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INDULGING YOUR FOODIES

How to lead the field in Culinary Travel

Steve Gillick

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18 OCT 2013: According to World Food Travel Association, Food Travel is “the pursuit and enjoyment of unique and memorable food and drink experiences, both far and near”. The association uses the term “Food Tourism” as

opposed to “Culinary Tourism”, as the word ‘culinary’ is perceived by some to be elitist and implies gourmet travel to some people.



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And as terms such as ‘unique’ and ‘memorable’ are totally in the taste buds of the beholder, this broad definition covers every aspect of food and drink tourism, anywhere and everywhere, from appetizer to dessert, in all price ranges, from street food to gourmet.

It’s one of the hottest tourism trends, yet many travel agents feel that the simple mention of a tour with culinary highlights will attract clients. Not so. This is not a case of ‘if you build it they will come’, rather than an opportunity based on “If you lead them, they will flock”.

Here are 16 suggestions on how to take the lead and crystallize the identification of your name or agency with culinary tourism.

1) **Start small.** Concentrate on a few countries with

which you are familiar and learn as much as you can about the food culture.

2) **Take Photos.** Every time you and your travel companions eat or drink something, on the street, in a restaurant, try to capture the image. Later when you are putting together presentations for your clients, you will be able to feature images from your own photo archives.

3) **List websites.** Food tourism implies that you know something about the country and why certain foods are eaten, or why there is a 'fusion' of foods: adapting dishes from other countries to the climate or growing season or 'taste' of the respective country. Collect URLs for your clients.

4) **Guide Books.** Understand the content of all the major guide books covering the destination, but have your own recommendation available for clients who ask "in your opinion, which one is the best?"

5) **Inform.** Information evenings allow you to meet, present and then chat with prospective clients. If it's a Food Tour, feature tastes of foods and drink from the featured country. This appeals to the senses (and specifically to the taste buds) and helps to place your audience at the destination.

6) **Wine and Dine.** Arrange an evening at an ethnic restaurant as an 'introduction' to a destination. Talk about how to order, what to order, translate the menu, order communal dishes to allow people to taste and try. Take in the ambiance of the restaurant to establish that travel mood as you relate the food experience to the travel experience.

7) **Top Ten.** List and explain the top ten dishes that a country or a region features. “Star’ the ones that you’ve tried and add your own comments/testimonials for your clients.

8) **List restaurants.** Pay attention to the restaurants, snack bars, street stalls, markets that you visit when on holiday or on a Fam. Collect business cards where possible. Then you can provide the list to clients who have time on their schedules to eat on their own.

9) **Chef Chats.** Consider having an in-person or an on-line ‘chat with the chef’ as a way to market a trip. Pre-submitted questions will assist the chef in this Q & A and add some structure to the session, followed by random questions from the audience.

10) **Promote videos.** YouTube and Food TV are filled with shows on domestic, ethnic, beyond the border foods, including a bit of food history and the actual preparation details. Start to collect these. Add some to your website, as well as list them for your clients to get involved to see and hear and get excited about the foods at the destination.

11) **Street Proof.** Street proofing and safety refers to the counsel you provide on what areas of a city or town are generally safe and which ones may not be. Case in point. In San Salvador there are some amazing restaurants but the best advice is to have a taxi pick you up at your hotel and take you directly to the restaurant and then return you afterward.

12) **Talk hygiene.** Food preparation and scepticism about hygiene is a common ‘objection’ to food tourism, yet much is based on myth. In Mexico you

can eat almost everywhere. In just about every Asian country, the same holds true, including food purchased at street stalls, crowded night markets and in restaurants where you may be the only customers. Your reassurance - or caution - to your clients will be appreciated and help them navigate through their food journey.

13) **Advise alternatives.** In this era of food sensitivities (peanuts, gluten, lactose etc) it is important to assure travellers of the availability of alternate foods. In some cases, you may be able to provide clients with a note, written in the language of the destination, to be presented to the server or the chef or the market stall owner, relating to the food sensitivity.

14) **Pushing limits.** You will have some clients who want to try the unusual to acquire bragging rights (e.g. eating marmot in Mongolia, ants in Colombia, fugu in Japan, sheep's head in Iceland etc). Aside from your top ten dishes, you may wish to entertain your reality-TV-influenced travellers with 10 'other' dishes.

15) **Say What?** Put together a food glossary for your clients. If you can make it bilingual, then all the better as your clients can point to the local language describing the dish when they want to try it.

16) **Food Fam.** A creative programme that defines the uniqueness of your agency is the Food Fam. With some expert assistance (if needed) gather your clients in the morning. Head to a local market to buy ingredients and learn about fresh spices and herbs. Then go to a kitchen for an actual discussion on mixing, matching and pairing ingredients. A cooking lesson follows and then the

eating experience. Of course your talk on a destination Food Tour accompanies the meal. A small charge may be made for the event with some of it applied to the final price of the travel experience.

Food tourism is a huge niche in which many travellers wish to indulge for their own individual reasons. It may be as simple as eating at a McDonalds in Rome 'for the experience,' or munching on Springbok Carpaccio at the Kwa Ttu! Restaurant just north of Cape Town. But food tourism also includes more than restaurants: alcohol, soft drinks, cook books, chefs, markets, desserts (chocolate tourism is becoming a huge sub-niche market), gourmet dining, food expos, farms and more.

Travellers who refer to themselves proudly (and sometimes haughtily) as 'foodies' are making a statement. This information will help you indulge their interests by crafting a tasteful recipe for travel success.





Steve Gillick

A tireless promoter of "infectious enthusiasm about travel", Steve delivers his wisdom once a month in his column *The Travel Coach*.

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