, the taste (food and wine), the guide, the quality of the food and wine, the socialization with the group, the learning component, entertainment (fun), the quantity of the food and wine and being offbeat. The results are essential for food tour businesses to offer a memorable food tour experience.

Keywords: Food Tour, Memorable Tourism Experience, Online Reviews, Tour Guide

INTRODUCTION

The importance of experiences became increasingly apparent as a critical aspect for businesses with the work of Pine and Gilmore in 1999, *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre & Every Business a Stage*. The authors argue that companies must provide experiences to be profitable and that recognizing them as a distinct economic offering is the key to economic growth.

More than 30 years later, it is not surprising that designing memorable and exceptional tourism experiences has become a leading concern for tourism businesses worldwide. Indeed, memorable tourism experiences make tourists happier and more satisfied (Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2017) and impact revisiting intentions (Zhang et al., 2018). Also, providing tourists with memorable experiences is fundamental to be competitive in the tourism industry (Sthapit et al., 2019).

Tourists are looking for unique and memorable experiences (Antón et al., 2019; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021) and studies have evidenced that gastronomy can be a crucial component of this memorable experience (e.g. Antón et al., 2019; Chirakranont & Sakdiyakorn, 2022).

Food tourism has witnessed strong growth in recent years. The market size was valued at \$1,116.7 billion in 2019 and is expected to reach \$1,796.5 billion by 2027 (Allied Analytics LLP, 2020). Moreover, food and beverage experiences influence tourists' travel decisions (Knollenberg et al., 2020).

While there may be several studies evidencing that gastronomy can contribute to a memorable experience, studies exploring what makes the experience memorable are rarer. On the other hand, businesses usually evaluate these tourism experiences with surveys to measure tourist satisfaction. However, surveys typically provide vague assessments of the guest experience (Capriello et al., 2013).

Given the growth of food tourism and its impact on influencing traveller's decisions and experiences, this study aims to analyze online reviews to explore which factors contribute to a memorable food tour experience.

Data collected directly from tourists' online reviews has the advantage of being available and is not as intrusive as direct interactions with the respondents (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2014). Moreover, online reviews provide a better understanding of tourists' opinions (Simeon et al., 2017). This is an important issue considering that tourist experiences and satisfaction are complex to measure and analyze (Capriello et al., 2013).

To conduct this study, the Rome Food Tour by Sunset around Prati District was chosen since Tripadvisor travelers rank it as the best food city and food tour in the World (Tripadvisor, 2022).

Findings contribute to make advancements on the topic of tourists' gastronomic experiences analyzed through online reviews. Furthermore, the study contributes to the scarce literature regarding food tours, as pointed out by Ko et al. (2018). The study also provides implications for food tour businesses to offer more satisfying food tour experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Food Tourism and Food Tours

Food is an essential motivator for travel and a vital travel consideration in the decision-making process for tourists (Knollenberg et al., 2020). Furthermore, research has evidenced that many tourists travel to taste novel and authentic cuisines (e.g. Andersson & Mossberg, 2017; Sthapit et al., 2019).

Given the growing popularity of the combination of food and tourism, researchers have tried to define food tourism over the years. For Hall and Sharples (2004), the concept of food tourism includes the “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” (p. 10). This definition suggests that food tourism implies that food is the primary motivation for travel. However, food tourism can also be seen as a tourism activity, as long as there is an intentional interest in experiencing a place through its food or drink (Stone, 2022). This idea is well supported by the World Tourism Organization (2019), which considers that food tourism involves food-related activities such as participating in food festivals and cooking classes.

According to the World Food Travel Association (2022), the most popular food tourism experiences are food tours, cooking classes, wine tasting, brewery tours, producer visits and market experiences. Food tours are becoming very popular and are one of Generation Z's favorite attractions (Setiawan et al., 2018). Ko et al. (2018) consider that food tours have not yet been clearly defined and propose that they are a tourism product “in which the participants

experience the destination's culture and heritage through the local food culture and dining customs" (p. 835).

A local food experience is essential to the tourist experience as it offers new tastes and different traditions for tourists' consumption (Seyitoğlu, 2021). Usually, this kind of experience related to food attractions has a positive relationship with memorable tourism experiences (Lee, 2015). The personal involvement that a consumer feels with gastronomy leads to memorable moments (Di-Clemente et al., 2019).

Memorable Tourism Experiences

A memorable tourism experience (MTE) is defined as "a tourism experience positively remembered and recalled after the event has occurred" (Kim et al., 2012, p. 13). MTEs are designed to reinforce and consolidate the recollection of pleasant memories of experiences (Sharma & Nayak, 2019) and lead to high satisfaction (Manthiou et al., 2015; Sie et al., 2018; Torabi et al., 2022).

One of the first studies to examine what makes a MTE was conducted by Tung and Ritchie (2011). The finding of their study revealed four key dimensions: affect (positive emotions such as happiness and excitement), expectations, consequentiality (divided into four subdimensions: enhancing social relationships, intellectual development, self-discovery, and overcoming physical challenges) and recollection (efforts made to remember the tourism experience).

Shortly after, Kim et al. (2012) developed a scale to measure MTE with seven dimensions: hedonism (pleasurable feelings that excite oneself), refreshment (the state of being refreshed), local culture (travelers' experiences of friendly local people), meaningfulness (a sense of great value or significance), knowledge (exploration of new cultures and the acquisition of new knowledge), involvement (travelers' active participation in memorable tourism experiences), and novelty (a psychological feeling of newness resulted from having a new experience). Many studies used these dimensions to measure MTE (e.g., Chen & Rahman, 2018; Zhang et al., 2018).

Later, Chandralal and Valenzuela (2015) extended this scale by adding two dimensions: the role of local tour guides and the engagement in surprising and unexpected experiences.

Although there are many studies examining MTE (e.g., Chandralal et al., 2014; Jiang et al., 2022; Kim, 2014; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021; Skavronskaya et al., 2019; Sthapit et al., 2019; Wong et al., 2019), there are few studies examining what makes a memorable food tourism experience. Stone et al. (2021) stress that "food alone is not always enough to establish a memorable experience" (p.789), but when a food experience occurs outside the usual environment, in a traveling context, the result is more memorable.

One of the essential components of a memorable food experience is the food itself, as being unique or authentic (Sthapit, 2017; Stone et al., 2017). Another factor that has been pointed out as enriching the experience is the social interaction, not only with family and friends but also with new people met (Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2017; Stone et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2018). Other components that have been found to be part of a memorable food experience are authenticity (Sthapit, 2017; Stone et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2018), hospitality, and

servicescape (Sthapit, 2017), the location or setting and the occasion (Stone et al., 2017). None of the few studies examining memorable food experiences focused on food tours.

It is crucial to provide a MTE since studies have found that they have an impact on intentions to return (Chen & Rahman, 2018; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021; Rivera et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2018) and recommendation (Chen & Rahman, 2018; Rivera et al., 2015). Memorable experiences also generate positive word-of-mouth behaviors among tourists (Seyitoğlu, 2021) and generate eWOM (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021).

METHODOLOGY

Study setting and data collection

This study aims to examine the features that make the experience with a food tour memorable. The food tour selected was the Rome Food Tour by Sunset around Prati District, ranked as the best food city and food tour in the World (Tripadvisor, 2022).

This tour is a four-hour experience and provides an insight into the best of Italian cuisine. The visit includes five notable venues - La Nicchia Café (typical Italian café), Pizzarium (Rome's number one pizzeria), La Tradizione (gourmet food shop), Al Giardino del Gatto e la Volpe (family-owned restaurants). Participants have five schedule options, in the afternoon from 3:30 until the last departure at 7:30. Prices vary between 70€ (for children from 5 to 12) to 99€ (for adults).

This food tour can be considered a memorable food tour experience, since memorable tourism experiences are experiences that are positively remembered after they happen (Kim et al., 2012). Given that the tour was rated the best food tour in the World because of tourists' high satisfaction, the reviews clearly evidence a positive experience that tourists remember.

The analysis of online reviews was chosen to achieve the study's aims. Using online reviews has been broadly used in tourism and hospitality studies. Some examples include examining customer's experience at restaurants (e.g., Choi et al., 2020; Mathayomchan & Taecharungroj, 2020), at cultural attractions (e.g., Simeon et al., 2017) and guests satisfaction (Lee et al., 2020). Regarding food tourism, online reviews have been examined to explore tourists' experiences related to cooking classes (Huang & Yi, 2021; Kokkranikal & Carabelli, 2021)

The reviews were extracted from TripAdvisor in June of 2022. TripAdvisor is considered the most globally recognized social travel network (Dillette et al., 2020). The selection criteria were reviews written in English and in 2022. A total of 111 reviews was obtained, of which 104 rated the tour with 5 stars, four with 4 stars and only three were negative. The three negative reviews were excluded from the analysis.

Data Analysis

The reviews were first examined with Voyant Tools (<http://voyant-tools.org/>), a free, web-based text analysis software package. This software has 29 analytical tools, all supported by highly interactive and rich visualization effects (Alhudithi, 2021). Reviews were cleaned up prior to uploading them to the software. For instance, sometimes reviews do not mention the word "guide", but mention only their name. In these cases, the word "our guide" was added to the review. Flaws were also corrected (example: wonderful to wonderful), all

words were put in lowercase letters and plural words were transformed into singular words. This procedure is essential for text analysis to increase the accuracy of automatic word counts and the analysis.

Reviews were also manually read to detect the aspects mentioned in the review that provided a memorable experience and, thus, such a high classification on TripAdvisor.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis in Voyant indicated that there were a total of 6,866 words and 1,117 unique word forms. The most frequent words in the reviews were food (189), tour (149), guide (105), great (76) and Rome (68). A word cloud was generated in Voyant (Figure 1), which evidence these words. Another word that stands out is Experience, with 58 mentions.

Figure 1. Word Cloud with the most frequent terms in reviews of the Rome Food Tour Sunset



The word Experience, as one of the central topics of this study, was further explored in Voyant, to examine how reviewers characterized their experience with the tour. As shown in Figure 2, the Experience was described very positively, with the most used adjectives being great, fabulous, fun, amazing, wonderful and the best.

Figure 2. Links with the word Experience



The following review is an example of how travellers described their experience:

Amazing experience. We loved every minute of this tour and would highly recommend to anyone considering booking it. Our tour guide Mari was so lovely and knowledgeable about the history of Rome and of course the food and drink! We spent the evening with a great group of people smiling and laughing. Thanks again Mari, I've already recommended you and this tour to friends back home! (Review #88 - Fantastic tour!)

The content analysis of the reviews identified 7 components of what made the food tour memorable. Table 1 provides those themes and the number of reviews mentioning that theme.

Table 1 - Number of Reviews mentioning each theme

| Rank | Components | Number of reviews |
|-------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | Tour Guide | 100 |
| 2 | Food and Wine | 88 |
| 3 | Socialization | 41 |
| 4 | Learning | 33 |
| 5 | Fun | 32 |
| 6 | Quantity | 30 |
| 7 | Offbeat | 14 |

Not surprisingly, given that the experience is a food tour, the analysis revealed that the quality of the food and wine is essential for the experience to be memorable. However, more important than that, the analysis reveals the importance of the tour guide to the memorable food tour experience, since 93% of all reviews mentioned the guide. Some reviews did not even mention the food or any other aspect except for the guide, as evidenced in the following review:

We had a lovely time. The group was great and our tour leader -Giada was the absolute best. She knew her stuff, spoke very good English and she's in it because she loves food, wine and people. We felt very welcome and left satisfied. Would recommend to anyone! (Review #63 - Great time!)

Given the tour guide's importance to the memorable experience, a manual count was conducted on adjectives describing them and a word cloud was generated with those adjectives (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Word cloud with the most frequent adjectives used to describe the tour guides



Knowledge was used 43 times to describe the tour guide, demonstrating that tourists highly appreciate the tour guides' knowledge of the Italian food history and culture. Other most used adjectives were amazing (10), fantastic (10), enthusiastic (9), lovely (8), friendly (7), great (7); fun/funny (7), engaging (5), passionate (5), welcoming (5); entertaining (4); excellent (4); outstanding (4), brilliant (3), delightful (3), incredible (3); phenomenal (3) and wonderful (3).

Tourists' reviews underlie a great deal of affection for their tour guides. Out of the 100 reviews that mention the tour guide, 75% of the reviews mentioning them mention their name. The descriptions of the tour guides indicate their importance for the memorable experience, as so well portrayed in the following reviews:

The food tour around Prati District was a lot of fun. The food was amazing. Meeting fellow travellers from around the World was great. However, what made the experience unforgettable was Giada, our guide. Funny, full of enthusiasm, and an expert on the cuisine, Giada is the perfect guide. Grazie mille. (Review #55 - A fantastic night out)

You want to taste amazing food in Rome? You must take this tour. The places we visited were amazing. Our tour guide was informative and made the evening an amazing experience. Honestly one of the best parts of my trip. (Review #62 - Amazing food tour)

The third most important theme that emerged from the reviews was the socialization with the other members of the food tour group. Respondents truly appreciated meeting travellers from other parts of the World and their interaction with them was a significant factor in their memorable experience. Some reviews mentioned that they had made friends. These ideas are supported in the following reviews:

I can't say enough amazing things about this tour! Ashley was an incredibly knowledgeable, fun, inclusive tour guide who made the experience 5/5. All food stops were DELICIOUS. I'll think about the delicious cheeses, basil pesto spreads, pizza and gnocchi forever. Made some fun new friends from all over the World too. Highly recommend this tour for fun, delicious meals, food knowledge, and tasty drinks that never go to waste! (Review #28 Amazing food and guide was incredible!)

Irina was fantastic and the food was delicious! My family and I had such a great time! It was the perfect way to kick off our days in Rome. The food and wine were generous and by the end of it we were stuffed. We had so much fun that we didn't want it to end and even continued

hanging out with our group after the tour officially needed. I promise you won't be disappointed! (Review #4 - Great way to start your vacation!)

Another essential dimension to the memorable food tour experience is acquiring knowledge. Over 30% of the reviews mention the learning aspect of the tour, such as learning the history, the local culture and traditional Italian cuisine, as seen in the following review:

Interesting tour. We learned a lot about traditional Italian cuisine and where the locals shop and eat. Great to meet fellow travellers and to find out what makes some things better than others. Vegans and vegetarians were catered for at short notice too. The company were also very accommodating when we needed to amend our booking. Marissa was a knowledgeable and entertaining guide. (Review #103 - Great food and very knowledgeable guide)

Fun is also essential to a memorable food tour experience, since it was mentioned in 32 reviews. Review number 55 starts by stating that the tour was much fun:

The food tour around Prati District was a lot of fun. The food was amazing. Meeting fellow travellers from around the World was great. However, what made the experience unforgettable was Giada, our guide. Funny, full of enthusiasm, and an expert on the cuisine, Giada is the perfect guide. Grazie mille. (Review #55 – A Fantastic Night Out)

A significant number of reviewers reported that there was more than enough food, commenting on how full they were at the end of the tour and recommending people to go on an empty stomach. Therefore, the component of quantity was also considered part of the memorable food tour experience. The following review illustrates the importance of quantity:

This tour is FANTASTIC & we'll worth the money. The variation of food is interesting and immensely tasty and PLENTIFUL. Our Tour Guide Tatiana was outstanding - she is passionate about food & Rome and loves passing that passion on. Definitely do this tour. (Review #65 - Best tour we did in Rome).

Finally, although mentioned only in 14 reviews, the analysis further revealed that being an offbeat tour was important for the experience to be memorable. Several reviews mentioned that they had visited places that they would have never got to know on their own.

Ashley was amazing and the foodie tour was terrific. I highly recommend doing this tour and is a great break from seeing the typical tourist stuff (Vatican, Colosseum, etc.) (Review #116 - The highlight of our trip!)

The three negative reviews were read, providing useful insights about why the experience was negative, which is equally important to food tour businesses. One of the reviews blamed a “wailing, shrieking toddler” present in their group that ruined the experience. Another reviewed complained about having to wait and felt that the experience was not authentic. Finally, the third negative reviewed complained about the few allergy options that were available.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The practical implications that yield from this study for food businesses are apparent. Food tour businesses need to focus on the identified seven components and ensure they are being attended for.

This study found that the tour guide was the most crucial component for a memorable food tour experience. The importance of tour guides for a memorable experience had already been indicated by Chandralal, Rindfleish, and Valenzuela (2014). However, in their study, it was the least important and it was not in the context of food tourism. This is the first study to identify the importance of tour guides in the context of food tourism. With their knowledge and communication skills, guide tours can transform tourists' tours into experiences (Ap & Wong, 2001). Food businesses must hire qualified tour guides and provide the best working conditions so that they will be highly motivated.

The second most important component is the food and wine (taste), supporting the results of Sthapit (2017) and Stone et al. (2017) for memorable food experiences. The restaurants where the food tours stop need to provide quality products. This aspect should not be neglected as it is essential to the positive experience.

The social interaction with others during the food tour is another significant factor in the memorable experience. This result is similar to the few studies addressing memorable food experiences (Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2017; Stone et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2018). While it is almost impossible for businesses to control who will be part of the group and their social skills, some strategies can be used to promote social interaction between the members of the food tour. It is essential to have relatively small groups so that the tour guide can interact more easily with everyone. On the other hand, the tour guide should try to facilitate social interaction between the tourists, such as asking everyone to introduce themselves and playing simple games, for example.

Learning was another theme pointed out in the reviews. While this aspect had already been acknowledged in studies addressing MTE (e.g., Chen & Rahman, 2018; Kim et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2018), the few studies regarding memorable food tourism experiences did not refer to it. This study evidences that learning about the food and wine, the culture and history is essential for tourists to have a memorable food tourism experience. Individuals who closely experience local culture are more likely to have memorable tourism experiences (Kim et al., 2012). Once again, the role of the tour guide is crucial. They need the skills to provide this learning experience, especially about the local culture, and in a fun way, as fun is another component influencing the experience.

Finally, the last two components that were least mentioned were the quantity and going to less popular places (offbeat). Food tours should also consider these factors when organizing and planning their tours.

In sum, food tours need to consider all the components identified in this study to provide a memorable food tourism experience.

Although it was not the aim of the study, it is essential to highlight recommendations based on the negative reviews. First of all, since children under a certain age may affect the experience

of others, there could be an option for adults-only groups. Food tours also need to cater for people with specific food allergies or intolerances. If they cannot ensure this, they should make it straightforward so that false expectations will not be created.

CONCLUSION

This study used online reviews of the Rome Food Tour by Sunset around Prati District to investigate memorable food tour experiences. Online reviews revealed to be a valuable source to get insights into what makes the experience memorable. No previous studies had used online travel reviews to examine a memorable food tour experience. This study contributes to the scarce literature regarding food tours and memorable food tour experiences.

One of the major findings from analyzing the descriptions of the experience and the ratings given is that a food tour can provide a memorable experience. Another significant finding was the identification of seven components that are determinant for the food tour to be a memorable experience: the guide, the quality of the food and wine, the socialization with the group, the learning component, entertainment (fun), the quantity of the food and wine and being offbeat.

This study has limitations that can be considered starting points for future research. First, only one food tour was analyzed. An analysis of other food tours, in other countries, should be conducted to compare results. Another limitation is that only reviews in English were examined. Future research could compare reviews in other languages to compare cultural differences.

Another avenue for further research would be to explore if other gastronomic experiences, such as cooking classes or gastronomic events, provide a memorable experience and which factors influence that experience.

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VI. INTERNATIONAL GASTRONOMY



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