

An Exploratory Study into Generation Z's Interest in Food Tourism

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ABSTRACT

Food tourism has grown significantly in recent years. Although it may not be the primary reason people select a destination it is very important in the decision making process. Generation Z is becoming a sought after market because of their spending power and interest in travel. This research shows that this generation is seeking more experiences while they travel. They prefer to spend more money on shopping, food and drinks than lodging. They are active on social media and this affects their travel preferences.

Keywords: Food Tourism, Generation Z, Travel Preferences, Marketing

INTRODUCTION

A large part of what has always made tourists enjoy a destination is the through food and beverage experiences (Torres 2002; Lin et al. 2011). However there has been a growth of food tourism recent years with a study indicating one-third of all tourist spending worldwide is devoted to food (Ruppenstein, 2016). People have always been interested in food and beverages offered by a destination but with the increase in popularity there has been an increase in researching food tourism which is defined travelers' motivation in experiencing and learning about foods of a place (Nelson, 2016). Because of the demand studies have found that destinations are beginning to use culinary experiences as attractions (Robinson and Getz 2014). People incorporating the appreciation of food and drink has become more mainstream with 53% of leisure travelers choosing their next destination based upon the communities food and drink options (Wolf, 2020) These tourists are among many that have found out that the enjoyment of a localities food and beverage offerings have heightened their experience (Henderson, 2009).

Generation Z has been defined as the generation that was born between 1996-2010 (Business Insider, 2017). This generation has not received the same amount of research as millennials in travel research because of their age. However, it is vital to understand their motivations and

habits to be ahead of the game in terms of attracting this segment to tourist destinations. This generation makes up about 40% of global consumers this year with the spending power of \$143 billion (Madori-Davis, 2020). Generation Z which is the largest generation in US history (27% of the population) is graduating from college and entering the workforce. They are internet and social media savvy and the most ethnically diverse in US history. The purpose of this research is to better understand Generation Z's travel interest and motivations and see how it aligns with the increase of food tourism segment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Food Tourism

As food tourism has grown so has the research about motivations and preferences of these tourists. The following section will include results from some of these studies. Cultural tourism planners need to always stay current on trends specifically targeting this dynamic market and what experience means to them (Skift, 2016).

Food tourism has become more than niche market. More and more people have included food and beverage experiences as reasons that they are drawn to a community (Everett, 2016; Stone and Migacz, 2016). Researchers have attempted to determine for the increase in food tourism. The reasons have included that food

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travel engages more senses than other travel activities, a traveler can experience multiple activities in a day, and while they may not return to the prime attraction (Empire State Building) they will return to their favorite restaurants and pubs (World Food Travel Association, 2020). There also has been an increase in heritage tourism based on the increase in education levels and exposure to more information (television shows and the internet). Engaging in unique food and beverage experiences can help visitors learn more about the culture and heritage of an area. A 2020 Food Travel Monitor determined 79% of visitors learn about local food and drink when they visit a destination. (World Food Travel Association, 2020)

Food tourists are more likely to explore off the beaten paths in a community and travel further away from their hotel for a memorable culinary experience. They equate that the more unique the culinary experience the more unique the travel (Skift, 2016).

Mandala Research (2013) found that 30% of respondents in a study found culinary planning to be a factor in choosing a destination, 26% that they took one or more trips where they sought out culinary activities and 19% participated in culinary activities without planning them but as a result of them being available at a destination. Another study found that people are saving money to splurge food and drink experiences when they travel. This applies to both higher and lower income brackets. Some are looking for better quality and some are wanting bragging rights (Wolf, 2020).

Psycho-Culinary Profiles

In order to better understand and market to a segment it is important to be able to determine the similarities and differences in what motivates them. The World Food Travel Association has been a leader in food tourism research. This organization produced the 2016 and 2020 Food Travel Monitor Research Reports that have looked into how to differentiate food travelers. The World Travel Food Association created the following categories of food tourists (2016).

Adventurer

Enjoys trying new culinary experiences and foods, no matter how bizarre or different. (Includes culinary experiences/attractions with highly unique offerings.)

Ambiance

Seeks experiences that have an obvious mood or tone (Romantic restaurants, themed restaurants).

Authentic

Prefer real food made by real people (Ethnic attractions).

Budget

Seek a quality experience for a cheap price (Culinary tourists that do not need to spend a lot to have a good time).

Eclectic

Desire the incorporation of a wide variety of culinary experiences, a little bit of everything.

Gourmet

Typically choose culinary experiences based upon their reputations, "only the best will do." (5-star restaurants, top of the line places).

Innovative

Experimental, rarely ever the same, trying new things.

Localist

Prefer local businesses instead of chains and corporations (Includes "mom and pop" stores and restaurants unique to that certain area).

Novice

Beginner culinary tourists and tourism experiences. Seek culinary experiences that are pretty standard, or a "safe bet."

Organic

Desire organic and naturally grown foods and ingredients (Includes agriculture, organic food stores, and so on.)

Social

Seek culinary experiences which provide a setting where people can meet, talk, eat, and drink (Includes bars, clubs, and festivals.)

Trendy

Are always ahead of the new trends and culinary hotspots (The places that are "hip" or "cool.")

Vegetarian

Does not eat meat. Includes vegetarian and vegan experiences. Restaurant owners can use these profiles to better understand their target market and how to create their concept and menu to attract these tourists. Not all tourists are alike and not all food tourists are as well.

Generation Z

Millennials have been known for their interest in travel and Generation Z is following in their footsteps. Older millennials are parents to Generation Z which could influence their interest in travel (Wolf, 2020). Skift research found in the US that 83% of Generation Z answered that they had taken 1-3 leisure trips in the last 12 months (millennials 81%) and 17% of Generation Z respondents responded that they had taken 4 or more leisure trips in the last 12 months (Millennials 19%) (Skift, 2019).

Generation Z travelers are also influencing and planning their travel. Thirty-one percent stated they were the primary planner, 45% shared this responsibility with someone else, and 23% had someone else usually plan their trips (Skift, 2019). Generation Z travelers are planning and paying for their vacations more often than not. Seventy-six percent of respondents stated they usually pay for all or split costs of the vacation with someone else while the remaining respondents stated someone else usually pays for it (Skift, 2019).

Younger adults have always been an attractive market for tourist destinations because they are more likely to be drawn to new. Seeking experiences has a primary reason for travel is key Generation Z's motivation. They are not focused more on the experience than the destination and thrive on seeking out unique experiences (Whitmore, 2019). Plus Media found when they asked Generation Z respondents what they would do with if they were given an extra \$100 to spend on vacation

and most stated they would spend it on an experience (2019).

In order to reach this generation planners need to be able to understand the role that social media plays on this Generation's decision making process. Biesiada found that more than a third of Generation Z travelers chose a destination based solely on a because they saw a post on social media (2018).

METHODOLOGY

The sample included 275 students enrolled in junior and senior level hospitality management courses. This was a convenience sample and the survey was distributed online. 222 surveys were successfully completed (response rate 81%). The data was analyzed to ensure the sample's age range classified them all as Generation Z's age range.

The survey was based upon the psycho-culinary profiles from the World Travel Food Association study (2016). The data was analyzed utilizing percentages, Pearson correlation, and factor analysis.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The respondents indicated that when they travel they are more into experiences than the location and like to participate in many activities. They are looking for an authentic experience. The location is the priority over the food offerings. The location is primary and food experience is secondary in terms of the decision-making process. When partaking in food offerings the respondents are seeking a variety of experiences. (See Table One)

Table 1.1 *Travel Preferences of Generation Z*

| | Strongly Agree/Agree |
|--|----------------------|
| When I travel I am more into experiences than the location. | 90% |
| I like to participate in many activities when I travel. | 88% |
| I am interested in authentic experiences when I travel. | 88% |
| I desire the incorporation of a wide variety of culinary experiences, a little bit of everything. | 84% |
| I like to first decide the vacation destination and then look for local food and restaurants. | 83% |
| I seek a quality experience for a cheap price when I dine on vacation. | 81% |
| I prefer to go to trendy destinations when I travel. | 79% |
| I prefer to go to different destinations when I go on vacation than to a place that I have traveled to often. | 77% |
| I enjoy trying new culinary experiences and foods, no matter how bizarre or different. (Includes culinary experiences/attractions with highly unique offerings.) | 75% |
| I seek culinary experiences which provide a setting where people can meet, talk, eat, and drink (Includes bars, clubs, and festivals.) | 71% |
| I like to have exotic and gourmet experiences when I travel | 70% |
| I like to visit museums and historic sites when I travel. | 66% |
| I seek out luxury experiences when I travel. | 64% |

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| | |
|--|-----|
| I seek experiences that have an obvious mood or tone (Romantic restaurants, themed restaurants). | 64% |
| I tend to spend less on my lodging while I am on vacation so I can spend more on shopping and food/drinks. | 60% |
| I prefer to go to more urban locations when I travel. | 58% |
| On vacation I seek culinary experiences that are pretty standard, or a "safe bet." | 57% |
| I like to go on vacations that involve the outdoors (hiking, rafting, camping etc). | 55% |
| I prefer more of a family friendly destination (not a party scene) when I travel. | 55% |
| I prefer organic and naturally grown foods and ingredients. | 49% |
| I do not care as much about dining when I go to a destination to participate in the following activities (pools, beaches, theme parks) | 48% |
| When I travel I typically choose culinary experiences based upon their reputations, "only the best will do." (5-star restaurants, top of the line places). | 38% |

The sample was analyzed utilizing factor analysis with a varimax rotation (see Table Two). The sample broke out into five distinct factors. Factor 1: the authentic traveler is interested in museums and historic sites, quality dining experiences for a value that are standard, and are interested in authentic experiences. This tourist may not be interested in exotic dining experiences but appreciates authenticity in terms of a destinations' history.

Factor 2

The active traveler desires many activities to new destinations when they travel. They desire

Table 1.2 Factor Analysis Table for Travel Preferences of Generation Z

| Factor 1: Authentic traveler | Loadings |
|--|----------|
| I like to visit museums and historic sites when I travel. | 708 |
| On vacation I seek culinary experiences that are pretty standard, or a "safe bet." | 697 |
| I seek a quality experience for a cheap price when I dine on vacation. | 460 |
| I am interested in authentic experiences when I travel. | 458 |
| Factor2 : Active traveler | |
| I like to participate in many activities when I travel. | 791 |
| I prefer to go to different destinations when I go on vacation than to a place that I have traveled to often. | 731 |
| I desire the incorporation of a wide variety of culinary experiences, a little bit of everything. | 687 |
| Factor 3: Social traveler | |
| I enjoy trying new culinary experiences and foods, no matter how bizarre or different. (Includes culinary experiences/attractions with highly unique offerings.) | 684 |
| When I travel I typically choose culinary experiences based upon their reputations, "only the best will do." (5-star restaurants, top of the line places). | 566 |
| I seek culinary experiences which provide a setting where people can meet, talk, eat, and drink (Includes bars, clubs, and festivals.) | 535 |
| Factor 4: Trendy traveler | |
| I seek out luxury experiences when I travel. | 783 |
| I prefer to go to more urban locations when I travel. | 755 |
| I prefer to go to more urban locations when I travel. | 587 |
| Factor 5: Experience traveler | |

a wide variety of culinary experiences. Factor 3: the social traveler enjoys unique culinary experiences that have stellar reputations. They enjoy the social part of the culinary experience where they can meet people.

Factor 4

The trendy traveler enjoys luxury experiences in urban areas that are trendy. Factor 5: the experience traveler bases experience over everything. They are not as focused on food and beverage when deciding on a destination but will spend less on lodging in order to have more money for shopping and food/drinks.

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| | |
|--|-----|
| I like to first decide the vacation destination and then look for local food and restaurants. | 789 |
| When I travel I am more into experiences than the location | |
| I tend to spend less on my lodging while I am on vacation so I can spend more on shopping and food/drinks. | 593 |
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy | 518 |
| Significance | 000 |

Based on the importance of social media with this generation the samples' travel preferences were correlated with their level of activity on social media. The sample is indicative of Generation Z's interest in social media. Eighty-four percent of the sample strongly agrees or agrees that they are active on social media.

Table Two shows the relationship between the level of activity on social media and travel preferences. Fifteen of the twenty-two relationships were significant showing a clear connection between social media use and travel preferences amongst Generation Z.

Table 1.3 Relationship between Travel Preferences and Activity on Social Media

| Active on Social Media | Sig |
|--|-------|
| When I travel I am more into experiences than the location. | .014 |
| I seek out luxury experiences when I travel. | .005 |
| I tend to spend less on my lodging while I am on vacation so I can spend more on shopping and food/drinks. | .000 |
| I like to have exotic and gourmet experiences when I travel | .000 |
| I prefer to go to different destinations when I go on vacation than to a place that I have traveled to often. | .012 |
| I like to participate in many activities when I travel. | .000 |
| I prefer to go to more urban locations when I travel. | .549 |
| I like to visit museums and historic sites when I travel. | .142 |
| I do not care as much about dining when I go to a destination to participate in the following activities (pools, beaches, theme parks) | -.041 |
| I like to go on vacations that involve the outdoors (hiking, rafting, camping etc). | .015 |
| I am interested in authentic experiences when I travel. | .020 |
| I prefer more of a family friendly destination (not a party scene) when I travel. | .381 |
| I prefer to go to trendy destinations when I travel. | .001 |
| I like to first decide the vacation destination and then look for local food and restaurants. | .084 |
| I enjoy trying new culinary experiences and foods, no matter how bizarre or different. (Includes culinary experiences/attractions with highly unique offerings.) | .027 |
| I seek experiences that have an obvious mood or tone (Romantic restaurants, themed restaurants). | .030 |
| I seek a quality experience for a cheap price when I dine on vacation. | .000 |
| I desire the incorporation of a wide variety of culinary experiences, a little bit of everything. | .006 |
| When I travel I typically choose culinary experiences based upon their reputations, "only the best will do." (5-star restaurants, top of the line places). | .332 |
| On vacation I seek culinary experiences that are pretty standard, or a "safe bet." | .081 |
| I prefer organic and naturally grown foods and ingredients. | .011 |
| I seek culinary experiences which provide a setting where people can meet, talk, eat, and drink (Includes bars, clubs, and festivals.) | .128 |

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of this was to explore motivations behind this generations travel decisions and to see if there were differences in motivation among this segment. As noted in prior research Generation Z travelers priority is the experience when they travel. They are more active and are seeking unique experiences. They are definitely

interested in food and beverage offerings of a destination. Although it may not be the primary reason for choosing a destination they will be active participants of these offerings while visiting a destination

There are five distinct factors that were determined in this research. As with all travel it is a mistake to believe that everyone is

motivated the same way and seeking the same experiences even within one segment (food tourism) and one generation (Generation Z). Based on the responses to one survey the sample is seeking five different food tourism experiences.

Generation Z are “foodies” and enjoy a variety of culinary experiences. Destinations should create experiences and market these via social media to attract this generation. They are experienced travelers that are seeking new experiences. They are definitely interested in the food offerings of a destination and are more likely to spending money on dining than on their lodging. Lodging is seen as a place to rest their heads while the draw is the destination.

Destinations need to understand the importance of social media and see that the higher the activity on social media the greater chance that they are seeking culinary opportunities. It could be a win-win for a destination. The culinary and beverage options of community should be showcased in their marketing material.

FUTURE RESEARCH AREAS

This study is just scratching the surface and the sample needs to be expanded beyond hospitality and tourism management students determine the reliability and validity of this research. The scale needs to be expanded to include the interest in specific opportunities such as wine tastings and food tours. Further understanding of what is defined as luxury and the amount of money spent per trip will be helpful as well.

CONCLUSION

As the growth of food tourism shows no sign of abating it is vital to understand the motivation behind this growth. Generation Z are enthusiastic travelers that are entering the job market. They are participating in planning and paying for travel already with more discretionary income their travel behavior should become more extensive. This study shows that food tourism is attractive to Generation Z and although it may not be the primary driver they will seek out opportunities at a destination. There is a symbiotic relationship where this generation makes travel decisions on posts they view on social media, they enjoy culinary and beverage experiences when they travel and will share these experiences on social media. The key is how to create experiences that they are attracted to. This research found there are five distinct types of food tourists within this generation.

Understanding these differences and promoting accordingly will benefit both the tourist and the community. Niche marketing is going to be key based on the motivation of experience as the guide. Marketing a destination with one web page is not going to be enough to attract this generation. Creating a desirable presence on social media and providing different culinary and beverage opportunities will lead to success when attracting this generation to a community.

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