



FOOD IN TOURISM

Attraction and Impediment

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Abstract: The common perception of food as a mere attraction in tourism is challenged by stressing the complications and impediments experienced by tourists in the local culinary sphere in unfamiliar destinations, even when attracted to the local cuisine. Hygiene standards, health considerations, communication gaps, and the limited knowledge of tourists concerning the local cuisine are discussed, while the role of ethnic restaurants at home in preparing tourists for the food abroad is questioned. The various ways in which culinary establishments mediate between the tourists and the local cuisine are described. The authenticity of dishes in such establishments and the varieties of culinary experience are considered. **Keywords:** food, cuisine, culinary establishments, ethnic restaurants. © 2004 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

Résumé: La nourriture dans le tourisme : attraction et empêchement. La perception de la nourriture comme une simple attraction dans le tourisme est contestée en faisant ressortir les complications et les empêchements qui sont rencontrés par des touristes dans le domaine culinaire local des destinations inconnues, même quand on est attiré par la cuisine locale. On discute des normes d'hygiène, des considérations de santé, des manques de communication et des connaissances limitées des touristes au sujet de la cuisine locale, et on met en question le rôle des restaurants ethniques dans le pays pour préparer les touristes à la cuisine à l'étranger. On décrit les différentes façons dont les établissements culinaires servent d'intermédiaire entre les touristes et la cuisine locale. On considère l'authenticité des plats dans de tels établissements et les variétés d'expériences culinaires. **Mots-clés:** nourriture, cuisine, établissements culinaires, restaurants ethniques. © 2004 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

INTRODUCTION

“...every tourist is a voyeuring gourmand...” (Lacy and Douglass 2002:8).

At an international conference dedicated to “Local Food and Tourism”, held in Cyprus in November 2000, an overwhelming

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majority of papers was dedicated to local food as an attraction in different destinations (Leu 2000; Skinner 2000; van Westering, Poria and Liapis 2000). None of the scholars present suggested that the confrontation with strange local food might also constitute a problem for the tourists. The only issue that did raise some concern was that of health and hygiene standards in certain destinations (Chikhaoui 2000; Duke 2000; Per-Anders 2000), but the prevailing attitude was that such problems are temporary and can be easily resolved.

Most of the papers at this conference dealt with the culinary practices of West European tourists visiting destinations in their own countries or in the same region, such as France, the United Kingdom, Denmark, or Sweden. The most “exotic” and remote destinations discussed were Cyprus and Greece which, according to Herzfeld are “aboriginal European” cultures (1987:49), as well as Tunisia.

However, the eating practices at the conference itself seemed to contradict some of the assumptions and claims made by the participants. The lunches provided at the conference were served in the hotel’s dining room and featured a potpourri of Greek, Cypriot, and West European dishes. The organizers told the second author of this paper that it was “easier, quicker, and more convenient to eat in the hotel”, and that the varied buffet allowed for each participant to choose according to his own taste and preferences. In the evenings, the participants ate in the vicinity of the hotel, in the tourism strip of Larnaka, and chose dishes from Italian, French, German, and English menus. Only two meals were taken at a local restaurant or “taverna”, both of which were clearly tourism-oriented, featuring English menus and English speaking waiters. On both occasions, the food was chosen by the Cypriot hosts. A quick survey among the participants revealed that most of the participants did not eat independently even once in a local restaurant that was not tourism-oriented. Clearly, even for experts in the field, “local food” becomes acceptable only if it is to some extent transformed. This transformation is the principal concern of this article.

The study of food, eating, and culinary institutions became a burgeoning subfield of sociological and anthropological research in recent years (Beardsworth and Keil 1996; Bell and Valentine 1997; Fine 1996; Lupton 1996; MacClancy 1992; Mennell, Murcott and van Otterloo 1992; Warde 1996; Warde and Martens 2000; Watson 1996). However, while the relations between tourism and different aspects of the culture at the destinations—such as art, religion, and sexuality—were thoroughly studied by researchers of tourism, the interface between tourism and food was, until recently, neglected by scholars of both tourism and food.

In the promotional literature, the cuisine of touristic destinations is widely advertised. Indeed, the few publications on food in tourism mostly deal with it as a significant attraction (Hjalager and Richards 2002). There are hardly any detailed studies of the actual eating practices of tourists, or of the processes of transformation of local culinary

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