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A Critical Review of Gastronomic Tourism Development in Kenya

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Abstract

Gastronomic tourism is an emerging niche tourism that plays a key role in sustaining tourism development. This paper critically reviews literature and identifies gaps on the concept of gastronomic tourism especially in the Kenyan context and gives recommendations on how to develop it further. It was found out that studies on gastronomic tourism are still limited in Kenya despite the benefits that a destination can reap from developing gastronomic tourism and that the development of gastronomic tourism as a form of tourism is still in its infancy. A number of recommendations have been made in this paper; firstly that there is need for stakeholder approach in research on gastronomic tourism, secondly documentation of authentic gastronomic aspects in every County and development of gastronomic tourism packages and routes is important. Thirdly, the development of a gastronomic tourism strategy within the broader tourism policy framework will go a long way in promoting gastronomic tourism in Kenya.

Key words

Sustainability, Gastronomic Tourism, Local foods, Cultural and Heritage Tourism

Overview of Gastronomic Tourism

Tourism is a key revenue earner for most countries globally. In Kenya, it accounts for 10% of the GDP and it is the second highest foreign exchange earner after agriculture (SNV, 2007). Due to improved connectivity and government prioritization, tourism has been growing in the country and expanded by 4.9% in 2019 (WTTC, 2020). However, it is very seasonal in Kenya because its development is modelled on reliance of international tourists whose arrival is influenced by weather and other social, economic and political factors both in their countries of origin and in the destination countries (SNV, 2007). For many decades, wildlife safari, beach, nature and scenic, cultural, adventure, business and sports tourism have been the main tourism segments developed and promoted in Kenya. With the stagnation and decline of wildlife safari and beach tourism respectively, tourism product diversification is therefore justified for tourism sustainability in Kenya (GoK, 2017). Gastronomic tourism is one of the tourism niche area that has high prospects for tourism diversification in Kenya, justified mainly by the presence of 42 ethnic communities; grouped into western bantu,

central bantu, coastal bantu, plains nilotes, highland nilotes, river-lake nilotes and Cushitic speaking people, each with occurring within unique geographical setting with unique cultural foods and lifestyles (Makoloo, 2005)

The concept of using food as a unique destination attraction for tourism has gained prominence among academicians around the world in recent years. This concept has been described using different terms such as culinary tourism, food tourism, cuisine tourism and gastronomic tourism (Steinmetz, 2010). Despite the different terminologies used in describing the concept, it is generally agreeable that cultural food, traditional forms of food production and consumption are common items in all these forms of tourism (Rachao, 2019; Carral, 2020).

Tourists and food

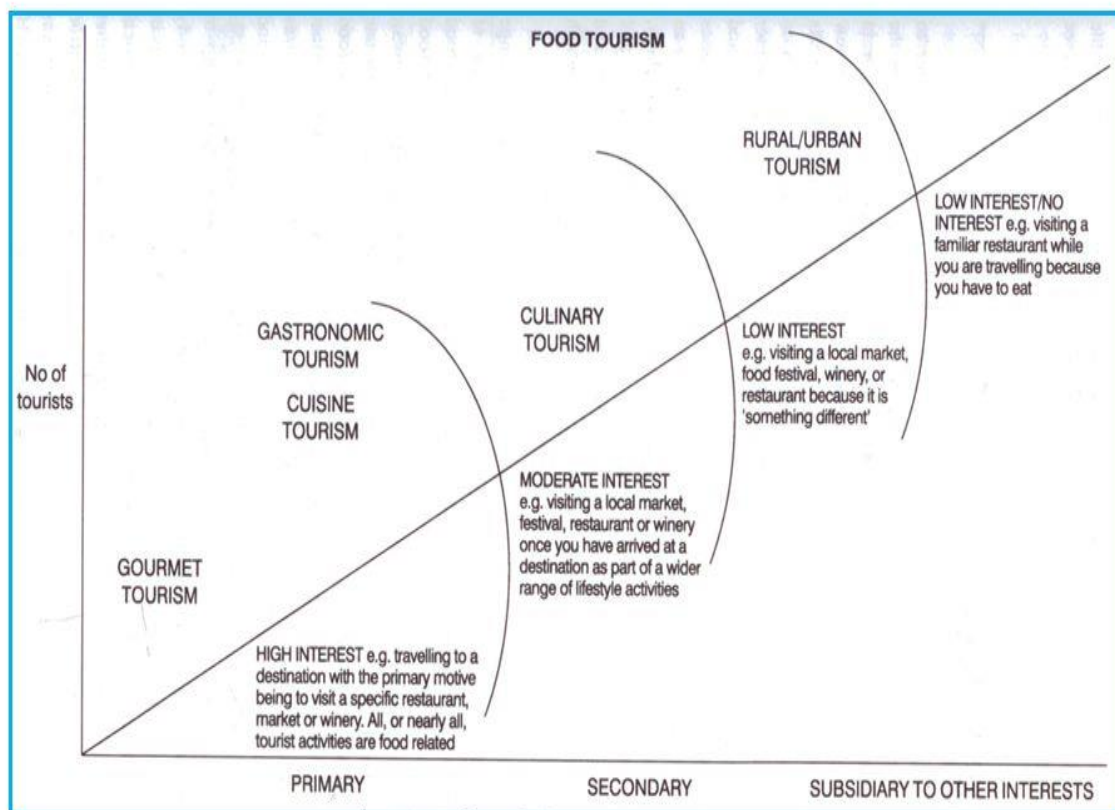


Figure 1: Food tourism as special interest tourism

Source: Adapted from Guzel, (2016)

From figure 1 above, it can be deduced that various forms of food tourism are distinguished depending on the extent to which food is the motivating factor for tourist travel. The various form distinguishable based on the extent to which food is the motivator for travelling include, gourmet, cuisine and gastronomic tourism; where culinary tourism is used in situations where food consumption is secondary as a factor for travelling and that food consumption is perceived as part of a wide range of the activities undertaken by the tourists at the destination. Where food consumption and all other tourist activities during travel are food related, cuisine and gastronomic tourism used to describe the type of tourism taking place while in situations where food consumption comes after all other interests, then rural or urban tourism is used to describe that form of travel (Shalini, 2014). For gastronomic tourism to thrive in Kenya, it is imperative that focus should be placed on developing itinerary and tour packages where food consumption and food related activities are the foremost motivators for travel to a particular gastronomic destination within the Kenyan territory.

Tourism destinations are in a global competition; as such the creation of unique products is vital in giving the destinations a competitive advantage. Several studies have shown that a destination's local food and culture may offer good selling proposition and enhance the destination's appeal and authenticity of tourists experience; which could then act as a critical pool factor for tourists and motivate tourists to stay longer in the destination (Haven-Tang, 2006; Hall, 2006; Sims, 2009). Therefore gastronomic tourism can be a tool for strengthening competitive advantage for Kenya as a tourism destination.

In respect of tourism spending by travellers, food is the number one expenditure item for both international and domestic tourists. For instance, in New Zealand, 57% of the international tourists indicated that dining out was the most important activity for them when travelling (Statistics New Zealand, 2009) while in the United Kingdom, 40% of international travel expenditure was attributable to food purchases (Boyne, 2004). Similarly, in Singapore; Henderson (2004), found that 13% of the international visitors' budget was spent on food while du Rand (2003), found that 8% and 24% of the budget of international and domestic tourists respectively, was spent on food acquisition. From these revelations, it can be acknowledged that food is a key component of visitors' expenditure as alluded to by Meler (2003); who stated that one third of tourists expenditure is credited to purchasing food; and therefore Kenya's investment in the development of gastronomic tourism for tourism product diversification and tourism sustainability would make good tourism business sense.

Evolution of gastronomic tourism facets and its enablers for success

Available literature has shown that the term culinary tourism was introduced in 1998 by an assistant professor of food and Culture at State Bowling University. Five years later, the International Culinary Association was formed to support the development of culinary tourism segment globally. In 2012, it was felt that the term culinary tourism was more elitist and that it was a preserve for the high and mighty; consequently, gastronomic tourism; which was perceived to be a more general term that included food shops, street vendors, food shops for locals, wineries and restaurants was coined to replace culinary tourism (Sandybayev, 2016). Further, Lee (2015) and Williams (2014) confirmed that gastronomic tourism entails travel to regions that are rich in gastronomic resources to generate recreational experiences and that it include visits to primary or secondary producers of gastronomic products, gastronomic festivals, food fairs, events, cooking demonstrations, food tastings and food-

related activities associated to particular cultures. The connection between food and tourism had already been emphasized by Lacy (2004), who stated that “every tourist is a voyeuring gourmand” and that food is one of the main hidden deterministic factors that tourists consider when choosing a destination.

Countries that have succeeded in developing gastronomic tourism have variations in their gastronomic tourism resources, but they all have specific strategies developed for promoting the use of unique cultural food as an enhancer of their destination appeal. As reported by Mitchell and Hall (2001), the success of gastronomic tourism in Australia and Canada was credited to specific strategies developed for promoting wine and food tourism. The need for a specific promotion strategy was affirmed when it was demonstrated that the success in the sale of food and wine in Scotland, Wales, United Kingdom, German, Singapore, Italy, France and Spain was also credited to the development and use of a specific food and wine promotion strategy within their broader tourism development strategic plans (Mitchell, 2001; Canadian Tourism Commission, 2003; du Rand., 2006). It is therefore inferred that availability of unique food and other gastromic offerings in a destination should be complemented by a specific gastromic tourism promotion strategy for gastronomic tourism to be developed successfully.

Owing to poor infrastructural development, very low numbers of both local and international tourists were willing to cross the rough terrain of Kazikstan to enjoy culinary products and join in the art of cooking the products (Sandybayev, 2016). In addition to the poor tourism infrastructure, lack of clear gastronomic routes and concepts on gastronomic tourism were also blamed for Kazakhstan’s gastonomic tourism’s low numbers. Gastromic routes is defined as a system of comprehensive and thematic tourism offereing generally branded and defined by one or more itineraries in a given geographical space with a series of tourism products or sites such as factories and restaurants which are listed in tourism guide books and which revolve around a specific food, product or dish generally with differentiated quality or gastronomic events and that the success of gastronomic routes is based on their ability to activate gastronomic heritage and convert it into food tourism as an attraction for tourists (Herrera *et al.*, 2012). Despite the low developement of gastronomic tourism in Kazakhstan, a high potential for its development was recorded due to the availability of resources, diverse natural and recreational potential, rich cultural and historical heritage, availability of educationsl institutions of higher learning and centres of professional training in the field of tourism and hospitality, organization of major international and regional business events, cultural, entertainment and sporting events (Sandybayev, 2016). From this findings, this study inferred that the success of gastronomic tourism not only relies on the presence of gastronomic tourism resources, but also on good tourism infrastructure, marketing and clear concepts for its development.

Theories related to gastronomic tourism food consumption

Although the aim of this theoretical paper was not to evaluate the gastronomical food consumption theories, an elaboration of these theories was necessary since they may influence the patterns of food consumption that is relevant in shaping the development of gastronomic tourism in a destination.

Hedonic food consumption theory

Hedonic food consumption theory stipulates that guests will consume food for the sake of experiencing it and not for hunger and thus food consumption is more experiential than functional. In this theory it is perceived that preference will be given to simple cultural foods and the desire to participate in food consumption and the benefits of eating (Le Bel, 2009)

Food physiological theory

Food physiological theory relates to food neophobia and food neophilia traits of guests. In the category of food neophobia guests, it is assumed that the choice or reluctance of people to eat new or foreign foods depends on their personal tastes, personality, cultural preferences and aesthetics. As such neophobics are not keen on tasting and experiencing food of other regions. Guests with neophilic food attributes on the other hand are able to discriminate food items based on their taste assessments and hedonic rankings. Such people tend to seek something new as a means of increasing sensation and pleasure which is a common feature of guests taking gastronomic tourism. Based on the description of neophobics and neophiles, it was alluded that neophobia decrease demand for gastronomic tour experience while neophiles drive the demand for gastronomic tourism (Shenoy, 2005). Understanding the dynamics of the two groups of guests and how they are likely to evolve in the future is key in understanding the demand and source markets for gastronomic tourists in the future.

Phenomenological categorisation of guest lifestyle theory

The phenomenological theory divides guests attributes and perceptions on food consumption into four groups: existential, experimental, recreational and diversionary attributes. The existential gastronomy guests is interested in food and beverage combinations and eating that promotes learning to get an in-depth knowledge of the local or regional cuisine and culture of the people (Le Bel, 2009; IBM, 2011). Guests with these attributes therefore seek simple peasant food in simple local restaurants where food is prepared with care and respect to local culture. Guests with experimental attributes on the other hand seek sophisticated service, trendy and fashionable foods, ingredients and recipes. These guests are driven by quality and the fancy of tasting new things (Forga, 2012). Guests with recreational attributes are conservative and enjoy staying in self-contained accommodation facilities where familiar foods and beverages are served. In addition, recreational guests respect family values and take pleasure in eating together. Finally, guests with diversionary gastronomic attributes are

driven mainly by the desire to escape the day-to-day monotony of life. However, they dislike exotic food and actively seek for menu with food items that they are familiar with (Kivela, 2006). From the analysis of phenomenological categorisation of guest lifestyle theory, it can be deduced that guests with existential and experiential attributes will be key in driving success of gastronomic tourism and therefore marketing strategies for gastronomic tourism should be targeted towards attracting tourists with these attributes.

Resource-Based View theory

The resource based view theory argues that sustainable competitive advantage is derived from developing superior capabilities and resources. From the point of view of Barney (1991), sustainable competitive advantage is brought by resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable. This theory is relevant to the development of gastronomic tourism because for gastronomic tourism to thrive, the unique and authentic food and food related offerings are a prerequisite.

Gastronomic Tourism resource framework

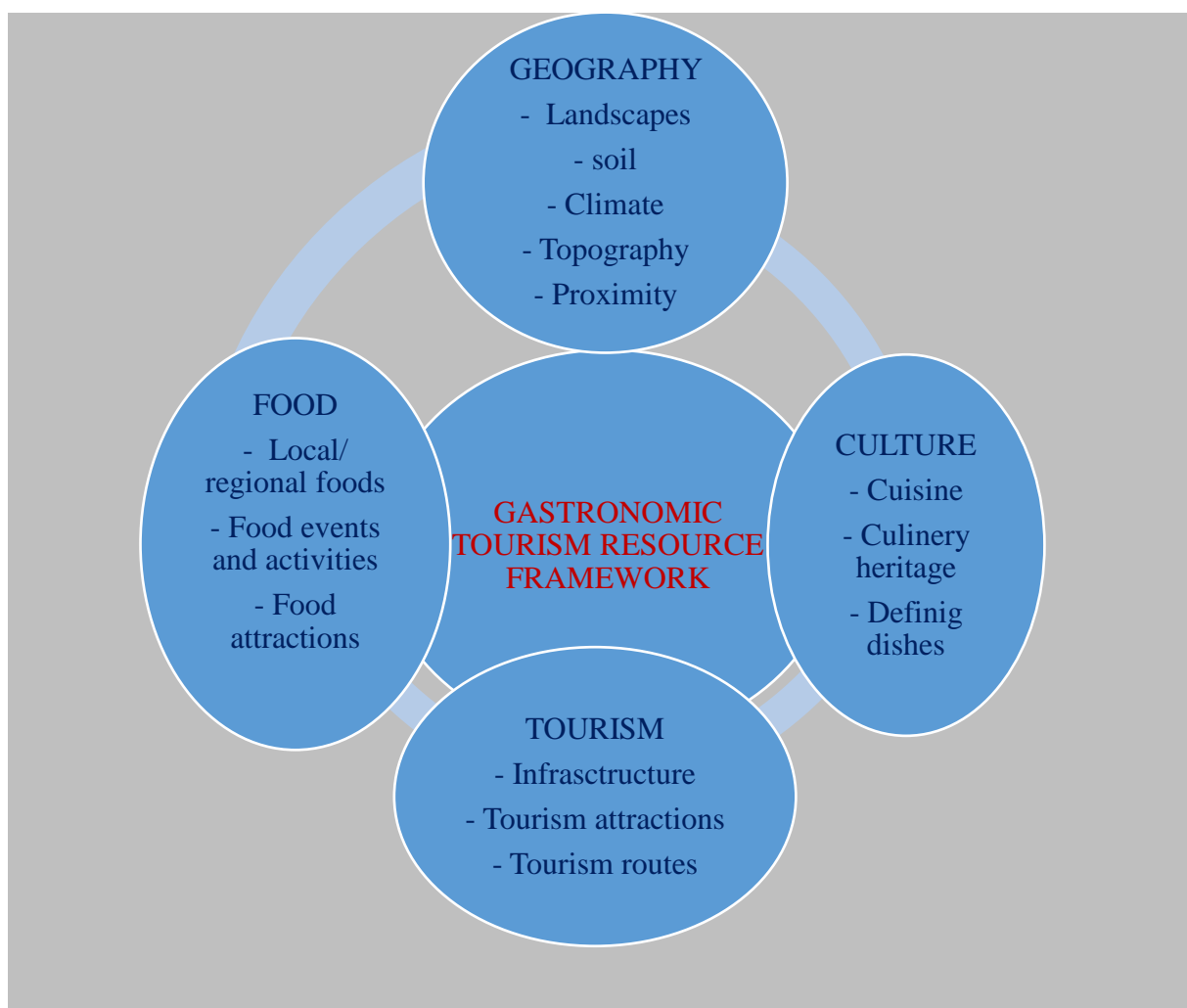


Figure 2: Culinary resource framework

Source: Adapted from GE du Rand *et al.*, (2016)

From the gastronomic tourism resource framework, it can be deduced that success of gastronomic tourism relies on a combination of factors such as food, culture, geography of the destination and availability of other tourism support infrastructure. Studies have shown that culture and environmental factors of the destination are important shapers of its gastronomic identity. While geography and climate of the destination determine the type of food that can grow in the area, religion, history and tradition will influence the cooking and eating habits of the destination; and thus collectively they determine the gastronomic identity of the destination. (Chaney, 2012)

Benefits of gastronomic tourism

In recent years the attention of tourists has moved from the classic 'must see' physical sights to a 'must-experience' consumption of intangible expressions of culture, creativity and lifestyle (Geng-qing Chi, 2010). In a study on international visitor's perceptions on service at the V&A Waterfront restaurant in South Africa, it was affirmed that visitors were more concerned in the authenticity of the Africanism of restaurants (Mutsango, 2011). Consequently, food tourism has grown in popularity as a tool for tourism diversification and promotion of culture. Despite the role of food in promoting culture and sustaining tourism, food tourism has largely been ignored in the Kenyan tourism development context. With natural resources degradation and tourists weariness on the desire for the traditional safari and beach tourism, development of gastronomic tourism could be key in driving forward the tourism industry in Kenya. Beyond the obvious benefits of sustaining the tourism industry, gastronomic tourism boost local economies and promote food security as well as creating a unique image for a destination (Okech, 2014; Guruge, 2020), a benefit which was affirmed by Rachão (2019), who stated that the World Tourism Organisation had indicated that 88.2% of tourism destinations perceived gastronomy as a strategic element in defining their image and brand. It was further asserted by Guruge (2020), that gastronomic tourism plays an important role in branding destinations, regions or locations where gastronomic events are taking place from the brand names that promote the authenticity of the place.

Gastronomy tourism promotes food festivals that focus on attracting tourists to experience food and beverages that are native to a certain geographical area and thus are effective promotion tools for culinary heritage and unique attributes of the destination. (Iriguler, 2017). Using the food festivals, marketing opportunities for local products are created for the local communities who also share what they perceive as valuable to them and thus reinforce social cohesion within the local community.

Generally, gastronomic tourism like all other forms of tourism has multiplier effects which include raising demand for hotels, transportation services, employment generation, infrastructure development, enhanced destination image, community empowerment, market for local products and opportunities for exporting local products (Iriguler, 2017). From this illustration it is clear that the benefits of gastronomic tourism far outweigh the costs and therefore it makes business sense for Kenya to develop and actualize her gastronomic tourism potential.

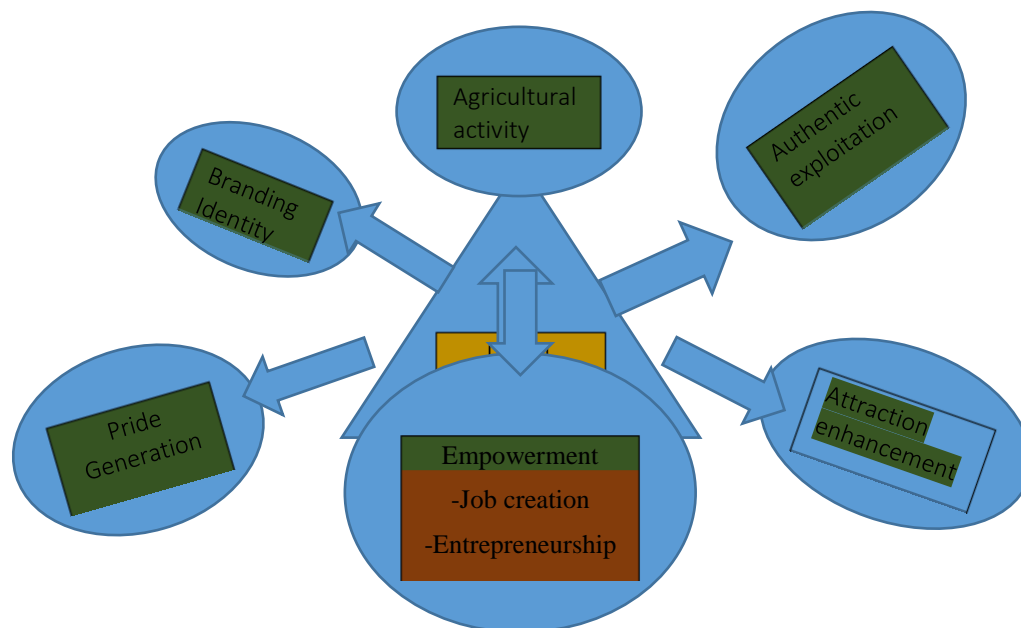


Figure 3: The contribution of local food to sustainable development within a destination

Source: Adapted from du Rand (2003)

From figure 3 above, it has been illustrated that development and packaging local food as a gastronomic tourism product enhances agricultural development and exploitation of authentic resources of the destination which then enhances the brand identity of the area creating a sense of pride for the destination all of which will enhance the attractiveness of the destination for tourism development from which jobs are created and opportunities for economic empowerment of the community are also created.

Status of gastronomic tourism in Kenya

Major strides in the development of gastronomy tourism have been reported in the developed world; with very minimal success reported for the developing countries (Du Rand, 2006). Countries such as Australia, the United States, some parts of Europe and Asian countries including China, India, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam and Japan have developed special food tour packages which combine shopping and sampling of the local foods (Zain, 2018). In Kenya, gastronomic tourism niche development and research on gastronomic tourism is still at the infancy stages. The few studies that have been done have focused on specific regions of the country and on specific food items. For example, Obonyo (2012) investigated possibility of gastronomic tourism development in the western part of Kenya while Pepella (2014) focused on the potential of gastronomic tourism development in the coastal part of Kenya. In both studies a high potential for gastronomic tourism development was revealed. According to the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife (2017) tourism 2030 blueprint, Kenya has several tourism circuits including the North, North Rift, Western, Central, Coast, South Rift and Nairobi; most of which have not been assessed on their potential for gastronomic tourism. Apart from these traditional tourism circuits, there are over 2000 species of indigenous

vegetables, roots, fruits, cereals and meats in the African region, Kenya included, most of which are overlooked and underutilized since they are regarded as inferior and only meant for the poor. As a consequence of the neglect, there is a greater loss in knowledge on their preparation; a concern that was reiterated by Pepella (2014), who indicated that there were several menu cook books for local foods in Kenya but that there was little focus on how the foods could be used to position the country as a gastronomic tourism hub.

According to UNESCO (2001), culture represents peoples' way of life and is usually displayed through food, rituals, dances, festivals, sculpture, building designs, religion, dressing and other practices. Within the framework of UNESCO definition of culture, Kenya has a diverse cultural mix due to her diverse ethnic composition (Obonyo, 2012; Oketch, 2014). From this perspective, it can be construed that the potential for gastronomic tourism in Kenya is second to none. Despite this immense potential gastronomic tourism has not been fully promoted in Kenya and that gastronomic studies have constantly revealed that there is a demand for authentic tourism products and unique culinary experience by gastronomic tourists that has not been met (Obonyo, 2012). In the western part of Kenya, gastronomic tourism has mainly been modeled around regional foods that are prepared and served in homes, restaurants, hotels, food kiosks, various ceremonies, expositions, fairs, festivals and events. Comparatively, food tourism is very well developed in the developed countries while efforts to develop it in the developing countries including Kenya are still wanting (Du Rand, 2006). In fact the Kenya Tourism 2030 Blueprint pointed out that the product market and readiness of Kenya's cultural and heritage tourism was average though the country has a rich culture and heritage (Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife, 2017). This is indicative of the existence of gastronomic tourism resources in Kenya which need to be developed.

Challenges of developing gastronomic tourism in Kenya

Though food is the main motivation for visiting a destination in gastronomic tourism, food alone is not sufficient to create a brand image of the destination (Guruge, 2020). As alluded to by (Williams, 2014) a destination should not be appealing only from a food perspective, it should also have good infrastructure, organisation, local hospitality and marketing. Thus for gastronomic tourism to function properly, provision of infrastructure and other support services is key.

Globalization has threatened localization of food through bringing new foods and new methods of cooking to local areas resulting in fusion cuisines thus diluting the authenticity of the food packaged for gastronomic tourism. As reported by Guzel (2016), although gastronomic destination marketing is premised on the exclusivity of food, there is reservation on the extent to which the food is actually pure and authentic; a position that was also reported by Chaney (2012), who indicated that hybridization of menus is a likely outcome of globalization.

Destination branding is very difficult because of the variety of products and activities that exists in a destination which must all be packaged into the brand image that the destination wants to create for itself. The other challenge is the fact that what has been marketed as the brand image is what tourists want to see when they visit and that they need tour guides who can give information on all aspects on the brand image which in most cases is difficult to provide. (Guruge, 2020)

Food safety, hygiene and quality issues are other challenges that slow the development of gastronomical tourism in a destination. In a study on Food Tourism in Local Economic Development and national branding in Nigeria by Nwokorie (2015), food safety and quality problems associated with poor handling during production, collection, processing and distribution were strongly cited as key issues that threatened the development of gastronomical tourism in Nigeria. As such if development of gastronomic tourism has to be successful in Kenya, food safety and hygiene protocols must be a top priority.

Even though gastronomic tourism offers potential for tourism diversification, its acceptance by communities and contribution to community empowerment has not been sufficiently demonstrated. For instance, despite 9% of Spanish tourism being gastronomic attributable to diverse gastronomic tourism products in Santiago, studies showed that gastronomic tourism did not contribute significantly to the development of the host communities partially due to offering only rice with lobsters and octopus thus limiting the gastronomic experience availed to tourists (Carral, 2020). It is therefore deduced from this finding that diversification of food items and products is key to the success of gastronomic tourism development in Kenya.

Conclusion

There is high potential for gastronomic tourism development in Kenya, however it has not been developed due to over-emphasis on the traditional beach and safari tourism which are now at the deceleration phase. Time is now right for Kenya to invest in developing gastronomic tourism especially at the County level since the Counties have unique cultural settings with unique traditional foods and food preparation and consumption practices that can be harnessed for gastronomic tourism development. Due to the immense benefits that can accrue from development of gastronomic tourism including tourism diversification and community development, it is economically sensible for Counties to invest in research aimed at developing the gastronomic tourism niche in the respective Counties or counties within the same tourism circuit can pull resources together and aggressively promote gastronomic tourism.

Recommendations

1. There is need for participatory stakeholder approach in research on gastronomic tourism to find out the role of government in promoting gastronomic tourism, perspectives of the hospitality industry practitioners as well as those of the tourists regarding gastronomic tourism development in Kenya.
2. There is need for research, documentation and promotion of authentic gastronomic aspects in every county or counties within the same tourism circuit.
3. There is need to develop a specific gastronomic tourism promotion strategy which will go a long way in developing and promoting gastronomic tourism niche in Kenya.
4. Development of gastronomic tourism routes and itineraries and marketing of the same through the tourism promoters is key for the success of gastronomic tourism in Kenya.
5. There is need to develop supportive tourism infrastructure for enhanced accessibility to remote villages and also training of tour guides to provide gastronomic tourism interpretation for the entire gastronomic itinerary which is critical as this will enhance the gastronomic tourist experience.

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