

What are the opportunities for culinary tourism from Europe?

Food plays a major role in the travel plans of European holidaymakers. They like to experience local culture through its authentic cuisine. Interaction with locals adds an authentic touch to culinary experiences. European travellers like to combine culinary tourism with other activities, like adventurous excursions. Food safety is important, as well as sustainability. The Internet is a main influencer. However, European specialised tour operators continue to be a popular booking channel.

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1. Product description

Culinary tourism refers to trips in which local cuisine plays an important role. The [World Food Travel Association](#) (WFTA) defines culinary tourism as: the pursuit and enjoyment of unique and memorable food and drink experiences. For most tourist destinations, gastronomy plays a strategic role in their image and brand.

Most culinary tourists are interested in local food culture, rather than gourmet. This relates culinary tourism to cultural and adventure tourism. Local cuisine gives travellers a direct and authentic connection with their destination. They experience local heritage, culture and people through food and drink. Activities can range from tasting local food and drink to more adventurous and active experiences.

Examples of culinary tourism activities include:

- cooking with locals
- cooking workshops
- eating at locals' homes, at local restaurants, or street food
- food and drink tasting sessions of cheeses, wines, beers, spirits etc.
- food and drink tours and trails
- collecting ingredients or participating in the local harvest
- visiting farms, orchards, wineries, distilleries, food markets, fairs or festivals

Tourists spend over a third of their holiday budget on food and drink – even up to 50%, when food is the main travel purpose! Of course not all tourists base their travel plans on culinary interest, but it is becoming an important additional motivation. This is reflected in mainstream media, like the on-going [foodie traveller special from The Guardian](#).

Health and safety measures

Health and safety are important to European travellers. They often inquire about the safety of their destination. Especially safe driving can be a concern. They want to know the qualifications of their drivers and how/when the equipment is tested. Unclean rooms and a lack of (or faulty) smoke detectors are an annoyance at the destination. This might result in bad reviews after their holiday.

Tips:

Pay attention to general safety measures. For example, tour operators should check vehicles and equipment regularly and hire experienced guides who know the area. Accommodation establishments should have safety measures in place, such as smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, emergency exits, first aid kits and 24-hour medical assistance.

Show the outcomes of safety checks and licences to your clients.

Political stability

Safety is important to European travellers, especially because some developing countries are politically unstable. Most commercial tour operators don't offer holidays to countries that their Ministry of Foreign Affairs has declared unsafe. This has previously led to a drop in tourism arrivals to for example Mali, Egypt and Kenya.

Tips:

Keep (potential) customers updated on changes in the safety situation in your area. You can do so through your website and your staff, for example. Be open and honest in your communication: explain which area is safe or where safety might be an issue. Your customer has plenty of information sources too.

Share safety experiences from customers on your website. Let them write about how safe they felt, because people value the experience of other travellers.

If your region is 'unsafe', commercial tour operators will most probably not go there. In this case, focus on volunteer organisations and individual travellers. Check your country's current safety status on the websites of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs in your target countries ([Ireland](#), the [United Kingdom](#) etc.).

Flexibility and variety of activities

On long-haul holidays, European culinary travellers generally seek a variety of experiences. They combine culinary experiences with cultural or adventurous activities, for instance. Flexible itineraries allow them to get the most value out of their holidays. Travellers with a specific lifestyle like to include this in their holiday. For example, for wellness-oriented customers you can combine wellness activities with healthy food experiences.

Tips:

Provide options to combine culinary experiences with other activities.

Be flexible in your offering, with tailor-made products and services. Give your customers the option to build their own package.

2. Traveller profile

Culinary travellers are of all ages, but most are in the 30-60 age category. Based on the level of focus on food and drink, there are three types of culinary tourists:

Deliberate culinary tourist

Around half of all culinary tourists are deliberate culinary tourists. These are generally people with a:

- higher socio-economic background
- middle to high income
- high interest in (food) culture
- strong desire to travel
- high interest in social and environmental issues

Experiencing and learning about local cuisine is their main travel purpose. They spend around 50% of their holiday budget on culinary activities. This group appreciates the social side of food and drink. They like to interact with locals through their culinary activities, and are interested in authentic local food culture. Deliberate culinary tourists also care about the origins of their food and sustainability.

Tips:

Emphasise the authenticity of the culinary experiences you offer.

Offer packages with a wide variety of culinary activities. Include interaction with locals.

Develop itineraries with a special culinary theme.

Promote your products as an experience, rather than just activities.

Opportunistic culinary tourist

About a quarter of culinary travellers are opportunistic culinary tourists. The members of this group enjoy experiencing local cuisine. They actively seek out culinary experiences, but have another primary reason for their trip. Relatively accessible culinary activities like visiting a market suit them well.

They may also want to participate in more intensive activities that fit their plans. For instance, adventure travellers can try out adventurous culinary experiences. Adventure travel packages tend to be more popular if they include culinary experiences.

Tips:

Develop general packages that include optional culinary components.

Invest in on the spot promotion to reach opportunistic culinary tourists. For example, spread leaflets in hotels or restaurants.

Accidental culinary tourist

Another quarter of culinary travellers are accidental culinary tourists. They aren't considered 'serious' culinary tourists, like the other groups. These travellers don't seek out culinary activities: they participate simply

because these activities happen to be available. You can inspire them to join on the spot.

Tip:

For tips, see 'opportunistic culinary tourist'.

3. Which European markets offer opportunities for culinary tourism?

For statistics on European source markets, see our study on [European demand for tourism in developing countries](#).

Popular culinary tourism destinations

Popular culinary tourism destinations include:

- Brazil
- Indonesia
- Malaysia
- Mexico
- Morocco
- Peru
- South Africa

Tips:

Define your local food culture's unique aspects. In your marketing, emphasise those elements that tourists cannot find in competing countries.

If your destination has already established a culinary image, use this. Develop products that connect to your destination's theme.

4. What trends offer opportunities on the European market for culinary tourism?

Unique and authentic experiences

Culinary tourists are looking for something unique and authentic. They are interested in the typical local food culture of their destination. In recent years, authenticity has become a major factor in tourism. This is not expected to change any time soon.

Tips:

Develop unique experiences that European culinary tourists cannot find elsewhere.

Emphasise this uniqueness in your marketing.

Interaction with locals

European culinary tourists like to interact with local people. Think of eating at local people's homes or helping with the harvest, like picking grapes in Argentina or harvesting olives in Jordan. Participating in cooking workshops run by locals is also popular. This trend towards interaction with locals is expected to continue in the coming years.

Tip:

Include interaction with locals in your product/service offering. For example, offer a visit to a local food market or festival, opportunities to help with the harvest, local cooking workshops, or more adventurous activities like foraging with locals.

Peer-to-peer dining

Peer-to-peer dining experiences are becoming increasingly popular. This is related to the trends of authentic experiences and meeting locals. Consumers can offer dining arrangements to other consumers via websites like [EatWith](#) and [Traveling Spoon](#). The interest in these types of peer-to-peer experiences seems to be structural.

Tip:

Collaborate with individual dining arrangement providers to diversify your offer.

Sustainable and organic

European culinary tourists value sustainability. They are interested in where their food and drink comes from and value local products.

A related niche market is organic culinary tourism, especially among Western European culinary tourists. Offering organic options may give you a competitive advantage. For instance, Georgia has developed a popular niche market for organic wine tourism. As the European organic market continues to grow and tourists extend this lifestyle to their holidays, sustainable and organic culinary tourism is expected to thrive.

Tips:

Incorporate sustainable and environmentally friendly practices, like working with local products, responsible waste management, water-saving taps and showers and/or using solar power.

For more information and best practices, see the [UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Toolkit](#). In addition, see our study on [the need for sustainable suppliers](#).

Promote your concern for sustainability in your marketing.

Accommodation providers can encourage their guests to act responsibly, for example by using less water, energy or paper towels. For more information, see wikiHow's [How to Create a Green Hotel](#) and Global Stewards' [tips for green accommodation](#).

Consider your organic options. For instance, using organic products or offering visits to organic wineries and farms.

If you offer organic products/services, make sure to highlight them. You can submit your details to organic tourism websites like [Organic Holidays](#) and [Organic Travel](#).

Food and travel in the media

Cooking programmes are immensely popular, both on television and online. From baking shows to professional competitions to food travel programmes, they introduce European viewers to different and exciting food and drink cultures. This inspires people to travel abroad and experience local cuisines for themselves. Some may even like to get involved and follow a traditional cooking workshop.

Tips:

If possible, advertise your culinary tourism product or destination around food (travel) television programming.

Study your options for advertising or cooperating with [food travel vloggers/bloggers](#), such as [Migrationology](#) and [Eat Your World](#). For more information about travel blogging, see our study on [how to start a travel blog](#).

Increasing use of online research

European culinary tourists increasingly research and plan their trip online. To gather information and share experiences they use:

- peer review sites, like [TripAdvisor](#) and [Zoover](#)
- travel forums, like Lonely Planet's [Thorn Tree forum](#)
- social media, like [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#)

Online research is a trend that has increased exponentially over the past five years. Although growth has peaked, the use of Internet to research tourism will continue to increase. It is predicted to remain the most important research channel for years to come.

Make sure to show European culinary tourists the experience you can offer them. Visual media like photos and videos are useful tools in this regard. Sharing pictures of food on social media is very popular. This makes social media especially relevant to culinary tourism. Pictures of food can motivate people to visit new places.

Tips:

Maintain a strong Internet presence and online marketing strategy, including social media.

Use photos and videos to bring your story alive. For more information, watch this [webinar series on visual communication in adventure travel](#) by the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) and Libris.

Use current customers as ambassadors for your company and area. Encourage them to share their experiences and visuals on social media, to write blogs and to review your company.

For more information, see our [10 tips for online success with your tourism company](#).

For more information, see our study on [European tourism market trends](#).

5. What requirements should your culinary travel product comply with to be allowed on the European market?

For general tourism requirements, see our study on [what requirements your services should comply with to attract European tourists](#).

For culinary tourism in particular, food safety and hygiene is an especially important requirement.

Food safety and hygiene

Safety is of course very important in tourism. For culinary tourism, food safety is especially relevant. European tourists expect you to prepare their food safely and hygienically, using clean water and hygienic trash disposal methods for example. The [ISO 22000](#) family of International Standards addresses food safety management. These standards are voluntary, but you can use them for information on common food safety requirements.

Tips:

Make sure that you know the main (potential) food concerns for your destination. Be aware of the specific food safety needs and challenges.

Culinary experience providers should be educated on food safety. You also need to educate your staff on these practices.

Study the ISO standards on food safety and use them to maximise your performance.

For more information and useful checklists, see Healthy Tonga Tourism's [Guide to Food Safety and Hygiene for Tourist Accommodation Businesses](#).

In addition, there are some voluntary standards for niche markets in culinary tourism.

Culinary travel professional certification

The [World Food Travel Association](#) offers a [Certified Culinary Travel Professional](#) programme. This is a voluntary certification for tour operators and other travel entrepreneurs. Although European tour operators do not require this certification, it may give you a competitive advantage. You will have to complete a training course to become certified.

Tips:

Consider applying for the culinary travel professional certification. This shows European tour operators you are a reliable partner.

If you are certified, promote this clearly. Use the customised logo on your website and other promotional materials.

Voluntary adventure tourism safety standards

For more adventurous culinary experiences, three ISO standards support safe adventure practices: [21101](#), [21102](#) and [21103](#). Additionally, some countries have their own voluntary standards. For instance, [BS 8848](#) in the United Kingdom.

Tips:

- Study the ISO standards on adventure tourism. Use them to enhance your safety performance.
- Check for possible voluntary standards in your target markets.

6. What competition do you face on the European market for culinary tourism products?

World's Leading Culinary Destination: Peru

Peru has won the title of World's Leading Culinary Destination for 2012-2017. The country is famous for its food, like ceviche, quinoa and potatoes. But also for its drinks, such as Pisco, the Peruvian national drink.

Other regularly nominated destinations in this category are:

- China
- India
- Malaysia
- Mexico
- Thailand

Tip:

Learn about the culinary tourism sector of competing destinations. Use this as inspiration to improve your product and marketing. For instance, [culinary tourism in Peru](#).

Food culture as UNESCO World Heritage

Since 2010, UNESCO has accepted local food culture as [Intangible Cultural World Heritage](#). This kind of status can give tourism destinations a competitive advantage. They can build their image as a culinary tourism destination around it.

Examples of food cultures in developing countries:

- Armenia - Lavash, the preparation, meaning and appearance of traditional bread
- Democratic People's Republic of Korea - Tradition of kimchi making
- Georgia - Ancient Georgian traditional Qvevri wine-making method
- Morocco - Mediterranean diet
- Mexico - Traditional Mexican cuisine
- Turkey - Turkish coffee culture and tradition

The newest additions include:

- Azerbaijan - Dolma making and sharing tradition
- Azerbaijan, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey - Flatbread making and sharing culture
- Malawi - Nsima, culinary tradition
- Tajikistan - Oshi Palav, a traditional meal
- Uzbekistan - Palov culture and tradition

Tips:

If your local cuisine has UNESCO World Heritage status, relate this to your product. For instance, a coffee tasting or tour in Turkey.

Clearly promote your local cuisine's UNESCO status. Emphasise that this food culture is unique to your destination.

7. Through what channels can you get culinary tourism products on the European market?

Selecting smaller specialised tour operators

Smaller European tour operators specialised in culinary tourism or your destination offer the best opportunities. You can identify them via trade associations, events and databases.

Some examples:

- [Adventure Travel Trade Association](#) (ATTA) - global trade organisation for the adventure travel industry. Organises the Adventure Travel World Summit. [Search for members](#).
- [Food and Travel Magazine](#) - international magazine about culinary tourism.
- [International Wine Tourism Conference, Exhibition & Workshop](#) - annual wine and culinary tourism trade event. Dates and locations vary.
- [ITB](#) - annual tourism trade event, March, Berlin.
- [UNWTO World Forum on Food Tourism](#) - annual food tourism event, April, various locations.
- [Wanderlust](#) - magazine for adventurous, authentic travel. Browse their [tour operator directory](#).
- [World Food Travel Association](#) (WFTA) - global association for the culinary travel sector. Organises [FoodTrex London and the online FoodTrex Global summit](#).
- [World Travel Market](#) - annual tourism trade event, November, London.

Generating direct sales

European culinary tourists increasingly book their holidays directly with local service providers. To increase your chances of direct sales, you can promote your product on (culinary) tourism websites/portals.

For instance:

- [Food Tour Finder](#)
- [Saveur](#)
- [Taste Trekkers](#)

8. What are the end market prices for culinary tourism products?

Travellers have many destinations and types of holiday to choose from. This makes tourism a relatively price-sensitive and competitive industry. The price of a long-haul trip is determined by three factors:

1. The exchange rate between the currencies of the country of origin and the destination country.
2. The costs of transport to and from the destination country.
3. The price of goods and services the traveller consumes in the destination country.

European tour operators are not open about the purchasing prices of their tourism products. According to industry experts, their margins vary between 10% and 25%. Prices of holiday packages vary widely as they depend on a lot of factors, such as:

- availability
- destination
- modes of transport
- travel period
- number of travellers
- length of stay
- type of accommodation
- activities included

Tips:


Check which countries have cheap direct flights to your destination, for instance at [Skyscanner](#). This gives you a competitive advantage in those countries.

You can compare prices for culinary travel products via portals like [Lonely Planet Food & Drink](#).


Tourism Council WA has some useful [online tools for pricing tours and accommodation](#). These help you determine the break-even point and ideal retail price of your tourism product.

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