



EUSAIR GASTRO TOURISM HANDBOOK

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1 INTRODUCTION

This handbook is developed within the frame of the EUSAIR - European Strategy for the Adriatic – Ionian region. It is one of four macro-regional strategies of the European Union arising from a desire to boost regional integration of Europe, launched in 2014. The Member States (MS) of the EUSAIR include Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, North Macedonia, Italy (Abruzzo, Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, Emilia Romagna, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Lombardy, Marche, Molise, Sicily, Trentino, Umbria, and Veneto), Montenegro, San Marino, Serbia, and Slovenia. Four countries are members of the EU – Croatia, Greece, Italy, and Slovenia.

Figure 1.1. Countries and regions in the EUSAIR



The entire Adriatic – Ionian region economically depends on tourism for income and jobs. Given the economic importance of tourism to the region and the common sustainability challenges, it is one of the four strategic areas with specific aims to achieve:

- Diversified tourism offers (products and services) – full use of the unexploited potential of the region, combating seasonality, improvement, and diversification of the quality of tourism products.
- Sustainable and responsible tourism management (innovation and quality) – reduction of the impact of mass tourism, involvement of all potentially interested stakeholders, and establishment of common standards and rules.

Member States have recognised gastronomy tourism as one of the special interest tourism able to contribute significantly to the diversification of the regional product portfolio. The importance of gastro tourism is based on the enormous popularity and global acceptance of the Mediterranean diet typical to the entire region and a steep increase in market demand. Moreso, gastronomy tourism's

benefits stretch beyond tourism. Its development contributes to agriculture and food production, promotion of environmentally friendly practices and, consequently, influences overall sustainable development.

The main purpose of this handbook is, therefore, to provide a framework for the development of gastronomy tourism in the Adriatic – Ionian region, with specific aims to:

- Deepen understanding of gastro-tourism and provide insight into the Adriatic – Ionian region's gastro-tourism products, destinations, and development potentials.
- Provide practical guidance for gastro-tourism improvements, including planning, development, and promotion based on identifying and assessing resources, market trends, and distribution channels.
- Improve gastro-tourism offer by inspiring stakeholders through good European practices and best-case examples from the Adriatic – Ionian region.

The handbook is developed with several potential users in mind:

- National, regional, and local tourism (boards, associations) and destination management organisations on how to boost gastro-tourism development, marketing, and promotion.
- Tourism product and service providers to get ideas on how to introduce new or improve existing gastro-tourism products.
- Policymakers to improve regulatory framework and funding for the development of gastro-tourism.
- Scholars and students of tourism and related programs to broaden their understanding of this concept in the context of the Adriatic-Ionian region.

This handbook is divided into several logically organised sections. The following chapter describes the main features of gastro-tourism, starting with its definition, market characteristics and critical success factors, before evaluating gastro-tourism in the Adriatic – Ionian region. The elements of gastro-tourism- such as resources, products, promotion and distribution - are then identified as an inspiration for regional stakeholders. Finally, the examples from the region illustrate a diversity of approaches to gastro-tourism development.



2 GASTRONOMY TOURISM

Interest in food and drink is an increasingly evident phenomenon in modern society, and the associated experiences are an important motive for tourist travel. Societal changes, better education, demographic and technological shifts, and environmental pollution have fuelled the growing interest in food, drink and healthy eating. There are two main reasons for people's preoccupation with food. First, people need food for survival, health and well-being. There are no other products so vital to our life. Second, since food has a crucial role in human reproduction and physical and cognitive development, food availability measures how well we care for ourselves and others.¹

It is therefore not surprising that gastronomy has become an essential part of the tourism offer. Some twenty to thirty years ago, when tourism policymakers, academics and professionals became aware of the tourists' growing interest in cultural experiences, food was considered a part of cultural tourism. Gastronomy has provided an ideal setting for those seeking authentic experiences, as food is embedded in the local cultural traditions and reflects the cultural distinctiveness and lifestyle of the communities. Meanwhile, gastronomic tourism has transcended the boundaries of cultural tourism and become a product of special interest in its own right, even though it remained closely linked to cultural tourism to the extent that culinary tradition is a reflection of a country's culture and its people.²

The growing interest in gastronomy during travel and the efforts of destinations to develop a gastro-tourism offer are also due to concerns about social and environmental sustainability. Gastronomy tourism has many indirect benefits, such as promoting rural development, generating income for agriculture, promoting ecological practices, diversifying the economic base of communities and reversing out-migration.³ From this perspective, gastro-tourism can contribute to the sustainable development goals of the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations (Box 2.1).

¹ Morgan, K.J. (2010). Local and green, global and fair: the ethical foodscape and the politics of care. *Environmental and planning* 42(8). 1982-1867

² Rand, G. & Heath, E. (2006). Towards a Framework for Food Tourism as an Element of Destination Marketing. *Current Issues in Tourism* 9(3). 206-234

³ The Future of Gastronomy: 7 Foodservice trends for 2025, Bord bis Irish Food Board.
<https://www.bordbia.ie/industry/news/food-alerts/the-future-of-gastronomy-7-foodservice-trends-for-2025/>

Box 2.1 Gastro-tourism and Sustainable Development Goals of the UN Agenda 2030



Sustainable consumption and transparency is a part of the 2030 UN Agenda. Endorsed in 2015 by 193 countries, the Agenda is a blueprint for eliminating poverty, reducing inequality and protecting the planet. It is implemented through 17 Sustainable Development Goals. They translate the core values and principles of the Agenda into concrete and measurable results. Goal 12 provides a 'green' framework for food consumption, setting up limits and targets. The overall goal is to reduce halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses. This means that producers and consumers need to be part of the sustainable style of consumption, through standards, labels and supply chains. Iconic cuisines, as well as the demand for transparency regarding regulations on the traceability of origin as a quality benchmark become the core of gastro-tourism that changes the perception of the typical, the authentic, the excellent. This means 'greening' the culture of food consumptions and change in eating practices, food styles and values, and media presentation.

Source: Onorati, Maria Giovanna. (2020). "Food consumer culture. Emerging patterns of taste for sustainable eating and made-in-Italy food in different countries". UNICART Selected Papers – Vol. 1 «Tourism management and development of territory». pp. 11-26, Bruxelles, IARC-USC & ETQA. ISBN: 978-2-931089-00-2., <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>

In light of the growing importance of gastro-tourism and the needs of the Adriatic-Ionian Member States to diversify their product portfolio with innovative products and services, this chapter aims to

provide a solid foundation for understanding the products, market dynamics and factors that make gastro-tourism successful. The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to:

- Define gastro tourism and its different facets
- Build a theoretical foundation for regional gastro-tourism development.
- Provide insights into key market trends shaping gastro-tourism supply and demand.
- Outline critical success factors for gastro-tourism product development.

Definition

Gastronomic tourism is a new form of tourism, and there are different terms used for it, such as food-based tourism, culinary tourism, tasting tourism, gastronomy tourism or food tourism.⁴ Regardless of the terminology used, the concept of knowing and learning, eating, tasting and enjoying the gastronomic culture is at its core.⁵

The UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) uses an activity-based definition that says it is a type of tourism where "visitors' experiences are linked with food and related products and activities while travelling".⁶ Scholars have formulated gastro-tourism from an experiential perspective as a "pursuit of appealing, authentic, memorable food and beverage related experiences of all kinds while travelling internationally, regionally or even locally"⁷. World Food Travel Association links gastronomy with the place in a somewhat poetic style when it says that it is an "act of travelling for a taste of place to get a sense of place", inextricably linking gastronomy with the local culture. It is not surprising that leading international tourism organisations such as UNWTO claim that gastro-tourism is as important today as visiting museums, enjoying music or admiring the architecture in a destination.⁸

Gastronomy tourism is much more than food and goes beyond restaurants. It includes various activities - visits to primary and secondary food producers, festivals, fairs, events, markets, tastings, cooking demonstrations, restaurants, or other food-related experiences. Chefs, media, tourism services, food images, promotion and marketing support gastro-tourism.

⁴ Hall, C.M. & Sharples, L. (2003) The consumption of experiences or experiences of consumption? An introduction to the tourism of taste. In C.M. Hall, E. Sharples, R. Mitchell, N. Macionis, & B. Cambourne (Eds.), *Food tourism around the world: Development, management and markets*, 1-14. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

⁵ UNWTO and Basque Culinary Center (BBC) (2019). *Guidelines for the Development of Gastronomy Tourism*. Madrid: UNWTO.

⁶ UNWTO (2022). At: <https://www.unwto.org/gastronomy-wine-tourism>

⁷ Williams, H. A., Williams Jr, R. L., & Omar, M. (2014). Gastro-tourism as destination branding in emerging markets. *International Journal of Leisure and Tourism Marketing*, 4(1), 1-18.

⁸ UNWTO (2016). UNWTO Second Global Report on Gastronomy Tourism: Sustainability and Gastronomy

As already pointed out, different terminology is used in the gastro-tourism concept, with slightly different meanings derived from the importance of food-related motivation in overall travel, as presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Gastro-tourism terminology in relation to tourist motivation and other types of tourism

GOURMET TOURISM	High interest - travelling to a destination with the primary motive of visiting a specific restaurant, market or winery. All or nearly all activities are food related.
GASTRONOMIC TOURISM	
CULINARY TOURISM	Moderate interest - visiting a local market, festival, restaurant or winery upon arrival as part of a broader range of lifestyle activities.
RURAL/URBAN TOURISM	Low interest - visiting a local market, food festival, winery, or restaurant because it is "something different".
	Low interest/no interest - visiting a typical restaurant while travelling because of the need to eat.

Source: adapted from Hall & Sharples, 2003.

Market size

According to the Food Travel Monitor, 93 percent of travellers have engaged in a unique or memorable food or beverage experience other than dining out.⁹ Food and beverage make up a significant part of every tourist's budget. According to the World Food Travel Association (WFTA), tourists spend around 24 percent of their budget on food and beverages.¹⁰ For over 80 percent of all leisure travellers, food and drink experience greatly influence their overall satisfaction with a trip and make them more likely to return to the destination.¹¹

Europe is the largest source market worldwide for outbound tourism. From 3 to 5 percent of all European tourists are purely culinary tourists. European food travellers are interested in food and beverage experiences, the history of the places they visit, and learning about culinary cultures and customs. The main European outbound markets for food tourism are France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Netherlands and Austria.

Germany is not only the primary source market for gastro-tourism but for tourism in general. In 2019, Germans made more than 50 million trips lasting five or more days. Almost 80 percent of Germans travel, of which a vast majority travel internationally (95 percent). On average, Germans spend 16 percent of their travel expenditure on food. They are a great target group for gastro-tourism, especially for sustainable food activities such as visiting farms, local wine producers, and local festivals. Furthermore, 22 percent are willing to pay more for sustainable food, and 33 percent on the food they

⁹ World Food Travel Association (2016). State of the Food Tourism Industry 2018 Annual Report. At: <https://worldfoodtravel.org/annual-food-travel-industry-report/>

¹⁰ World Food Travel Association. At: <https://worldfoodtravel.org/news-the-economic-impact-of-food-tourism/>

¹¹ CBI Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2021) The European market potential for food tourism. At: <https://www.cbi.eu/market-information/tourism/food-tourism/market-potential>

are sure that farmers get a fair price in return. This market also holds potential for plant-based food, as it is the nation with the largest share of vegetarians (7 percent) in Europe.

France is the second largest outbound travel market in Europe. In 2019, French tourists achieved the highest growth in total outbound travel expenditure (11.5 per cent over the previous year). Like the Germans, they spend 16 percent of their travel expenditure on food. For them, food is very important during travel - 39 percent plan their trip around where and what they eat and drink. However, they are not overly adventurous regarding food choices, as they prefer food that is familiar to them or dishes that are similar to what they eat in France.

Slightly more than 30 million Italians travelled abroad before the COVID-19 pandemic, and the number of outbound trips is expected to grow. As food and drink play a significant role in the national tradition, food is an important factor in destination selection for Italians. Their willingness to choose sustainable food is among the highest in Europe; 28 percent are prepared to pay more for sustainable food, and 35 percent for food with fair deals for farmers. Italians are also willing to reduce meat consumption; 45 percent are willing to cut down on red meat primarily for environmental reasons.

Spain is also a sizeable gastro-tourism market. Expenditure on outbound Spanish travel has increased by 55 percent in the five years until 2019, and it is expected to grow further after the Covid-19 crisis. As food and drinks are a vital part of the national culture for Spaniards and an indispensable part of socialising, they extend this behaviour while travelling. Like their European counterparts, for a majority (73 percent), environmental concerns have at least some influence on their eating habits. About a third of them would spend more on products paying a fair price to farmers.

Dutch tourists are a sizeable outbound market. In terms of behaviour, they are adventurous, always looking for something new and different. They like to be physically active on trips; for them, activities are more important than the quality of accommodation. They enjoy discovering new places and tastes in a quest for uniqueness and novelty. In particular, they want to see products grown by local farmers, as it is what they are used to in the Netherlands. Similar to Germany, there is a large proportion of vegetarians (7 percent). Slightly more than half (54 percent) agree that sustainability concerns have at least some influence on their eating habits.

Although with a population of 9 million, Austria is a small, important outbound market, given its high GDP per capita (45,000 EUR) and significant disposable income to spend on holidays. Seven percent of them are vegetarians. Austria is one of the countries with the highest emphasis on sustainable food choices.

Market segments

In recent years, many tourism destinations and regions have begun to promote their local cuisine, culture, food-related events, local restaurants and famous chefs to increase the number of tourists. These trends are also visible in EUSAIR countries, characterised by great diversity in culinary heritage. Therefore, understanding tourist behaviour is crucial for building a competitive gastro-tourism.

Most broadly, the demand for gastro-tourism is driven by ageing population and changing lifestyles.

Socio-demographic segments driving demand for gastro-tourism are:¹²

- DINKS (Dual Income No Kids),
- SINKS (Single Income No Kids),
- Empty Nesters (parents whose children have left home),
- Baby Boomers (members of the baby boom generation in the 1950s), and
- Divorcees.

By **centrality of the food in motivation** to travel and influence on destination selection, the market can be segmented into two groups:

- Gastronomy-motivated tourists – for them, food is the leading travel motive or, at least, a decisive factor when choosing a destination. Most of their activities in a destination are related to gastronomy.
- Accidental gastronomy tourists – they consider food when choosing a destination, but not to the extent that it substantially influences their decision; however, when making their final choice, they might lean towards places with better gastronomy. While staying at their destination, they are not particularly interested in food-related experiences.

Gastronomy and gastro-tourism frequently refer to **foodies** as the most important market segments.

¹²Williams, H. A., Williams Jr, R. L., & Omar, M. (2014). Gastro-tourism as destination branding in emerging markets. *International Journal of Leisure and Tourism Marketing*, 4(1), 1-18.

Box 2.2. Foodies

WHO ARE FOODIES?



Foodies are food lovers, people who associate their lifestyle with food, enjoy cooking, and share food and culinary experiences. Food-related activities are an indispensable part of their individual and social identity. They are looking for new tastes and new experiences; they love to cook, learn about food or even just think about food.

Foodies are mostly working couples between 30 and 50 years of age who have a higher education and an above-average income. They are willing to pay more for unforgettable and unique experiences that they like to share. Foodies are also interested in culture, history, traditions and connection to nature. They prefer authenticity and the opportunity to learn as well as socialise and be seen as good guests. As a rule, they have experience and knowledge acquired on previous trips.

The first mention of the term 'foodies' was in 1980 in a New York Times article. After that, Barr and Levy (1984) published the "Official Foodie Handbook" and defined 'foodies' as people who talk about food all the time and everywhere; they are almost obsessively interested in food and waste no time talking about it.

Sources: Guzel, B. (2016). *Gastronomy Tourism: Motivations and Destinations*. In book: *Global Issues and Trends in Tourism* (pp.394-404). Ed. Cevdet Avcikurt, Mihaela S. Dinu, Necdet Hacioglu, Recept Efe, Abdullah Soykan, Naruy Tetik, Publisher: St. Kliment Ohrindsky University Press; Getz, D. Robinson, R., Andersson, T., & Vujčić, S. (2014). *Foodies and food tourism*. Oxford: Goodfellow Publisher; Yozukmaz, N. Bekar, A. & Kilic, B. A (2017). *Conceptual Review of Foodies in tourism*. *Journal of Tourism and Gastronomy studies*, 5/4, pp 170-179; Robinson, R.N.S., & Getz, D. (2013), *Food enthusiasts and tourism: Exploring food involvement dimension*. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*.

Based on **attitudes and food and drink preferences**, gastro-tourists are divided into four segments: recreational, existential, diversionary, and experimental tourists (Figure 2.1).¹³

¹³ Kivela, J and Crotts, J. C. (2006). *Tourism and Gastronomy: Gastronomy's Influence on How Tourists Experience a Destination*. *Journal of Hospitality Tourism Research*, vol 30(3), 354-377

Figure 2.1. Attitude-based gastro-tourist market segmentation

Recreational gastro-tourists

- Conservative; family values and the pleasure of dining together.
- Dining ambience and service style are not so important.
- Food-related entertainment while on holiday is limited to activities that enable watching without participation.

Existential gastro-tourist

- Consumption of food and beverage means gaining in-depth knowledge about the local or regional cuisine, wines, beverages and the destination's culture.
- Respect and search for pleasant and simple food prepared with care and respect to tradition; prefer visiting working farms and vineyards, participating in cooking classes, harvesting of grapes and fruits and visiting cheese makers.
- Avoid expensive restaurants because of extravagant décor and service that often reflect 'manufactured' dining-out environment.

Diversionsary gastro-tourists

- Food and beverages must come easy, without too much effort and there must be plenty of it.
- Prefer large meat joints, jumbo-sized desserts, house wine and big plates of food.
- Eating and drinking is a way of getting together with friends and enjoying life.

Experimental gastro-tourists

- Food and drins symbolise their lifestyle.
- Actively seek the destination's smartest designer cafes and restaurants that serve innovative and different menus; keep up to date with trendy recipes, fashionable foods and ingredients; food, wine styles and cuisines are part of their self-image, and they are well informed about news in food by reading lifestyles magazines and portals.
- Holiday souvenirs bought by them are cookbooks, culinary and wine readings, kitchen gadgets, porcelain, etc.

Key trends

As people start to understand that climate change is a severe threat to the planet's survival, they demand a meaningful response from businesses and policymakers, which is especially noticeable with the younger generation. They want to travel sustainably - use sustainable transport, accommodation, and destination products and services. They want to be assured that they will contribute positively to the local community, as they seek authenticity, local, and eco-friendly. This is also reflected in food consumption and gastro-tourism.

According to a survey of Europeans' attitudes towards sustainable food¹⁴, consumers primarily see 'sustainable' as a synonym for environmentally friendly, without GMOs and pesticides and local, with some specificities across countries; two-thirds of consumers are open to changing their eating habits for environmental reasons; slightly over 40 percent of consumers say they have either stopped eating

¹⁴ BEUS (2020). One bite at a time: consumers and transition to sustainable food. Analysis of a survey of European consumers on attitudes towards sustainable food. At: https://www.beuc.eu/sites/default/files/publications/beuc-x-2020-042_consumers_and_the_transition_to_sustainable_food.pdf

red meat or have cut down the consumption due to environmental concerns; most consumers want sustainability information to be compulsory on food labels.

Among several consumer trends identified in 2020¹⁵, three are the most important for the food and beverage sector:

- **In control**

In times of uncertainty, consumers want a sense of agency over their lives. Food brands need to help consumers feel empowered to make decisions that protect their health and, at the same time, the planet's health. People want to see measurable progress on environmental, health and ethical commitments. Providing verified information will be one of the critical success factors.

- **Enjoyment everywhere**

Consumers are eager to break out of their confines, explore new experiences and have fun. A deeper emotional resonance with food and drink can be created with taste, colour, texture and aroma. It is essential to offer activities to help people to get tangible, real-world experiences that cannot be replicated online.

- **Flexible spaces**

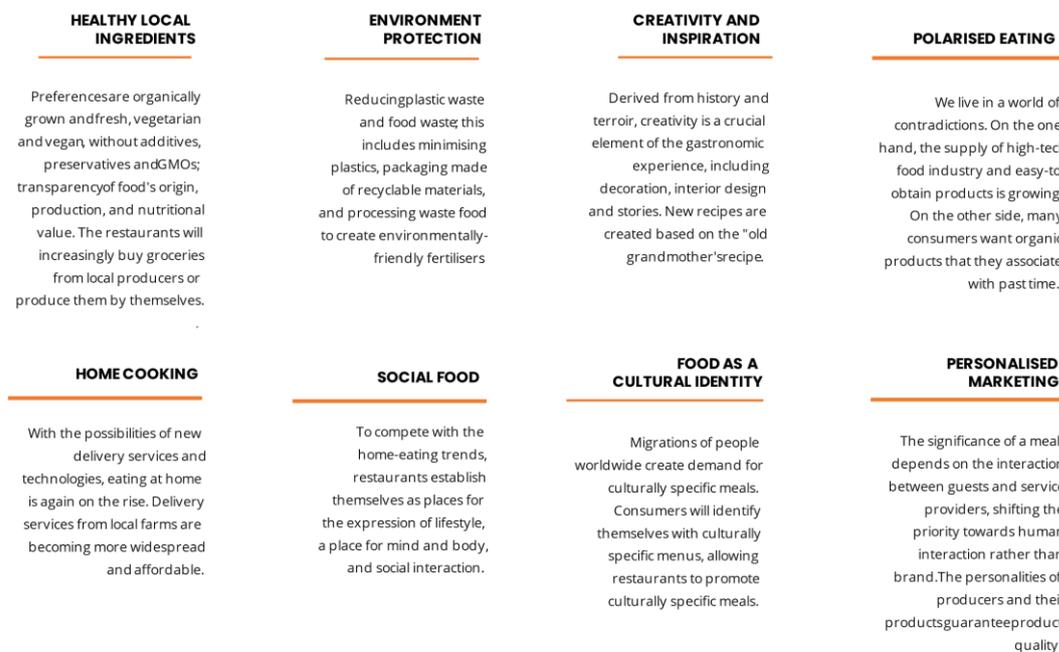
The home will continue to be a sanctuary for many people in the period to come. At the same time, restaurants, retailers and pop-up shops will be venues where deeper connections can be fostered between consumers and brands. Spaces will be designed to invite consumers to spend time, express themselves or meet new people.

Trends in gastronomic tourism reflect more general trends in gastronomy, as succinctly presented in Figure 2.2.¹⁶

¹⁵ MINTEL (2022). Food & drink application of the 2022 Trends: EMEA, Honorata Jarocka.

¹⁶ Sources: World Food Travel Association, at: <https://worldfoodtravel.org/>; Mintel (2022) Global Food and Drink Trends <https://www.mintel.com/global-food-and-drink-trends>

Figure 2.2. Trends in gastronomy



The global consumer trends and trends in food and beverages are also mirrored in demand for gastro-tourism. There are several trends in gastro-tourism that needs to be recognised for the successful development of this fast-growing special-interest product:¹⁷

- **Food storytelling**

It is crucial to satisfy visitors' desire to learn about local culinary traditions, ingredients and cooking techniques to broaden their cultural horizons and create meaningful experiences. Stories about chefs, meeting people behind the food – farmers, producers, and local connoisseurs and learning about food and wine pairings are all part of this trend. They want to spend time with chefs in the kitchen, producers and growers on the farm and winemakers in wineries.

- **Food experience packaged with other interests**

Visitors are looking for opportunities to combine food with other activities; for example, local healthy food is part of many active holidays; heritage experiences are unimaginable without local cuisine; retreats include healthy eating, often vegetarian; wine tasting is paired with art classes. These reflect a growing interest in healthy food, specifically for fresh, seasonal, locally produced, organic foods, and at the same time, growing resistance to the model of mass food production, i.e. industrial farming.

¹⁷ World Food Travel Association (2022). At: <https://worldfoodtravel.org/>; UNWTO (2012). Global Report on Food Tourism and UNWTO (2017) Second Global Report on Gastronomy Tourism, Madrid: UNWTO.

- **Showcasing local food culture**

Visitors learn about past and present places through the story about food. The recipes, ingredients and preparation techniques specific to a destination are embedded in the local culture, its historical trajectories and the influences of the people that lived and ruled over the place.

- **Harnessing the power of media**

Visitors are influenced in their destination choice by the level of shareable experiences posted across social media. The influence of bloggers and their posts and reviews is increasing. Food tourism includes online reservation systems, marketing, and digital and QR-coded menus. The popularity of online ordering and home delivery services is growing.

Critical success factors

As demand for gastro tourism is growing, so is the competition. Some countries of the Adriatic- Ionian region have been recognised for their food, such as Italy, whose food is acclaimed globally due to the mass emigration to the USA in the last part of the 19th and early 20th century, taken over for its healthy ingredients and simple preparation and has been romanticised through novels and movies. This has made the Mediterranean-style diet that prevails in the Adriatic – Ionian region very popular and acclaimed worldwide, providing a good foundation for developing gastro-tourism in the region. However, with the growing sophistication of consumer tastes and preferences and increased pressure from competitors, it is imperative to adopt a strategic approach to gastro-tourism development. As the gastro-tourism entails many actors from private and public sectors and cuts across industries, a lead by a destination management organisation is crucial. In the process, destinations must be mindful of factors critical to their success in the competitive gastro-tourism market.

As gastro-tourism reflects a destination's characteristics, critical success factors differ depending on the nature of a destination, broadly divided into urban, rural and coastal.¹⁸

Urban gastro-tourism destinations share the following characteristics:

- The food and gastro scene is given a high-profile supporting role, complementing all other visitor experiences of the city
- Thriving urban gastro-tourism destinations have a concentration of innovative food and drink service providers and venues or those that are quick to recognise and adopt new trends
- Dining and entertainment are the primary forms of gastro experience, supported by food theme events and gastro tours
- Although tourists generate an essential share of the trade, the gastro scene is primarily developed with locals in mind, who are the mainstay of demand, with tourists

¹⁸ Ward-Perkins, D. (2017). Success factors in the development of a food destination. Success Factors in the Development of a Food Destination. At: https://www.academia.edu/40067137/Success_factors_in_the_development_of_a_food_destination

- Cities reputed for the gastro-scene have invested in the upgrade of their fresh food markets as well as their promotion to visitors
- Diversity of food and drinks, evolving from the historical influence and enriched by immigrant populations, is embraced and acclaimed as it shows the link between culture, food, heritage and inclusivity.
- The city's food and drinks and related products showcase regional or national cuisine, tradition and produce, thus significantly contributing to the visitors' idea of the national cuisine and food quality.

In contrast to urban destinations, **rural regions** have different attributes that contribute to gastro-tourism success. Rural areas are where food is grown and produced, and their gastro-tourism products need to establish a link between the land, agriculture, food production and consumption on the spot, embedded by the idea of 'field to fork'. In particular, successful rural gastro-tourism destinations are those that have:

- Agricultural tradition, reputation for growing certain crops or farming, such as the sheep from the island of Cres in Croatia, or produces such as the kalamata olives from Greece
- Local people appreciate and nurture their culinary tradition
- Proximity to urban centres brings twofold benefits – a concentration of demand for innovative, quality and local food and a source of talents to enrich the rural restaurant scene (chefs, investors, and even employees willing to relocate or diversify their business)
- The ability of producers to embrace innovation in production and preparation to reinterpret traditional food according to modern tastes and preferences.
- A concentration of stakeholders – restaurants, shops, accommodation providers, tour organisers - involved in the whole gastronomy value chain that appreciate local food and tradition and actively promote it to visitors.
- High-quality restaurants, acclaimed regionally, nationally or internationally, give reputation and visibility to rural gastro-tourism destinations.
- Gastro-themed events to support agriculture and food production establish the region's reputation and build up year-round demand.

Coastal destinations are the mainstay of tourism activities in the Adriatic-Ionian region, often struggling with overtourism and investing in activities that could ease the seasonal pressure and extend the season. Gastro-tourism offers an opportunity to address those challenges. Towns and villages along the coast have a strong fishing tradition and seafood-based cuisine. The fertile soil in their hinterland supplies plenty of fresh-grown fruits and vegetables, quality wines and olive oils. These are precisely the attributes that make them successful gastro-tourism destinations:

- Fishing tradition, with fresh fish and seafood supplied daily, often by small-size fishing fleets selling the catch in the harbour, straight from the boats
- Locals have pride in their culinary traditions

- Destinations are known for some specific geographical characteristics or a history of production, such as oysters in the bay of Mali Ston in south Dalmatia
- Tourists can access fishing harbours, get a boat excursion or participate in fishing expeditions
- Local restaurants serve seafood and fish caught locally and ingredients from nearby farms, preparing it following traditional recipes or that upmarket cooking with a creative twist
- Food is celebrated through festivals and events, either as an essential part of the event or completely dedicated to food and drinks



3 GASTRONOMY TOURISM IN THE REGION

As already pointed out, sustainable tourism development in the EUSAIR aims to widen the product portfolio and improve destination management. Gastro-tourism is a special interest product that can broaden destination appeal by attracting new market segments, especially in off-and-shoulder seasons. Equally important, gastro tourism can serve as leverage for developing local agriculture, boosting or reviving food production, stimulating preservation and protection of culinary heritage, retaining locals in the rural area and attracting new talents in the food and beverage sector and, finally, contribute to the promotion of local food products thus fostering demand and exports.

The countries of the Adriatic – Ionian region share common, widely accepted and popular, Mediterranean culinary traditions that are a mix of national traditions and cultural influences. Nevertheless, there are differences in the stage of gastro-tourism development among the Member States, with Italy leading the way not only regionally but globally, Slovenia as the market newcomer, Greece as a country seeking affirmation on the global gastro-tourism map and the rest of the countries at the incipient stage of product development.

National tourism development strategies and official tourism web-sites were analysed to evaluate gastronomy tourism in the Member States. The main goals were to see the role that gastronomic tourism plays in overall tourism development, what is being done for its development and how it is promoted.

- **Italy**

It is an icon on the global gastro-scene and a global leader in food tourism. The Italy culinary tourism market represents about five to nine percent of the international culinary tourism industry. Although the Italian National Tourism Strategy 2017-2022 does not explicitly address gastro-tourism, government initiatives to promote local restaurants and the rising use of social media platforms are key trends driving their culinary tourism market.¹⁹ National tourism organisation's official web-site promotes Food and Wine in the "What to do" section, with detailed information about typical food, wines, prosecco, and tours.

- **San Marino**

Its geographical location shares all the characteristics of Italian cuisine and actively promotes gastronomic experiences as a journey through rural tradition and culinary specialities. Culinary tradition is based on grain fields, vineyards and the agricultural landscape surrounding Mount Titano. San Marino has a long tradition of winemaking and olive oil production from its specific olive varieties. In terms of its development, gastronomy tourism is in a group of products that

¹⁹ Future Market Insights (2022) Italy Culinary Tourism Market by Activity Type, Booking Channel, Tourist Type, Tour Type, Customer Orientation, Age Group & Region - Forecast 2022 – 2032. At. <https://www.futuremarketinsights.com/reports/italy-culinary-tourism-market>

have to be market tested, with an emphasis on the culinary workshops (pasta and pizza making, deserts baking) as the best way to promote local dishes.

- **Slovenia**

Slovenia is an example of a policy-driven gastro-tourism development. In the national tourism strategy, gastro tourism is a key product that cuts horizontally across the product portfolio. Furthermore, a gastro tourism Action Plan 2019 – 2023 was adopted to ensure a coordinated and structured development approach. Slovenian gastro-tourism product is diverse. It includes culinary offers from restaurants and accommodation facilities (top restaurants, quality restaurants, inns, mountain lodges, tourist farms), wine cellars, farm visits, tastings, cellar/farms open days, picnics in urban and rural areas, food festivals, themed menus, cooking classes and workshops. The food matches well with its overall market positioning focused on pristine nature, health and well-being. To gain international attention and reputation, it bid successfully for the "European Region of Gastronomy 2021" award²⁰, promoting healthy and sustainable gastronomy. There is a dedicated portal, TasteSlovenia.si,²¹ bringing together gastronomy, restaurants, chefs, experiences, unique stories and events.

- **Croatia**

Croatians are proud of its food and wine, and visitors continuously express high satisfaction with food in hotels and restaurants²². Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy 2030 recognised gastro-tourism as a strategically crucial special interest product which can improve the quality and range of related experiences. Gastronomy is prominent in its tourism promotion. It is one of the key experiences on the official tourism portal web-sites.²³ The emphasis is on the diversity of Croatian cuisine and its regional variations due to history, climate and heritage – from north to south and east to west. Wines, olive roads, and traditional gastronomic events are particularly highlighted.

- **Greece**

Greece is intensively developing gastronomic tourism. As an illustration, in its tourism marketing plan for 2022, half of the marketing budget was dedicated to special interest tourism, with gastronomy, alongside culture, wellness, nature and recreation, having a priority. Ministry of Tourism runs a national quality label for restaurants, wineries and specifications for agro-tourism enterprises. As in the case of other countries, gastronomy is prominent on the official tourism portal. The portal emphasises the rich aromas and flavours

²⁰ Annual award by the International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism (IGCAT). More information at: <https://igcat.org/>

²¹ <https://www.tasteslovenia.si/>

²² Marušić, Z., Čorak, S., Ivandić, N., Beroš, I., Ambrušec, M. (2020). TOMAS – stavovi i potrošnja turista u Hrvatskoj 2019. Zagreb: Institut za turizam.

²³ <https://croatia.hr/en>

of the food and tradition that goes back to ancient times²⁴; the promotion is structured around traditional recipes, products, regional cuisine, wines and other beverages.

- **North Macedonia**

In the national strategy, eno-gastronomy is included as a part of Macedonian culture. 'Macedonian culture' represents one of the four main pillars for future market positioning and includes, among others, traditional Macedonian cuisine, typical products, Macedonian festivals and Macedonian wine. The first tourist activity promoted on the official tourism portal²⁵ in the menu 'Things to do' – 'Feels Macedonia through senses' is 'Taste – food and wine'. The emphasis is on history, lifestyle and preserved culinary customs until today. North Macedonia specialities are dried peppers, Macedonian ajvar – a savoury spread from roasted peppers and eggplants, and Tavche Gravche – fresh beans prepared in a brass pan.

- **Albania**

Improving the image of Albania and promoting local products is one of the four main goals of the National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development 2019 – 2023. In particular, eno-gastronomy, together with culture and heritage, is considered the country's strength; therefore, it is one of the nine subsectors to be invested in. Albania promotes the diversity of its cuisine, created under the influence of various culinary cultures – Mediterranean, Balkan and Ottoman. Currently, Albania is redefining its cuisine to appeal to contemporary market trends. Some of the dishes on which Albania builds culinary recognition are Byrek (Albanian spinach pie), Qofte (meatball dish), Fergese (creamy vegetable side dish), Kabuni (rice-based dessert), Baklavara (layered pastry with nuts).

- **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

This country, likewise, plans to capitalise on the themed culinary activities and events, and programs supporting such activities are part of the National Tourism Strategy. These programs include the creation of experiences that show a wide range of quality local food and wines, the development of independent themed restaurants, the establishment of a value chain related to halal food – from primary producers to end consumers, exploring the potential for creating menu guidelines for food services establishment to encourage the use of local produce and the preparation of traditional dishes. Bosnia and Herzegovina promotes its gastronomy as 'traditional yet international'. The promotion focuses on many restaurants that offer different dishes with rich flavours inspired by international and local cuisine.

- **Serbia**

²⁴ Archestratos wrote the first cookbook in history (330 B.C.)

²⁵ <https://macedonia-timeless.com/>

Rich gastronomy is recognised as one of Serbia's national tourism development strategy strengths. In the National Tourism Strategic Plan, "Spas, wine and culture" is a strategic business area. It is planned to be developed by appealing to those motivated to "slow down the pace of life, relax, enjoy, re-energise ". It is a product that needs to be continuously developed and represents a priority-added value. In the promotion of Serbian gastronomy, great emphasis is placed on tradition and lifestyle. Thus traditional dishes made according to old family recipes are highlighted. It also promotes culinary and wine events organised in numerous destinations on the topic of specific dishes or foods prepared there.



4 GASTRONOMY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The second chapter has presented the main features of gastro-tourism and the factors that influence its market success. In contrast, the preceding section demonstrated the importance of a planned approach to gastro-tourism development, even for a country such as Italy, which is a global culinary icon. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the elements that need to be considered or put together for a successful, competitive and sustainable gastro-tourism destination.

Resources

Common to all of the countries of the Adriatic – Ionian region is a globally popular Mediterranean diet. The Mediterranean sea was the main trade route where people and goods from South Europe, North Africa and the Middle East have mixed through trade, migration, invasions or colonisations since ancient times. As people and goods mixed, they have learned about herbs and spices, ingredients and cooking styles from each other. Mediterranean cuisine has evolved through time, and integration and evolution are still ongoing²⁶.

The onset of modern tourism helped spread the Mediterranean diet widely. Modern tourism is traced back to the 17th century Grand Tours when the nobles of western and northern Europe started to travel, especially to France, Italy and Greece; later on, the wealthy middle classes followed the fashion in the 18th century. The growing number of visitors were impressed with the food and started to write recipes and publish cookbooks celebrating the food's richness, diversity and flavours.

The popularity of Mediterranean food got a further boost in the 1950s when scientists discovered that people in the Mediterranean have a lower rate of diabetes, coronary heart disease and obesity, attributing it to eating whole grains, vegetables, fruits, olive oil and fish. A great number of scientific studies show the benefits of the Mediterranean diet and it has become a synonym for health and well-being.²⁷

While Mediterranean cuisine is a shared cultural heritage and contemporary practice of the Member States, their cuisines differ depending on the parts of the Mediterranean where they are located. Italy, Slovenia and Croatia use tomatoes, garlic, pine nut and wine for cooking and drinking, a variety of grains, bread and pasta. Other Member States represent the East Mediterranean cooking with dishes such as pitas, meatballs, kabobs, and rice, with lots of cheese and yoghurts spiced with parsley, mint and lemon.

²⁶ Helstoky, C. (2009) Food culture in Mediterranean. Westport: Greenwood Press.

²⁷ Altomare, R., Cacciabaudo, F., Damiano, G., Palumbo, V. D., Gioviale, M. C., Bellavia, M., Tomasello, G., & Lo Monte, A. I. (2013). The mediterranean diet: a history of health. *Iranian journal of public health*, 42(5), 449–457.

The popularity and cultural importance of the Mediterranean diet are affirmed by its inclusion in the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage, including Croatia, Italy and Greece, alongside Cyprus, Spain, Portugal and Morocco. The explanation encapsulates this phenomenon's main features (Box 4.1.).

Box 4.1. Mediterranean diet as inscribed on the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

“The Mediterranean diet involves a set of skills, knowledge, rituals, symbols and traditions concerning crops, harvesting, fishing, animal husbandry, conservation, processing, cooking, and particularly the sharing and consumption of food. Eating together is the foundation of the cultural identity and continuity of communities throughout the Mediterranean basin. It is a moment of social exchange and communication, an affirmation and renewal of family, group or community identity. The Mediterranean diet emphasizes values of hospitality, neighbourliness, intercultural dialogue and creativity, and a way of life guided by respect for diversity. It plays a vital role in cultural spaces, festivals and celebrations, bringing together people of all ages, conditions and social classes. It includes the craftsmanship and production of traditional receptacles for the transport, preservation and consumption of food, including ceramic plates and glasses. Women play an important role in transmitting knowledge of the Mediterranean diet: they safeguard its techniques, respect seasonal rhythms and festive events, and transmit the values of the element to new generations. Markets also play a key role as spaces for cultivating and transmitting the Mediterranean diet during the daily practice of exchange, agreement and mutual respect.”

Source: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/mediterranean-diet-00884>

Furthermore, several UNESCO-protected intangible heritage relating to food and food production is from the Adriatic-Ionian region, such as beekeeping in Slovenia, the traditional plum spirit in Serbia, truffle hunting in Italy, art of Neapolitan Pizzaiolo, cultivating mastic in Greece, head-trained bush vine ('vite ad albarello) in Italy, and gingerbread craft in Croatia. It shows not only the diversity of practices but also the appreciation for tradition and a desire for its preservation.

In addition, gastro-tourism is a rare tourism product with noteworthy regional cooperation between a few Member States. It is achieved through the European Cultural Route of the Olive Trees²⁸, certified by the Council of Europe in 2005. Of the nine Member States, this route includes seven - Albania, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Slovenia.

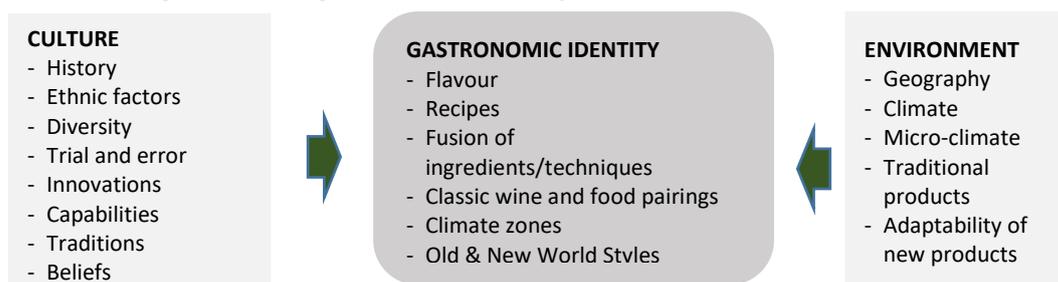
²⁸ More information at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/the-routes-of-the-olive-tree> and <https://olivetreeroute.gr/en/>



The Member States have already recognised the importance of their gastronomic tradition. However, for gastro-tourism development, destinations need to identify and evaluate a whole range of factors that are the main building blocks of their gastro-tourism offer.

The process and elements are outlined in Figure 4.1. This process might even lead to the use of food in creation of national identity and national branding, a trend known as 'gastronationalism'. Nordic countries, in particular, are an example of building a global reputation for innovation and creativity through, among else, food and healthy diet, involvement of culinary professionals, political support, collaborative scientific research and excellent promotion.²⁹

Figure 4.1 Building blocks of a gastronomic identity



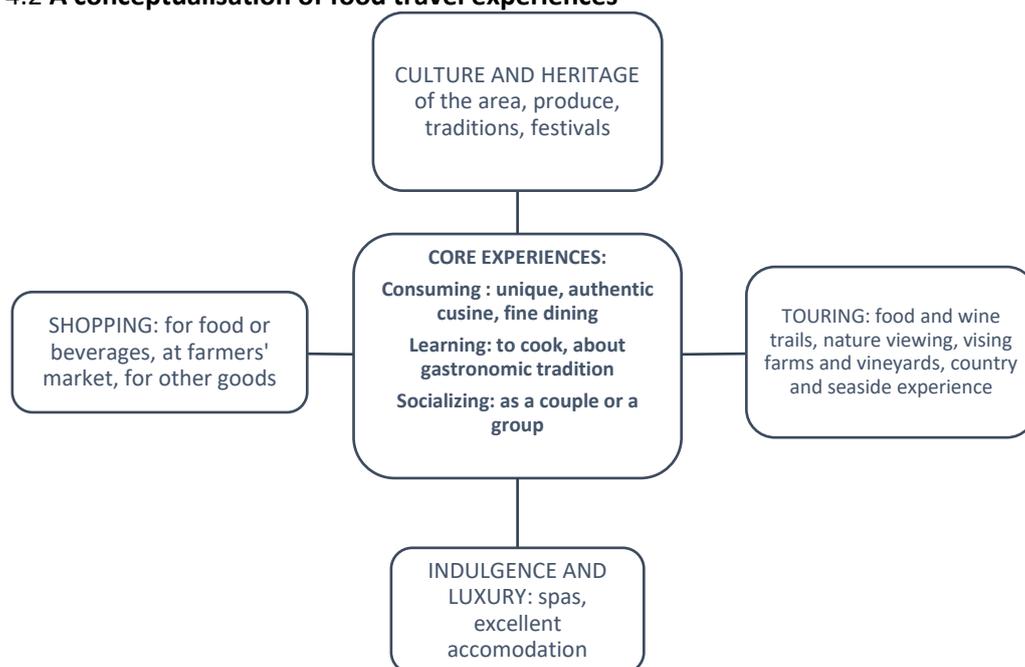
Source: Harrington (2005)

Gastro-tourism goes beyond diets, dishes and market recognition. The value chain – from production and processing to consumption needs to be developed. Figure 4.2 shows how a value chain needs to be developed for the tourist market, adding values at each stage. To build a value chain, a conceptualisation of the gastro-tourist experiences presented in Figure 4.2. is a good starting point. At the centre are core experiences, emerging from food consumption, learning about food and socialising

²⁹ Byrkjeflot, H. Pedersen, J. S. and Svejnova, S. (2013). From Label to Practice: The Process of Creating New Nordic Cuisine. *Journal of Culinary Science & Technology*, 11, 36-55

around food. There are four supporting products and services – shopping for local and traditional food and beverages, often prompted by the consumption, presentation of food-related culture and heritage through festivals, dedicated visitor centres and exhibitions, enjoying the farming landscape through touring and indulging in luxuries for a discerning up-market gastro-tourists.

Figure 4.2 A conceptualisation of food travel experiences



Source: Getz, D., Robinson, R. (2014), *Foodies and their Travel Preferences*, *Tourism Analysis*, Vol. 19

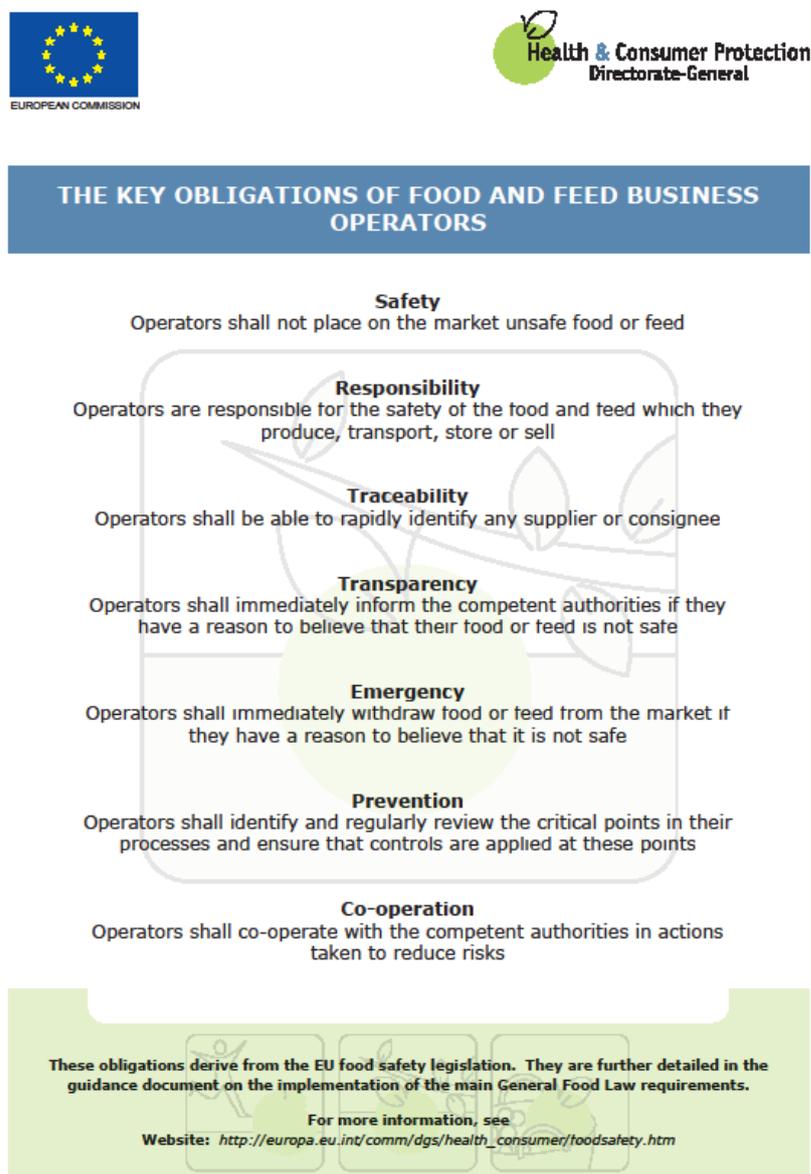
Rules and regulation

Gastro-tourism cuts across many sectors, each with its own rules, regulations and voluntary standards to ensure that products and services are safe, reliable and of good quality. This section focuses on the food-related legislative framework of the EU and international standards. Stakeholders in the gastro-tourism value chain should also be familiar with their own countries' laws, rules and regulations. However, reviewing the food-related legislation of each Member State is beyond the scope of this handbook.

The most important law is on food safety. Regulation (EC) No 178/200230 sets out the basic principles of food law to protect human health and consumer interests. It applies to all production, processing and distribution stages of food. This legislation includes, among else, the definition of food, food businesses and food business operators, the definition of unsafe food and food traceability. The Health and Consumer Protection Directorate General of the European Commission has produced a summary for food operators (Figure 4.3).

³⁰ Full text available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=celex%3A32002R0178>

Figure 4.3 EU food operator's guide



To ensure food safety for the tourist market, operators serving food can obtain ISO certification. ISO – International Organisation for Standardisation – has set out ISO 22000 Food Safety Management Standards³¹ - the requirements for a food safety management system. It maps out what an organisation needs to do to demonstrate its ability to control food safety hazards to ensure that food is safe for consumption. It can be used by any organisation regardless of its size or position in the food chain.

³¹ For detailed information see <https://www.iso.org/iso-22000-food-safety-management.html>

Product and facilities

Gastronomic products, based on the inventory of resources and gastro identity presented in the first part of this section, are ways for gastro-tourism experiences to reach a diverse tourist market. According to the Basque Culinary Center, the products can be derived from several types of food-related activities (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.4 **Typology of gastro-tourism products and facilities**



Source: UNWTO & Basque Culinary Centar (2018)

Some of the main attractions of gastro-tourism products are:

- **Local food markets** where tourists can see and taste local food and products, shop and 'feel the rhythm of local life'. Many well-known gastronomic destinations have restaurants that are integrated into them, offering local dishes made from seasonal ingredients sold there.
- **Food or wine festivals** are often used to build a destination image, promote local food producers and suppliers and boost sales. They also connect local producers, chefs, restaurants, and other stakeholders. There are many examples of themed events and festivals in the regions, such as those dedicated to truffles, strawberries, chestnuts, and plums; there are even more festivals and celebrations where food stalls are a vital part of the programme, such as Advent in Zagreb 2022 where high-end restaurants and famous chefs have stalls to bring their food to a broad audience at popular prices.
- **Harvests-related experiences** where tourists can participate; such as olives, grapes, figs harvests, wild berry picking, and herbs and plants collections. These events, run from a few hours to several days.
- **Food-themed roads**, such as wine roads, olive oil roads, cheese roads or any other theme emerging from the regional specialisation. They connect small producers across the region under one theme, increasing promotional effects for the region and producers and improving their sales.

- **Gastronomic tours** come in many shapes and forms – from a walking street tour to a week-long tour for foodies, including visits to restaurants, markets, wine cellars, tasting rooms, vineyards, or even cooking classes. Participants can enjoy walks, quality interpretation – storytelling or get quality interaction with locals. Tours can be themed by type of food, such as gourmet, vegetarian/vegan, pastry and desserts, wine and other beverages.
- **Food museums and visitor centres** are an excellent way to present local food traditions and give an overview of its history, produces and producers, promote produces and facilitate sales.
- **Cooking classes** are extremely popular with foodies; like tours, they can be themed (i.e. learning to cook local dishes or dishes specific to certain diets) and delivered in various ways, from community-run classes to those run by professional or well-known chefs.
- **Visits to local producers, farmers, and artisans** at their premises, including tastings and food and drink pairings.

Promotion and branding

Promoting gastronomic tourism should be planned and include several key steps and activities. The main activities involve determining communication goals, defining communication partners, defining targeted markets and guest segments, and activities and tools to be used.

In promoting gastronomic tourism, it is crucial to define the main external and internal goals of communication activities. **External goals** usually relate to raising the recognition of gastronomy or strengthening the image of a gastronomic destination and stimulating demand for gastronomic tourism products. **Internal communication** goals include raising awareness of gastronomy tourism among stakeholders and strengthening communication between all those who create the value chain of gastronomy tourism. Stakeholders in gastro-tourism can be broadly divided into three groups: institutional stakeholders (tourism communities, ministries responsible for tourism and culture, chambers, local governments, educational institutions in culture and tourism, etc.), producers (chefs, event organisers, associations, tourist agencies, etc.) and media (specialised journalists, influencers, bloggers, tourists, etc.).

Gastro-tourism destination can rarely provide experiences for all segments of the gastro-tourism market. Market for gastro-tourism can be segmented in many different ways, based on socio-demographic characteristics, psychographic characteristics and the centrality of food motivation in travel decisions or it can be activity-based, as already discussed in the second chapter. A decision on which market segments to appeal to is based on matching the segment's characteristics with food experiences, products and attractions that the destination can provide.

To promote gastronomic tourism, communication messages and communication constants have to be integrated into the activities of the entire tourism branding. Creating messages and stories that convey

local gastronomy's greatest values and uniqueness is essential. Messages that are interesting to the modern market are those that contain the following values - home, simple, quality, authentic, seasonal, healthy, and diverse. Destinations should develop their gastronomic stories to convey their authenticity and uniqueness to guests. These can be stories about:

- original foods and flavours (products with a protected designation of origin or geographical origin in the countries of the Adriatic region)
- simple traditional dishes (with emphasis on geographical diversity or historical influences),
- wines (including its relationship with the fate of the ancestors, planting vineyards, displacement around the world),
- hosts (table culture, tradition, role in the social life),
- healthy and preserved environment (local producers, eco-certificates, healthy and preserved natural environment).

Online marketing tools that can be used, among others, are web-sites of tourism organisations or specialised web-sites, food blogs and specialised portals, Facebook, Instagram, TV shows and mobile applications:

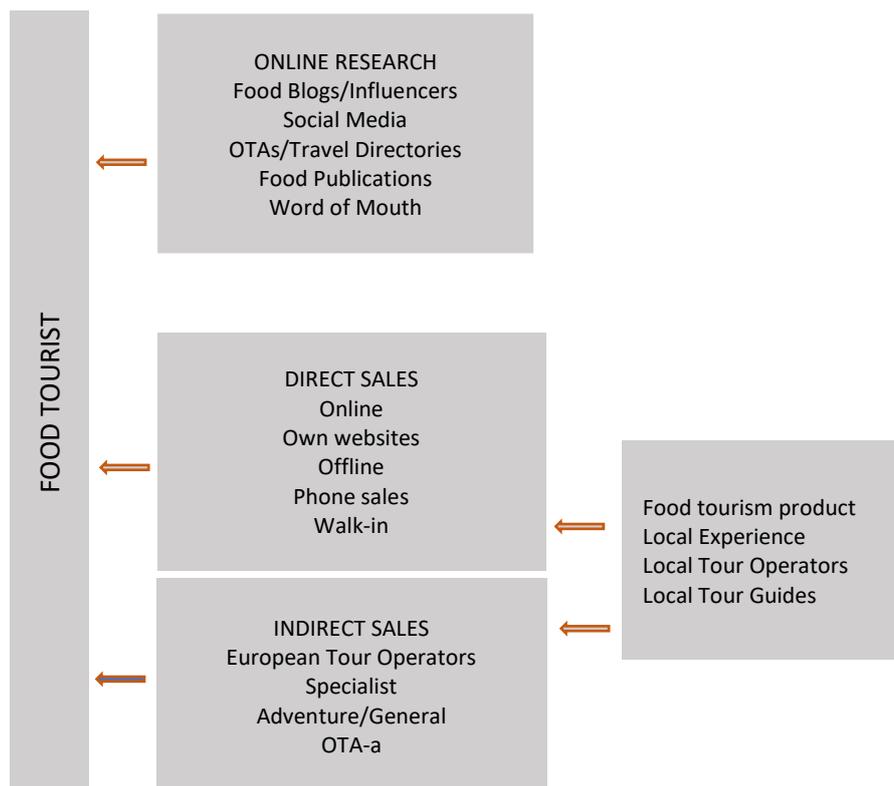
- *Food bloggers* are highly influential in attracting potential visitors to a particular destination or restaurant.
- *Vlogs* act similarly to blogs, except the focus is on video materials, which are simpler and easier to consume.
- *Facebook* is the most popular social network, with more than 2 billion users worldwide, enabling target marketing based on users' location, age, education, purchasing power, interests and other vital parameters.
- *Instagram* content is marketed exclusively in photos or concise video materials, requiring extremely high-quality images of gastronomic and gourmet content to stand out among other content.
- *TikTok* is a short-form, video-sharing app that allows users to create and share 15-second videos on any topic. TikTok is social media tool with over 1 billion monthly active users.

Mobile applications and culinary TV shows should also be mentioned. More and more tourists, especially younger ones, use applications exclusively when visiting a destination to be informed in just a few seconds about the desired aspect of the tourist offer (culture, history, nature, food). Culinary TV programs are among the most watched TV content today, and there is plenty of choice with famous chefs on cable television. Some chefs visit certain countries with their teams and do actual culinary reports on that country's gastronomy. Among the most famous programs are 24kitchen and Food Network.

Distribution

As illustrated in Figure 4.5, gastro-tourism products can be direct or indirect; direct when the sale is made without intermediaries, by producers or service providers' web-sites, by phone or by the retail shop. Indirect sales are sales via a tour operator or other type of travel sales agent.

Figure 4.4 Distribution Channels for Food Travel Products



Source: adapted from Acorn Tourism Consulting³²

Many large European tour operators offer food tours and experiences within a broader itinerary that includes adventure and/or cultural experiences. Sales through Online travel agents (OTAs) dominate nowadays. The importance of online presence is best illustrated by the fact that food is among the most popular and best-rated experiences on platforms like Tripadvisor. Furthermore, in 2018, OTA-s reported that food tours and cooking classes featured in the top five categories, growing by 57%.³³

Most agencies offer a wide range of food experiences discussed so far, from tailor-made itineraries, group tours, cooking courses for passionate foodies, wine tours and visits to wineries, cultural trips with gastronomic experiences or experiences such as truffle hunting, visits to Christmas fairs, gastronomic events and similar.

³² Acorn Tourism Consulting. Available at: <https://www.cbi.eu/market-information/tourism/food-tourism/market-entry>

³³ Source: <https://www.cbi.eu/market-information/tourism/food-tourism/market-entry>

Below is a list of several specialist operators, general and adventure operators and online travel agents (OTAs).

Specialist operators



Gourmet on Tour has a tradition of 20 years. Its mission is "to create one-of-kind experiences for food lovers who want to see the world a little differently".³⁴ They offer private and tailor-made tours featuring the discovery of small family producers, and they try to stay far from large commercial operators. They want their customers to feel more like quests than tourists. They organise private travel/tailored itineraries, cooking courses, wine tasting, special interest tours, etc.³⁵

General and Adventure Operators



Genussreisen is an operator from Munich, Germany, specialised in 'Gourmet & pleasure trips'. It offers individual and group culinary tours in different destinations, including Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Greece, and Italy. Their Internet shop also sells gastronomic and gourmet products from different countries.³⁶



Intrepid Travel promotes Europe as one of the best regions in the world to explore great food. They avoid tourist traps taking their guest to hidden laneway bars, herb-filled homestay kitchens and al fresco cafés only the locals know. They offer tours of 10 or more days in countries of the Adriatic-Ionian region such as 'Croatia & Slovenia Real Food Adventure', 'The Balkans Real Food Adventure', 'Slovenia to Macedonia Real Food Adventure'.³⁷



Imaginative Traveller is an independently owned travel company based in UK - Debenham, in rural Suffolk, founded in 1991. They offer food adventures all around the world and especially emphasise responsible travel and vegan-friendly travel, and they are helping to create a sustainable world.³⁸



Terre Voyage is a French operator founded in 1989. Their offer is based on a host-quest relationship. Their culinary trips revolve around local culture and production. They offer tours of the discovery of preserved agricultural techniques oriented to responsible organic productions.³⁹

Online Travel Agents

³⁴ <https://gourmetontour.com/>

³⁵ <https://gourmetontour.com/>

³⁶ <https://genussreisen.de/>

³⁷ <https://www.intrepidtravel.com/>

³⁸ <https://www.imaginative-traveller.com/>

³⁹ <https://www.terre-voyages.com/>



The company was started in 2011 to offer authentic gastronomic experiences. One of the interesting experiences they offer is in-home cooking experiences, meals with hosts, and market visits.

Airbnb Cooking Experiences



Airbnb started in 2007 and today has over 4 million Hosts who have welcomed more than 1 billion guest arrivals in almost every country worldwide. Airbnb introduced Cooking in Airbnb Experience – a new category of bookable experiences to discover culinary traditions around the world. The heart of this experience is people coming together to make and share a meal.⁴⁰



Eatwith is the world's community for authentic culinary experiences with locals, available in over 130 countries and more than 1,100 destinations. Some of their offers are cooking classes, food tours, rooftop brunches, pasta-making classes, etc.⁴¹



Secret Food Tours is an operator that offers the 'best secret bites loved by locals and overlooked by tourists.'. Their tours, which have over 15,000 5-star reviews, show how locals buy food and how food shapes the area's culture. Of the countries in the EUISAR region, only Italy is included in their offer, for now.⁴²



Evaneos is a platform that allows travellers to create tailor-made tours directly with a local travel agent based in the destination. Evaneos operates across ten international markets and has been operating since 2009. Evaneos offers tours in Croatia and Italy.⁴³



The Mission of ResiRest is 'to make a social impact by connecting local families and travellers in food experiences'. Their vision is 'making a change from 'far-tourism' into 'fair-tourism' and 'selfie-tourism' into an intercultural experience with local families'. ResiRest uses food to connect people worldwide.' From EUISAIR countries, they offer Croatia.⁴⁴



TourRadar is an adventure booking platform where users can book private, group, and tailor-made multi-day organised adventures from 160+ countries around the world. They have 2,500 operators and offer more than 50,000 adventures. One of the Adventure Styles they offer is 'Food & Drink Tours & Trips', which they promote as 'the best way to get a taste of local life'.⁴⁵



Musement was founded in 2013 and has since expanded globally from Milan HQ to serve over 1000 destinations in 80 countries. Musement helps travellers get the best from destinations by providing a great choice of local tours and attractions.⁴⁶



Klook is a booking platform that, among others, offers food & dining experiences all around the world. The offer can be selected on their web-sites by different menus, destinations, and prices.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ <https://news.airbnb.com/introducing-cooking-on-airbnb-experiences/>

⁴¹ <https://www.eatwith.com/>

⁴² <https://www.secretfoodtours.com/>

⁴³ <https://www.evaneos.com/>

⁴⁴ <https://resirest.com/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.tourradar.com/f/food-culinary>

⁴⁶ <https://www.musement.com/>

⁴⁷ <https://www.klook.com/>



5 EXAMPLES FROM THE REGION

This chapter presents good practices from the Adriatic-Ionian region. These examples have been selected to include the gastro-tourism development project, excellent restaurants, high-quality products, successful branding, popular festivals and events, and famous chefs promoting national cuisine. In this way, the examples presented to illustrate all aspects of gastro-tourism are covered in the previous sections. They also show the great diversity of gastro-tourism due to local culture, historical influences and environmental conditions, not only between but also within the Member States, and illustrate that each destination can find something unique on which to build its gastro-tourism products and experiences.

CROATIA: Vodnjan – Center of premium extra virgin olive oils

Vodnjan, a town in Istria, the largest peninsula in the north of the Croatian Adriatic, is an excellent example of strategic and coordinated development of a gastro-tourism destination. The strategy takes advantage of some of its competitive advantages - the unique microclimate, the history of olive cultivation since Roman times and more than 30 producers of high-quality olive oil.

This small town in the coastal hinterland is known for its cultural heritage and attracts mainly day visitors for sightseeing. Gastro-tourism has a dual function - to promote the oil and food producers through advertising and to broaden the tourist appeal of the destination. The strategy, implemented through the coordination of olive and oil producers, local authorities and the tourist board, was first to enhance the reputation of the oil producers and then to develop a showcase event for their promotion.

The reputation is based on the quality of the oil, which is testified by the leading tourist guides and world rankings. Istria is among the best olive oil producers in the world, as shown by the international Flow Olea, an ultimate guide to extra virgin olive oils (EVOO), and the EVOO World Ranking, which is based on the number and type of awards received in a given year. Many producers in Vodnjan carry the EVOO label to show that the oil is high quality and is produced with care and attention. Town of Vodnjan, already attracting cultural and heritage tourists, has used this to position itself as a leading destination for olive oil in the Mediterranean and promote the oil as the key to longevity in the Mediterranean. To promote the benefits of the oil, food and oil, producers have teamed up to create dishes that combine local produce with EVOO - salads, meat, pasta, fish, ice cream and a chocolate dessert.

The stakeholders (municipality, tourist board, producers' association) have created the annual fair and municipality festival 'The Days of Young Olive Oil' as a brand to promote oil producers and build Vodnjan's market position. The event gathers oil producers from Croatia and beyond but also presents other specialities of the region - Istrian prosciutto, wine, brandy and liqueurs, cheese and dairy products, figs and jams, honey and honey products. The programme includes olive tastings, workshops on the oil's properties, scent and taste, food pairing by top chefs, and a demonstration of the production process. The festival's centrepiece is an old mill that has been in continuous operation since 1911. Finally, walking tours through and around Vodnjan lead through olive groves and oil-producing farms.

GREECE: Ergon House – foodie hotel

This complex, located just below the Acropolis, features an integrated design inspired by Greek culinary tradition. Moreover, it is an example of hospitality that benefits the Ergon brand. Ergon Food is a Greek company run by the Douzis family, founded in 2008 as a premium brand for the best Greek food, comprising shops, restaurants, markets and accommodation. Ergon House offers around 1200 products from 150 producers, and the product range is growing by 10% annually.

On the ground floor of the hotel is Agora - the marketplace. This Greek farmers' market offers national specialities, an olive bar, fresh produce, a fishmonger, a butcher, a patisserie, groceries, wine and a liquor shop. In the centre of the spacious 25-metre-high glass-roofed atrium is a restaurant with a 200-year-old olive tree. The Greek theme is emphasised by a mural of the goddess of the hunt, Artemis, by the famous street artist; a vertical herb garden lines one side of the atrium.

Guests can fully engage in the culinary experiences. There are two kitchens for cooking classes. Guests can pick up products from the market and prepare the meal or make it themselves. To top it all off, there is a rooftop cocktail bar with olive trees and views of the Acropolis.⁴⁸

There are four different minimalist-style rooms with walnut wood floors, embroidered fabric panels, grey marble and a grey and white terrace, like those found in many Greek houses. They are equipped with a Marshall Bluetooth speaker and Netflix service aimed at discerning international guests. Each room has a curated minibar with delicacies, including personalised cocktails by famous mixologists, ouzo, soft drinks, pasteli, breadsticks, rusks, spreads and other Greek treats. The rooms also have espresso machines and Greek mountain tea, which you can enjoy amid minimalist, modern décor.

The hotel emphasises in its promotion, "Cities were built around marketplaces, and the table is the heart of the home. With Ergon House, we are creating a world we believe in, a place where the positive energies of Greek food and hospitality converge under one roof."⁴⁹

ITALY: EATALY - branding of national gastronomy

This example, similar to the one from Greece, is about a private company founded to present high-quality, affordable Italian food and drinks worldwide. The company's global success is partly due to the reputation of Italian cuisine. Italian food culture is the symbol of Italy throughout the world, which has always contributed to the culinary arts and gastronomy and whose typical products, such as pasta or pizza, are widely known. It has preserved its culinary traditions in the face of the homogenisation of

⁴⁸ <https://greekreporter.com/2019/09/13/food-tourism-in-athens-exploring-greek-culinary-traditions/>

⁴⁹ <https://house.ergonfoods.com/>

eating habits in Western countries; Italians have changed their eating habits very little in the last 60 years compared to other parts of Europe.⁵⁰

The EATALY brand comprises two English words: EAT and ITALY. In its broadest sense, EATALY is about the "Italian" way of enjoying excellent Mediterranean cuisine embedded in Italian food and wine culture and history in a place where "quality Italian food is available to everyone, at fair prices and in an environment where people can shop, taste and learn."⁵¹

EATALY is a chain of large food markets covering four thousand square metres, modelled on an Italian fresh food market, with restaurants, food and beverage counters, a bakery, retail shops and a cooking school. There are also book areas, kitchen utensil shops, conference rooms and training courses. EATALY's success is due to its innovative "eatertainment" experience that combines shopping, dining and learning.

EATALY's first shop opened in Turin in 2007. Today, there are over 35 shops in Italian cities and worldwide (London, Paris, Munich, Stockholm, Toronto, Sao Paolo, Boston, Las Vegas, Chicago, etc.). In the shops, customers can buy the best products at low prices, as direct relationships are established between producers and distributors, focusing on sustainability, responsibility and sharing.

SLOVENIA: Ana Roš and Hiša Franko – a story of a famous chef

From Slovenia, the story of a famous chef - a critical factor in gastro-tourism, is presented. Recently, Slovenia started to gain a reputation as a destination with high-quality and innovative gastronomy. It all resulted from planning, systematic investment, promotion, and stakeholder cooperation. Slovenia's advantages are its diversity in a small area, the vast stretches of unspoiled nature, excellent and original wines, a well-preserved culinary heritage, and the recent success of Ana Roš in the international arena

Ana Roš is one of the most famous chefs in the world. Her restaurant Hiša Franko in Kobarid, Slovenia, has become a major culinary destination. In 2011, the restaurant was featured in a documentary by the Franco-German channel Arte TV. The following year, she was the first female chef to join René Redzepi, Alex Atala and Daniel Patterson for the Cook It Raw event. Finally, in 2016, Hiša Franko was featured in the Netflix series Chef's Table, bringing Roš worldwide attention. Thanks to Ana, Slovenia is becoming one of the best gastronomic destinations in Europe. Her restaurant is listed as one of the 50 best restaurants in the world.

Ana Roš is a self-made chef. After giving up a promising diplomatic career in Brussels, she started to cook in a restaurant inherited by her parents-in-law out of a desire to upgrade traditional but bland Slovenian cuisine served up to date and a shortage of chefs. Years of learning and experimenting have

⁵⁰ Montelone, E. and Dinnella, C. (2009) *Italian meals*. In *Meals in Science and Practice*. Ed. Herbert L. Meiselmann.

⁵¹ Oscar Farinetti, entrepreneur who turns an old vermouth factory in Turin, into the very first Eataly location

skyrocketed her into chef's stardom. She is the winner of numerous awards, including the Best Female Chef presented in 2017 by the world's 50 Best Restaurants organisation.

The restaurant is located in the foothills of the lush Soča Valley, surrounded by beautiful mountains. All ingredients for the restaurant are sourced seasonally from local growers and producers who have been in the region for generations. The tasting menu at Hiša Franko reflects the seasons and the local environment, which is one of the keys to her success.

Her success also has to do with social responsibility. In Milan, she cooked with Massimo Bottura in the kitchen of Refettorio Ambrosiano as part of his Food For Soul initiative. In India, she cooked with the Creative Services Support Group. This group supports education and employment for disadvantaged girls and young women. Her latest project is the opening of Ana Bakery in Ljubljana, located in the city centre. The bakery uses high-quality ingredients from small producers, almost all of which are of Slovenian origin.

ALBANIA: Delicious Albania: Gjirokastra Gastronomy - a story about traditional food

Albania emphasises its uniqueness in gastronomy as "the most ancient countries of Europe and that there are track of both oriental and western cultures and culinary art as a border between the east and the west".⁵² Regarding gastronomy, there are three regions in Albania, each of which preserves its specificities: Northern Albania, Middle Albania and Southern Albania.

Gjirokastra is a town listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, famous for the well-preserved city of authentic architecture, old houses and wooden facades. Gjirokastra is renowned for its food. The destination offers numerous experiences related to gastronomy, some of which are: cooking classes for preparing unique traditional Gjirokastra recipes and qifqi. Qifqi is considered the national dish of Gjirokastra. The experience includes a visit to the old market. Then, there is the experience of Raki Extraction which is offered by a local producer who planted 1.5 ha of grapes. One of the unique gastronomic experiences in Gjirokastra is 'Drinking coffee', when tourists can be part of the whole process – from roasting it on the fire, grinding it on coffee stone and tasting it on mahogany. Drinking coffee on a stone is related to the story of 'Gjirokastra – stone city'.

It is an excellent example of how UNESCO city combines stories about history, culture and food. For the unique dishes, they use local names that some bloggers found amusing, such as mumulige, qollopit, bobollak, hordhi, qahi, papare, etc. The traditional food of the poorest remains simple. Traditional cuisine had many dishes invented due to poverty or ingredient scarcity in various periods. The destination has countless interesting stories about food that come from the history of the place. For example, these are the stories about poverty: 'Fake foods' - fake meatballs, fake shyueto, fake soups.

⁵² National Tourism Agency. Albanian Gastronomy. <https://www.albania.al/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/ALBANIAN-GASTRONOMY-compressed.pdf>

Despite being fake, they are packed in delicious ingredients and herbs; a story about 'The stone coffee pounder'; 'Story about Aneja' – an old woman skilled in all household matters.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: Wine Road of Herzegovina – a story of a themed tour

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country of cultural diversity, and it is reflected in its national cuisine, combining Mediterranean, Greek, Croatian and Turkish culinary traditions. Some of the most famous products and dishes are cheese and coffee, 'Potato PITA', 'Sarma'. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, gastro-tourism is usually seen as a subsector of cultural, eco and rural tourism. There are more initiatives, such as festivals and wine tours. The traditional dish 'ćevapi' are on a world list of the best foods⁵³.

The culture of winegrowing and wine production in Bosnia and Hercegovina dates back to the Illyrian period and the Tracians who introduced grapevine seedlings to the Balkans. Towards the end of the 19th century, with the first wine exports to Western Europe, the wine business becomes a significant source of income in Hercegovina. Herzegovinian winemakers aspire to be recognised for their Žilavka and Blatina as unique grape varieties in the world.

The Wine Road of Herzegovina is a project that rounded up the tourist offer of Bosnia and Herzegovina and extended from Ljubuski in the west to Trebinje in the east. It comprises wineries, museums, restaurants, galleries, and historical and natural attractions. The Wine Road is promoted with the slogan "With wine through time". Winemakers involved in the wine road (more than 30 producers) offer authentic local products, especially wines Žilavka and Blatina, as well as other traditional specialities. A large number of travel agencies provide a tour of the wine roads. The main attractions of the programs they offer are tasting the finest wines, visiting wineries, enjoying a rural environment, meeting with passionate wine producers and enjoying the scenery of vineyards, rivers and stone.

MONTENEGRO: Plantaže – a story of the largest vineyard in Europe

The gastronomy of Montenegro is based on the tradition of simple and healthy food. The gastronomy follows the geography of Montenegro; there are three very differentiated regional cuisines: Mediterranean-coastal cuisine, lake cuisine – cuisine of the central area of Montenegro and the shores of Lake Skadar (a UNESCO-protected national park), and mountain cuisine of northern Montenegro.⁵⁴

The unique vineyard and winery - Plantaže - is situated about 30 kilometres from the Adriatic sea, near Skadar Lake. The vineyards cover an area of 2.300 ha and produce 22 million kilos of grapes annually. Its wines are sold in over 40 countries.

⁵³ Peštek, A., Kukanja, M. and Renko, S. (2020). *Gastronomy for Tourism Development: Potential of the Western Balkans*. UK: Emerald.

⁵⁴ Vujačić, V., Pashova, S., Filipović, V. and Filipović, J. (2019). Gastronomy and food safety standards in the function of the development of gastronomic tourism of Montenegro. *Izvestiya Journal of Varna University of Economics*. 63(3). 238-250.

There are three wine cellars: Lješkopolje, Ćemovsko polje and Šipčanik. Planataže's wines have won over 800 awards and honours on international assessments, competitions and exhibitions.

The company organises different types of wine tasting and tours within the program Wine Route: 'Bouquet', 'In vino veritas', 'Montenegro – Land of wines'. The offer for tourists includes a restaurant where guests can experience traditional dishes paired with wines. Then, there is a retail store where guests can buy products of Plantaže. Tourists can also experience tours of the vineyard by train and visit plantations of indigenous varieties. Wine cellar Šipčanik is where the company organises educational workshops and wine school for wine lovers and offers meetings and events.⁵⁵

NORTH MACEDONIA: Tuto Hotel – a story of the 'Slow food' in Janče

North Macedonia cuisine is among the Balkans' most popular cuisines, reflecting Mediterranean and Middle Eastern influences. The agricultural sector in North Macedonia represents a high potential for development. The country offers different products, from citrus fruits, grapes, almonds and hazelnuts to tobacco and mountain teas. It is most famous for its red peppers and ayvar – a spread made of roasted peppers and eggplants. North Macedonia has been intensively developing its gastronomic tourism in recent years. One of the good examples is "Slow food in Janče".

Janče is a small village in Mavrovo, a picturesque place surrounded by hills, a part of the Mavrovo National Park. The town has stone houses with some examples of rural architecture with wooden frames. The village has Hotel Tutto, run by Tefik Tefikovski, a local culinary champion. Tefik lived in Germany and Italy, where he joined the Slow Food movement 20 years ago. He is the founding member of the Slow Food Macedonia Organization. His restaurant is the centre of the community, with views over the valley, and offers local specialities that need to be pre-ordered half a day ahead. He also runs a shop with local products, of which the fruit-based *rakija* (Macedonian firewater) and paper bags of dried herbs plucked from mountain passes are the most popular.

Tutto Hotel is entirely designed and furnished by implementing international eco standards, and it was built exclusively of natural materials. Nights and mornings are fresh and pleasant, and it is an ideal place for nature lovers and foodies. The restaurant prepares the finest traditional food by the Slow Food principles representing this region's spirit. Ingredients are entirely natural and locally grown.

SERBIA: Pirot - "Little Jerusalem" – a story of building a destination food brand

Serbia's cuisine is rich and diverse. It seeks to attract international tourism through unspoilt and beautiful nature, authentic gastronomy and cultural heritage, and cities. A good example is Pirot, a destination famous for its local cheese, lambs, sausage, handcrafts and unique ethnographic art motifs.

⁵⁵ <https://www.plantaze.com/>

The town was the winner of the EDEN – European Destination of Excellence competition for gastronomy tourism in 2015.

Pirot is well-known for sheep-based produce, especially Pirot sheep cheese and flattened sausage. Local food and customs are well preserved and can be experienced in many ways – through restaurants, markets, shops and events. Gastronomic tourism is well integrated into cultural tourism, the town's main product, endowed with cultural and historical monuments, churches and monasteries, fortresses, the Museum of Ponisavlje and archaeological sites. Apart from cultural attractions, Pirot and its surroundings include natural attractions of Stara Planina Nature Park and Jerma Special Reserve with waterfalls, lakes, rivers and canyons, and rural tourism establishments offering food.

Many gastronomic events have been organised throughout the years, of which the most famous are: Cheese Festival, the Pirot Lamb Festival, the International Folk Festival and the Tradition Pirot Fair. Pirot Flattened Sausages Fair, on the last weekend of January, is one of the most significant gastronomic events in the region, where a large number of distilleries, wineries, dairy and cheese producers, traditional art and craft makers participate to showcase their products to several thousand visitors that attend the festival each year.



6 RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The Adriatic-Ionian region has a long tradition of healthy cooking, and its Mediterranean diet is nowadays considered essential for health and well-being. People from all over the world practise it. Gastronomy has also lured tourists to the region for a long time. Therefore, it is not surprising that with the accelerated growth of food-motivated travel globally, gastronomy is considered an important tourism product in the Member States, regardless of the level of its development.

Modern tourists are travelling motivated by the need for new experiences that will enrich their lives and are looking for new ways to get to know people and cultures. In this context, gastronomic experiences are clusters for creating memories and connecting with the destination. Authenticity is increasingly important, and the experience of 'food and drinks' is, in a certain way, ideal for delivering this value.

Gastronomic experience itself results from a combination of products, services and stories that must be aligned to provide real value for guests. A high-quality product achieves this. It has to be innovative, represent the local heritage and be enhanced by exciting stories conveying uniqueness.

Gastronomy as a tourist product has been developed differently in the EUSAIR Member States. On the one hand, Italy is one of the world's most developed and attractive gastronomic destinations; Slovenia has made significant strides in developing its gastronomic offer in recent years, as have Croatia and Greece. Other countries have only begun to create this product and include it in the tourist offer. This is evident from the strategic development documents in which gastronomic tourism stands out as one of the primary products in most Member States. Gastro offer is also presented on the web-sites of national tourist organisations, where food and drinks are prominent on the main pages or those related to the activities of the stay in the destination.

Regardless of their level of gastro-tourism development, all Member States still have an abundance of underutilised resources. What makes their gastronomy unique are preserved original tastes, local recipes and table culture, coupled with the sincere hospitality of the local population. In all countries, guests can find "hidden oases" of preserved traditions and customs and authentic surroundings, which have not yet been lost under the influence of globalisation.

For several reasons, further growth in the popularity of gastronomic experiences is expected. Firstly, it supports the growing awareness of the importance of sustainable development, and secondly, the growing awareness of the importance and impact of food on human health. Increasing education and information and the recent health crisis have emphasised the importance of responsible behaviour, especially when visiting other destinations.

Gastronomic tourism contributes to sustainability in various ways, connecting the agricultural and tourism sectors, employing young people, developing the offer in rural areas, preserving cultural values, reducing seasonality and developing the economy in smaller regions.

For the development of gastronomy tourism, from the perspective of products and service providers, it is essential to have a good plan and define the strengths and weaknesses of the destination and opportunities and threats from the environment. It is also important to analyse all potential resources and attractions from which interesting tourist products can be created with their unique characteristics, considering the availability of sales and promotion channels. After that, it is necessary to find a way to collaborate between stakeholders and create partnerships. It is also essential to have quality promotional materials, highlight the stories and allow guests to immerse themselves in the local population. Gastronomic experiences can be combined with other forms of the offer in the destination, especially cultural tourism, active vacations in nature or wellness programs.

Finally, there is an excellent opportunity for the countries of the EUSAIR to connect more strongly with each other, to exchange knowledge and examples of good practice and to create joint gastronomic tourism products, especially tours, which can be offered to more distant markets. The topic of gastronomy is a quality platform that perfectly connects the entire tourist offer of the wider area and through which historical and cultural stories, stories about climate, lifestyle and customs and many others can be told.

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