

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ROLE OF LOCAL FOOD IN GEORGIAN TOURISM

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Abstract

The top three activities undertaken in Georgia by international travelers are: rest and relaxation (36%), tasting Georgian dishes (35%), exploring Georgian nature/landscape (35%), etc. Gastronomy has become one of the most important parts of a tourism market. Georgia is a unique country – as a homeland of wine and a country which is distinctive for its plenty of ethnographic regions. Each historical-ethnographic region had its own natural and agricultural specificity, which led to the peculiarity of the ethnic group feeding. A great Majority of foreign tourists, who tries Georgian traditional dish for the first time, declares about its best taste and scent at once. Georgia's traditional winemaking method of fermenting grapes in earthenware, egg-shaped vessels has been added to the world heritage list of the UNESCO. Georgian gastronomic diversity is a great resource for tourism development in the country. Friendliness and goodwill of a tourist greatly depends on the dishes and beverages they are offered.

Keywords: Georgia, Tourism, Gastronomy, Food, Traditional dishes

Introduction

For many of the world's billions of tourists to enjoy tried and tested recipes, cuisine, gastronomy has become a central part of the tourism experience. In addition, tasting local foods has become an important way to enjoy the local culture. Local food at a destination can bring tourists physical, cultural, social and prestige experience. Food and its related tourist activities have been described into a new category of tourism called food tourism in which the motivation for traveling is to obtain special experiences from food.

In recent years, Food Tourism has grown considerably and has become one of the most dynamic and creative segments of tourism. Both destinations and tourism companies are aware of the importance of gastronomy in order to diversify tourism and stimulate local, regional and national economic development. Furthermore, Food Tourism includes in its

discourse ethical and sustainable values based on the territory, the landscape, the sea, local culture, local products, authenticity, which is something it has in common with current trends of cultural consumption.

As the era of mass production eased in early in the 20th century, it became more and more difficult to cater to the needs of individual customers. The explosion in the demand for goods after the Second World War further reduced the importance of customer service¹³⁹.

The performance of the tourism industry in Georgia in last can be characterized as a period of further growth. International arrivals to Georgia have been growing rapidly over recent years. In 2014, these reached the record number of 5,515,559, representing annual growth of 2%. The highest growth rate to date was registered in 2012, when the number of international arrivals increased by 57%. In 2013 the number of international arrivals grew by 22%, overstepping the five million mark for the first time¹⁴⁰. According to “Rough Guides” Georgia ranks 5th among the top ten countries to visit in 2014, coming behind Brazil and Turkey. The top three activities undertaken in Georgia are: rest and relaxation (36%), tasting Georgian dishes (35%), exploring Georgian nature/landscape (35%), etc.

One research of tourists’ segmentation revealed three types: the culinary tourist, the experiential tourist, and the general tourist (see Figure 1). The culinary tourist was identified as the tourist who, at the destination, frequently dines and purchases local food, consumes local beverages, dines at restaurants, and rarely eats at franchisee restaurants. In addition, the culinary tourist segment was more educated, earned higher income than the other two segments, and was characterized by its variety-seeking tendency towards food.

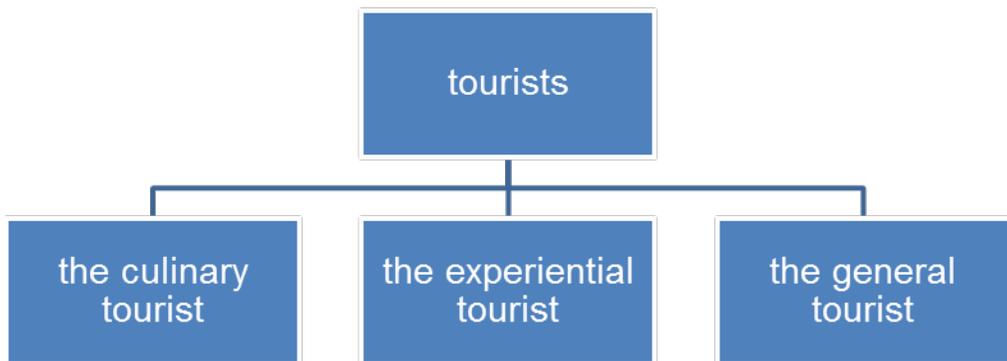


Figure 1. Tourists’ segmentation

¹³⁹ Simon Hudson, Louise Hudson *Customer Service in Tourism and Hospitality*, 2012

¹⁴⁰ Georgian National Tourism Administration:
<http://georgia.travel/uploads/angarishiweli/eng.pdf>

According to the above mentioned gastronomy has become one of the most important parts of Georgian tourism market as a facility used for attracting them. Gastronomy is a vital tool for place marketing and a strategic element for a brand image for tourist destination.

One of the significant trends is the connection of local products consumption to their place of origin – the idea that a specific food or wine can be fully enjoyed and “understood” only if it is prepared on the territory of its origin, by people from that community, using local ingredients. Also the tasting of wine should take place in the same area of production, at the same time it provides a possibility to deepen the knowledge of the technology used for the production and preparation (Sidali, Spiller, Schulze 2011:15). In addition, variety of Ethnography creates a unique cuisine. Georgia is a unique country in both priority directions – as a homeland of wine and a country which is distinctive for its plenty of ethnographic regions. Historically, the authenticity of each region was expressed by dressing style, architecture and gastronomy, but nowadays the most preserved is gastronomy. The unique geography of the land, which includes both alpine and subtropical zones, has created an enviable culinary tradition. Feature of the Georgian cuisine is the use of certain products distributed in the Caucasus, and therefore the presence of certain foods, the popularity of which has worldwide fame.

Georgian cuisine is an obvious manifestation of the oldest and richest culture of the country. Each region had its own natural and agricultural specificity, which led to the peculiarity of the ethnic group feeding (food type, cooking procedure, eating frequency). A great Georgian historian and scientist Ivane Javakhishvili used to say that Georgians created diversity of food and drink on the basis of natural variety, so that they protect their health as well as satisfy their feeding needs. Majority of foreign tourists, who tries Georgian traditional dish for the first time, declares about its best taste and scent at once.

Georgian cuisine at its compilation of recipes and dishes of ideology is based on the contrast of spicy and hot. Vegetables widely used in separate dishes and as a complement to meat dishes. Continued existence of the Georgian nation at the crossroads of many cultures and influences led to the fact that, none of the types of meat has no the predominant value in Georgian cuisine. Georgian meat dishes can be made from pork, lamb, beef, poultry, etc.

Georgia's traditional winemaking method of fermenting grapes in earthenware, egg-shaped vessels has been added to the world heritage list of the UNESCO. Georgia's ancient qvevri winemaking method is part of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity. The large earthenware vessels traditionally used to ferment grapes in Georgia are called qvevri and

archaeological evidence of their use goes back 8,000 years. They are typically buried in the floor of the cellar or Marani, a semi-sacred place to most Georgians and found in almost every house. The practice has recently spread to other countries, such as Slovenia, Italy, Armenia, Croatia and even the US, alongside current interest in natural and orange wines. UNESCO said, ‘the tradition plays a vital role in everyday life and celebrations, and forms an inseparable part of the cultural identity of Georgian communities, with wine and vines frequently evoked in Georgian oral traditions and songs.’

In Georgia the main regions of wine tourism spreading are: Kakheti, Kartli, Racha, Imereti, Adjara, etc. By its special location, the historical past and wine culture the town of Signakhi is considered to be the center for wine tourism in Kakheti.

The materials on grape found in Georgia are dated by VII-VI centuries BC which is confirmed by wine kernels discovered in Shulaveri and Sukhumi archeological excavations. According to the researches and historical sources it has been established that long before “Dionys” and “Bakhus” there was the godhead of vine and wine called “Badagoni” in Georgia. As far back as in the earliest period the wine sort “Badaghi” produced from pink grapes was spread on the territory of Guria-Adjara.

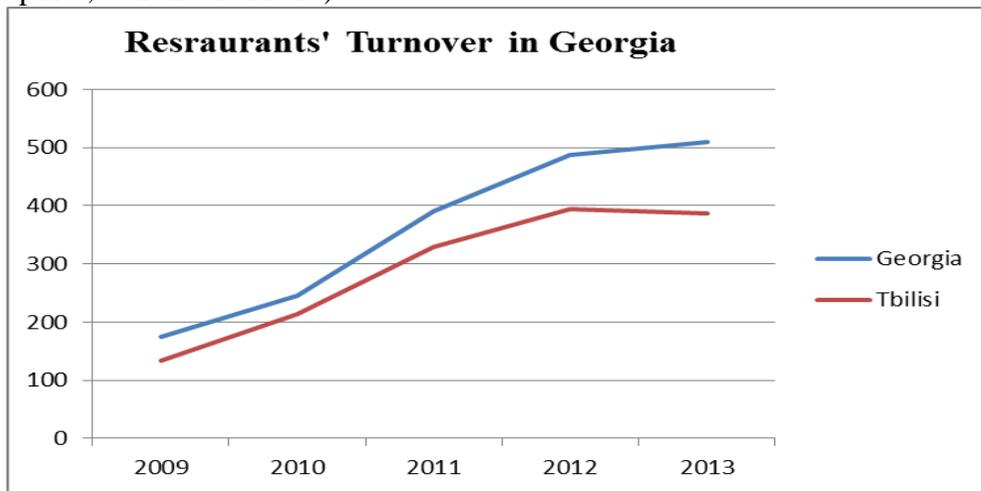
The statue of bronze man (height 7.5 cm) was found in Vani region (Georgia) excavation. It is a man sitting in the arm-chair with a drinking-horn in his right hand. One has the impression that he is proposing a toast. The period of this statue’s origin is considered to be VII-VI centuries BC. In the opinion of the scientists the word “wine” itself (“vin”, “wine”, “vine”, etc.) is of Georgian origin. Out of the 2000 famous grape sorts 500 sorts are Georgian.

There were primitive wine factories in Georgian churches and monasteries where the wine cellars and presses are still met. The wine cellar dated for IV century and the remains of wine factories existing in Ikalto monastery complex were found in Nekresi. On the territory of Alaverdi Cathedral Complex the oldest wine cellars consisting of 40 large wine jugs were discovered. The tradition of monastery wine preparing is going on nowadays. There is the unique wine reservoir in Kvareli region. It is situated in the tunnel made in the rocks. The length of this tunnel is 13.5 km. This reservoir maintains a permanent temperature in all the seasons (14-16°C). It is an ideal condition for wine ageing. Till today the Georgian fine wines are subjected to the process of ageing.

Georgian sweets are also included in the list of specific national cuisine. Moreover, “Churchkhela is made from pure grape juice. “Churchkhela” and “Gozinaki” is a phenomena representing Georgia’s gastronomic culture As well.

Hotels, Catering and Tourism (HCT) is one the fastest-growing economic sectors in countries around the world. The trends are reflected in Georgia. Figure 2 shows, that restaurants' turnover has been growing rapidly in Tbilisi and in Georgia total.

Tourists try not only familiar dishes in well-known touristic places but millions of them travel in order to discover new and unique culinary sensations. Nowadays a lot of tourism destinations set their marketing strategy based on gastronomy tourism. Majority of experts believe that touristic places can be significantly advanced within the borders of an international market with the help of wine places and national cuisine (Sidali, Spiller, Schulze 2011: 15).



Source: National Statistic Office of Georgia

<http://www.geostat.ge/index.php?action=wnews&npid=274&lang=eng>

Figure 2. Restaurants' Turnover in Georgia

Georgian cuisine is probably the most important attraction of the country. Wine, beer, bread, cheese, honey festivals are often held in Georgia. Some of them are not yet developed. The reason of this is a lack of experience not a lack of interest.

Every autumn wine festivals are held in Kakheti where guests are treated to wine and immediately cooked food. It should be noted that most of them are thoroughly fixed into annual events of the country as well as of the certain regions. Today, many Georgian and foreign visitors are attracted by wine tours and other events held at the "Chateau Mukhrani".

A number of projects contribute to the promotion of the country. The projects are created in favour of the revival of old Georgian gastronomic traditions. As soon as you enter the Bread House, you will find yourself in the Satone (hall with Georgian bakery). Long Kakhetian Shoti and round thin Madauri will be baked in front of you. For instance, any interested person

will have an opportunity to gain the experience of baking in “Bread House”- in the Satone (hall with Georgian bakery – see Figure 6). Another restaurant “the Shadow of Metekhi” – this is mostly a museum-restaurant with its ethnographic interior and retro contents.

Project “Treasure of Georgian Feast” – The tradition well preserved in the cuisine of Georgia, which is a historical flavor brought back to Georgian feast as a result of a search expedition conducted by M/Group. Treasure of Georgian Feast will be served in a special manner – original décor with national ornaments or the table laid in a Georgian manner – all these serve to help you arrange a unique cookery tour in time, taste the most native and simultaneously the most exotic dishes, feel previously unknown, piquant taste of Georgian cuisine and discover a new, interesting country.

Conclusion

Many people think running a restaurant is simple: Offer good food at a fair price and everything else takes care of itself. Profitable restaurants know that guests patronize them – or get angry and leave – for a variety of reasons other than food quality and value. Managing the total dining experience is a much bigger job than merely executing a good recipe. Guestology involves systematically determining what those factors are, modeling them study, measuring their impact on the guest experience, testing various strategies that might improve the quality of that experience, and then providing the combination of factors or elements that attracts guests and keeps them coming back.

Georgian gastronomic diversity is a great resource for tourism development in the country. Friendliness and goodwill of a tourist greatly depends on the dishes and beverages they are offered.

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