

FOOD AND DRINK AS A TOURISM PRODUCT - THE RELEVANCE FOR INDIA

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India is trying to grow the levels of inbound tourism and it has focussed on a number of tourism products to target the growing numbers of tourists, including cultural tourism, beach tourism, adventure tourism, ecotourism, and spa and well being tourism (Boniface and Cooper, 2000). All of these tourism products emphasise the opportunity that exists for the further development of culturally based tourism as part of the ongoing 'Incredible India' campaign.

The growth of cultural tourism relies on a subtle combination of a number of tourism resources to target the post-modern consumer who desires wider holiday experiences (Swarbrooke and Horner, 1999). Food and drink can contribute to the development of cultural tourism as it provides an important resource when it is used in combination with other factors such as traditional crafts, heritage attractions, festivals and special events, and religious sites (Swarbrooke, 1999). The opportunities to exploit food and drink as a tourism product are numerous, although it has traditionally been viewed as being of secondary importance compared to other tourism resources.

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The food and drink industry is complex and covers every stage in the supply chain which is illustrated in Figure 1.

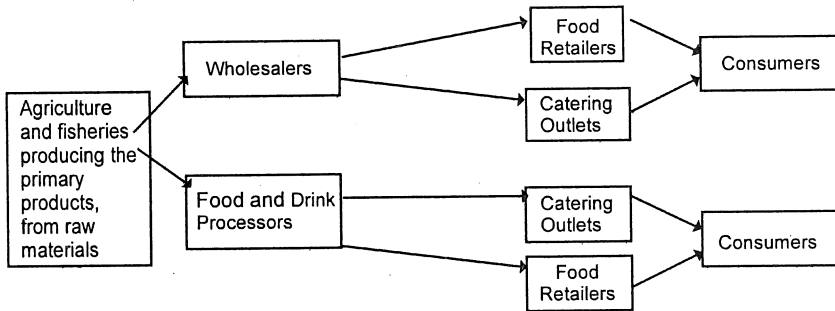


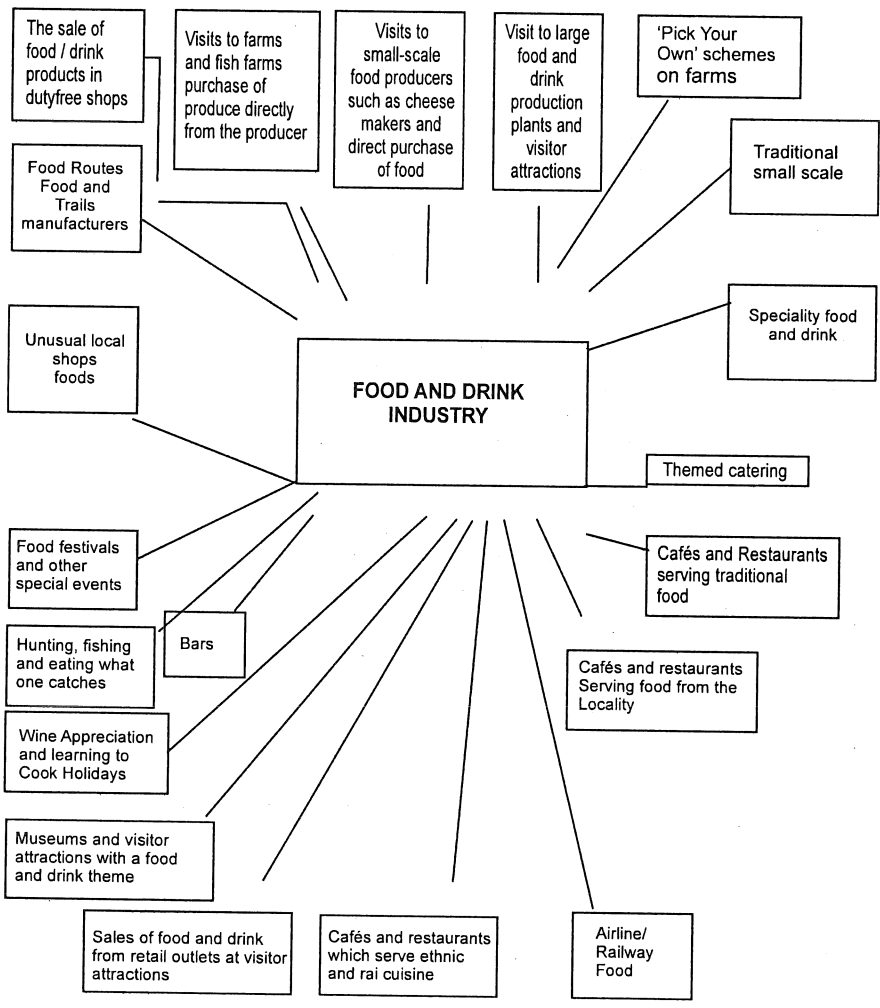
Figure 1: The Food and Drink Supply Chain

Source: Swarbrooke and Horner, 1998

Each stage in this chain is of interest to the tourist and the tourism industry. The food and drink industry is involved in the supply side of tourism in the UK in a wide variety of ways, some of which are shown in Figure 2.

It is clear from Figure 2 that food and drink plays a major role in the UK tourism industry.

However, the authors believe that there is still great scope for the development of this role in both the UK and India. It is important to consider what other countries have achieved to think about the opportunities for India.



Source: Swarbrooke and Horner, 1998

Figure 2: Food and Drink as a Tourism Product in the UK

Lessons from Other Countries

Food and drink have been used successfully in a number of other countries to enhance the tourism product in destinations, as can be seen from the following examples

1. **France.** In France, the public sector has encouraged the exploitation of the country's reputation for food and wine to attract tourists, including:
 - (i) the creation and development of the 'Logis', rural hotels with restaurants that offer regional dishes.
 - (ii) 'fermes-auberges', working farms which offer meals, using local produce.
 - (iii) providing tours of food production facilities with a chance to purchase directly from the producers afterwards, at everything from Oyster farms in Brittany to Cognac houses, from chocolate and biscuit makers to honey producers.
 - (iv) the development of 'eco-musées, museums which tell the story of local food and drink including the production of cider, wine, different types of cheese, and bread.
 - (v) the creation of visitor attractions designed to promote particular brands such as the excellent Hameau du Vin, developed by Georges Duboeuf in the Beaujolais region.
 - (vi) the production of themed food trails like that which links together small-scale 'artisan' producers in the Lozère.
 - (vii) the Appellation d'Origine Controlée scheme which protects local speciality foods and drinks from being copied in other areas.
2. **Ireland.** In recent years Ireland has used food and drink as a way of attracting tourists in a variety of ways, including:
 - (i) the use of food events such as the Galway Oyster Festival, to extend the tourist season.
 - (ii) the promotion of Kinsale as an international gastronomic centre.
 - (iii) the creation and imaginative marketing, of new types of cheeses, particularly in the South West of the country.
 - (iv) the exploitation of the Irish pub as a visitor attraction.
 - (v) the opening up of drink production plants to visitors such as Jamesons whisky distillery in Country Cork.

3. **Hong Kong.** Today, Hong Kong uses food and drink to attract tourists in two main ways, as follows:
 - (i) holding an annual food festival to highlight the quality and diversity of food available in the destination.
 - (ii) promoting unusual catering outlets such as the floating restaurants of Aberdeen harbour.
4. **The USA.** In the USA, food and drink play a large and varied role in the tourism industry. It makes a positive contribution to tourism as follows:
 - (i) the promotion of the idea that eating out in the USA is inexpensive due to the number of inexpensive fast food and branded outlets, and the use of promotional offers such as 'early bird specials' for those who are willing to eat early in the evening. This has made the USA a particularly attractive destination for families from other countries.
 - (ii) festivals or promotions which are built around particular food products such as the collection of Maple Syrup in New England in Spring.
5. **Belgium.** Belgium has attracted visitors who are keen to enjoy the wide range of locally brewed beers and to buy the famed Belgian chocolate.

On the other hand, we can also learn lessons from those countries which have failed to protect their traditional food and drink products, such as the mass market resorts in Spain and Greece. Here the tourist is too often faced with either poor imitations of traditional local dishes, or bland international fare. In the UK, there is a risk that traditional and local specialities may be under threat from the growth of branded catering outlets, major food retailers, and multi-national food manufacturers which is a lesson for other country's such as India.

However, there are success stories in the UK as we will now see.

Examples of Good Practice in the UK

There are now a number of impressive examples in the UK of the exploitation of food and drink as a tourism product, including:

- (i) Food and drink producers who have opened their doors to visitors such as the whisky distillers in Scotland. In several notable cases, the manufacturers have gone further and set up visitor attractions on their premises based on

their products. Perhaps the highest profile example of this phenomenon is Cadbury World in Birmingham. Another very interesting example is the Wensleydale Creamery in Hawes, North Yorkshire. When the plant was threatened with closure in 1992, the managers bought in and opened a visitor centre, 'The Cheese Experience'.

- (ii) The English pub is still a major attraction for foreign tourists, particularly in rural areas.
- (iii) Foreign tourists also enjoy the great English cooked breakfast - which so few of us eat these days - because it is different from what they are used to at home.
- (iv) Scotland, in particular, has been successful at marketing products which are unique to that part of the world such as Haggis, together with those products which have an international quality reputation such as whisky and smoked salmon.
- (v) The rise of local 'micro-breweries' which offer highly localised brews which are very different to those offered by the major breweries.
- (vi) The UK can now boast a large number of top class restaurants that are comparable with those in any other country. These range from traditional formal restaurants to 'designer restaurants' like those developed by Sir Terence Conran, to specialist restaurants such as Rick Stein's fish restaurant in Cornwall.
- (vii) The traditional Cream Tea is still a major attraction in Devon and Cornwall, for instance.
- (viii) Many visitor attractions have vastly improved their catering in recent years so that it is now often better than that found in many other countries.
- (ix) 'Pick your Own' schemes on farms combine a pleasant afternoon's healthy activity with bargain prices. Such schemes are now quite common in the UK in relation to products like strawberries.
- (x) The successful use of ethnic cuisine to promote destinations such as Birmingham and Bradford.
- (xi) The development of areas of cities as attractions in themselves, based on ethnic cuisines - Chinatown in Soho, and Manchester are good examples of this.

- (xii) Retail outlets which exploit traditional local foods such as 'Ye Olde Pork Pie Shoppe' in Melton Mowbray which lets visitors 'hand-raise' their own pork pie.

There is no doubt that the role of food and drink in the UK tourism product is now more powerful than it has ever been. However, there is still ample scope for further improvement.

Building on the Strengths

There is clearly a need for us to recognise and exploit our strengths in the food and drink field. Let us now look at several ways in which we could build on our strengths to further develop food and drink as a tourism product.

1. Visiting Food and Drink Producers Premises

Opening their doors to visitors can bring numerous benefits for producers, including:

- (i) increased sales by selling direct to tourists at the end of their tour
- (ii) greater consumer awareness of the producers' brands
- (iii) direct income from tour fees and associated merchandise sales such as guide books
- (iv) improved staff morale and increased job satisfaction for those staff who are involved in showing visitors around.
- (v) the opportunity to use the tour as a promotional technique when negotiating with major customers.

However, in the UK, hygiene legislation makes it quite difficult for producers to allow tourists to see production areas. Instead, therefore, many have chosen to open a separate visitors centre.

Evidence seems to suggest that the producers premises which are most attractive to tourists are those where:

- (i) prestigious brands are produced
- (ii) the production process is very traditional and/or highly skilled
- (iii) products are made which are used on an everyday basis by visitors
- (iv) the product has strong historical connections

In addition, there is no doubt that producers who give any free samples at the end of the tour are very popular, particularly if the product is beer or chocolate, for instance. Given the enormous size and diversity of the UK food industry, there is still great scope for the further development of 'factory tourism' in the food and drink sector in the UK and lessons to be learnt in other countries.

2. Food Routes and Trails.

Given the scale and variety of the food and drink sector more trails could be developed on a co-operative basis by consortia of producers and retailers. Tours could be created which might:

- * link everyone involved in the food chain in relation to a particular product. Tourists could, for example, see the cow milked, follow the milk to the cheese factory, and then visit the shop or wholesaler who sells on the cheese to a restaurant where it would then be consumed by the tourists
- * involve all the producers of a particular type of product in one geographical area, such as beer or bread or apples, for example tourists would then taste the product of all the producers and compare them.

Such tours would enhance the quality of the tourists' holiday by letting them see an aspect of the real, everyday life of the destinations. They would also bring financial benefits for the producers through tour fees and/or product sales.

3. Museums and Exhibitions

Food and drink has a long history in the UK and has played a major role in the history of the country as a whole. Yet there are very few museums or even exhibitions devoted to the subject in the UK. We should, therefore, perhaps, be looking to:

- (i) develop a national museum of food and drink as a showcase for the UK food and drink industry
- (ii) create themed local museums and exhibitions in those areas which have a distinct food heritage
- (iii) Encourage local museums and heritage centres to develop exhibitions which illustrate the role of food and drink in the history of the community.

There should also be more done to make food and drink museums and exhibitions more interactive. Visitors could be given more opportunity to make their own food and drink products, for instance.

4. Learn to Cook Holidays

There is considerable scope for the development of 'learn to cook holidays' which give tourists a chance to learn how to cook traditional dishes. An increasing number of people are becoming interested in traditional foods and both the UK and India has a rich heritage of traditional dishes, which could be used to develop courses to bring extra tourism income.

Tackling the Weaknesses

While, as we have seen, there are strengths which we can exploit, there are also weaknesses in the food and drink sector which limit its effectiveness as a tourism product. Those weaknesses which need to be tackled include the following:

- (i) Many catering outlets often fail to offer their customers traditional local food products and traditional dishes. Instead, menus today are often full of 'seared tuna, balsamic vinegar, passion fruit, and continental cheeses', while 'today's special' in the pub restaurant is most likely to be a bland international dish such as Lasagne or Moussaka. We must become proud of authentic local food and drink specialities and offer them to our customers.
- (ii) While many farms are now opening their gates to visitors, not enough of them are giving visitors an opportunity to buy their product directly at the farm. In fairness, this can be difficult in the parts of Britain where farms are large-scale mass producers of products such as cereals. However, at a time when farm incomes are falling, more farmers could start producing other subsidiary products that could be sold to tourists at a good price such as honey, duck and quail eggs, home-made cider, or farmhouse cheeses, as has happened in France and Ireland.
- (iii) There is a need to further improve the quality of food products offered in catering outlets. Some of the major issues that need to be addressed include:
 - * the growing use of microwave ovens and pre-prepared dishes
 - * service standards and the level of knowledge which waiting staff have about the food they are serving
 - * food hygiene problems and the growing incidence of food poisoning.
- (iv) There is still a general lack of professionalism in the way in which food and drink are exploited as a tourism product in the UK, although there are notable exceptions. The problem is that as yet, many tourism destination

marketers do not really understand the food and drink sector while many food and drink producers have little understanding of what tourists are looking for. There is clearly a need for more partnership organisations which bring both sides together for their mutual benefit.

Threats to Food and Drink Tourism in the UK

There are clearly a number of potential threats to the development of food and drink as a tourism product in the UK. The most serious potential threats are outlined below :

- (i) The reputation of the UK food and drink sector has suffered internationally because of high profile crises such as BSE and lower profile issues such as listeria in eggs, E-Coli outbreaks, and the introduction of genetically engineered food products, together with the controversy over 'alco-pops'.
- (ii) The UK still does not offer legal protection for local food and drink products, unlike countries such as France. The French 'Appellation d'Origine Controlée' system protects locally produced food and drink products from being copied elsewhere. This legislation covers a wide range of food and drink products from cheese and wine to the lentils we buy!

In the UK by contrast, we have failed to protect products such as Cheddar cheese, so that while Roquefort is still only produced in Roquefort, most Cheddar sold in the UK now comes from Ireland or Canada! Failure to protect local products like this greatly reduces their value as tourism assets.

- (iii) The growth of branded pubs and catering outlets with standardised decor and menus is threatening the diversity which is what appeals to most tourists. People travel to experience something new, not to buy what they could obtain in their own neighbourhood at home. This is clearly true of foreign tourists coming to the UK. This process of standardisation may thus reduce the appeal of the UK to international tourists.
- (iv) Tourists seeking authentic food and drink experiences must not be 'short-changed' with non-authentic pseudo-traditional dishes. Wherever possible, dishes should be authentic and use local produce.
- (v) Conversely, there is a risk that in major tourist destinations stereotypical 'traditional' dishes may stifle the imagination of young chefs. The UK not only needs authentic traditional dishes, it also needs a modern, living cuisine of its own.

- (vi) The increasingly stringent food hygiene regulations while sensible from a food safety point of view, undoubtedly pose problems for small-scale specialist producers of foods such as cheese and charcuterie. As we saw earlier, they are also making it more difficult for food producers to open their doors to visitors.

In more general terms the growth of supermarkets in multinational food and drink products is putting great pressure on both small specialist retail outlets and local small-scale food and drink producers. Unless these people survive and flourish, key skills will be lost and food and drink in the UK will become more and more like that in other countries. So what does this mean for India?

The Use of Food and Drink as a Tourism Product in India

With globalisation setting-in, and a paradigm shift in domestic tourism sector, Indian tourism is gradually approaching critical mass status and food may possibly be the crucial impetus. Indian Food, as a product is sensibly used overseas than in India, the idea of food being a product at its source is now beginning to dawn among the stakeholders. The potential, by all means, is there, and had always been there, to be identified as a brand by itself.

What it lacks immediately is a well-drawn plan to identify, standardise, create-awareness, promote and position it strategically in the tourism market. Three key aspects that give Indian food its Unique Selling Proposition;

- a. Its age - Indian food is as old as its culture, one of the oldest cultures in the world.
- b. Its diversity – we are talking of 28 state and 7 union territories.
- c. Harmony of spices

Age, diversity and complexity could also have an adverse effect on the tourist and may leave a perplexed impact, which we may not wish for at this point in time. In other words, a product's strength should not become its limitation or a dis-advantage. The answer perhaps may be to define, categorise and standardise and create a Indian Food Menu cutting across the length and breadth of the country.

Please reflect on the following case:

Karnataka, is one state with Konkan, Coorgi, Manglorean, Udupi, North-Karnataka, Mysore Region cuisines, this is the case with most of the states across India. Therefore, I emphasise that compiling and defining an Indian National Food Menu is a one big challenge. Though information and awareness of every cuisine exists locally, there is a lot of variance and unawareness at a macro level, which most don't get into fearing a maze effect. This however can be simplified and documented through perhaps a forum of food managers, chefs, and travel experts.

Though, wine culture is a new player in the Indian food market, indigenous non-alcoholic beverages have been part of the Indian culture for many centuries, and many are natural products: Lassi, Chaas, jal-jeera, aam ka panna, panakam, tender coconut water, moore, etc. to name a few. Though a lot of progress has been made over the decade, however a networked and national level initiative may leverage the process and bring about an effective brand.

Some examples of food and drink tourism in India

1. Ethnic Restaurants – Ethnic Indian Restaurants are a rage, overseas, and in India as-well.
2. Darshini's – The Indian Fast-food restaurant, pre-dominantly a Karnataka concept
3. Tender Coconut – Straight from the shell has a soothing and welcoming outcome.
4. Chaat – The great Indian snack, popular throughout India, its affordability and tanginess makes it a winner. Enjoyed out-doors, perhaps Juhu Beach Mumbai is an ideal example.
5. The Tandoor – the great Indian Clay oven, the heart of North Indian Cuisine. From breads to shaslks to Kebabs, cooks food, and gives it the perfect level of smokiness.
6. Dosa Camps – Again a Karnataka concept, these are small eateries specialising in Dosas.

7. Dhaba – A Punjabi highway food outlet for truckers made its way to most of the highways in India, a great evening out option. Also inspired many luxury hotels to have this as a theme restaurant.
8. Ayurvedic Food

The above is a just a brief listing to name a few.

Weakness and Threats

It is vital, that every culture must be sustained at all costs, if we are seriously thinking of food as a tourism product. Undoubtedly food is integrated with culture, in India, apart from food the way it is traditionally consumed can be another memorable experience subsequent to the food itself.

The advent of convenient food may dilute the endeavour of showcasing food as a tourism product. It takes the efforts of both, a tourist curious to explore local food and host community stakeholders responsibility that Indian food is offered at its best tradition, yet palatable to a traveller.

Hygiene, is another major issue, in the kitchen and the service outlet. India requires outlets at all levels, but not to comprise on hygiene, which could make matters work.

Pricing, affordability and suitability to travellers of different budgets.

Conclusion

It is clear that there are still significant obstacles and serious threats to the future role of food and drink as a tourism product. The authors believe that for the food and drink sector to fulfil its potential as a tourism product, there is a need to remove the well known marketing cliché of 'think global, act local'. Instead we should be thinking locally, but acting globally.

In other words, we should be seeking to protect the unique food and drink heritage of the different regions of India by:

- * encouraging catering outlets and food shops to source their supplies locally wherever possible

- * persuading restaurants to conserve authentic traditional dishes while developing new dishes based on the food and drink products of the area
- * giving statutory protection to local specialities so they cannot legally be copied elsewhere
- * using food and drink-based tourism to help sustain food and drink enterprises through on-site direct sales to visitors.

On the other hand, having protected and enhanced local food and drinks, we then need to use professional modern marketing techniques, like the Internet, to sell them to tourists around the world. We need to target those international tourists who are interested in seeing the 'real' India.

We should also not forget that tourists who appear to be becoming increasingly interested in food and drink. We need to be offering them new and innovative food and drink experiences, particularly in the short break market.

Perhaps the greatest challenge we face in raising the profile of food and drink as a tourism product is the need for a change of attitudes. We have to stop seeing eating as a chore that is necessary to sustain life, and instead see it as a pleasure, one of the joys of living. The industry will then have to deliver products that can satisfy the higher expectations, and that will flow from such a change of attitude. This will open up opportunities of cultural tourism products with food and drink as the central theme of authenticity.

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