

GASTRONOMIC TOURISM IN UZBEKISTAN: THE HARMONY OF TRAVEL AND NATIONAL CUISINE

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Abstract

This article discusses gastronomic tourism as one of the important directions of the tourism industry. The concept, significance, and contribution of gastronomic tourism to the development of national tourism are analyzed. In addition, the rich national cuisine of Uzbekistan is highlighted as having great potential for the development of gastronomic tourism. The article emphasizes the promotion of national culture and the increase in tourist flow through traditional foods.

Keywords

Gastronomic tourism, national dishes, tourism development, pilaf center, tourism, teahouse, Uzbekistan tourism, restaurant, cafe, guest.

INTRODUCTION: At present, tourism is considered one of the most effective and significant means of becoming acquainted with other cultures. The humanitarian importance of tourism is reflected in its capacity to promote comprehensive personal development, enhance creative potential, and broaden intellectual horizons. The pursuit of knowledge has always been an inherent characteristic of humanity. One of the primary functions of tourism is to combine leisure with the process of exploring the life, history, and culture of other regions and peoples.

The cultural heritage of any country is defined not only by historical monuments and achievements in art and science, but also by intangible assets, including the potential of domestic tourism. State support plays a crucial role in the development of domestic tourism, as public policy enables the promotion of internal travel, the creation of favorable conditions for the population, and the development of tourism infrastructure.

The relevance of this topic lies in the fact that state support mechanisms play a key role in the development of domestic tourism. Domestic tourism refers to the activities associated with residents traveling within their own country for leisure purposes and becoming familiar with the historical, cultural, social, and economic potential of different regions. In the context of the rapid development of the tourism sector in the Republic of Uzbekistan and the intensification of competition, the state is interested in improving the quality of domestic tourism and actively encouraging citizens to participate in internal travel.

The Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan adopted in 2018, titled "*On Measures to Ensure the Accelerated Development of Domestic Tourism*", served as an important legal foundation for the advancement of this sector. Based on this resolution, the program "*Travel Across Uzbekistan!*" was introduced, defining specific objectives for organizing domestic travel, creating preferential conditions for the population, and expanding tourism services. This document aims to increase public participation in domestic tourism and boost tourist flows.

In recent years, domestic tourism has gained significance not only in economic terms but also from social and cultural perspectives. Along with expanding the cultural and spiritual outlook of the population, domestic tourism stimulates the development of transport, hospitality, catering, ecological, and service sectors. In this regard, studying the experience of European countries in developing domestic tourism and adapting it to national conditions is considered a pressing issue.

In particular, European practice highlights the important role of educational institutions in the development of domestic tourism. By establishing specialized tourism centers within schools, higher education institutions, technical schools, and colleges, it is possible to actively involve young people in domestic travel. In this context, domestic tourism is not limited to visits to historical sites alone, but also includes familiarization with the history, achievements, and scientific and cultural potential of educational institutions themselves. Each higher education institution or organization possesses its own historical background, stages of development, and achievements, and showcasing these through domestic travel contributes significantly to the development of internal tourism.

Moreover, tourism centers established within educational institutions enable students, their parents, and relatives to become acquainted with higher education institutions in other regions. Such centers serve as an important tool for developing domestic tourism by organizing internal travel for students, providing discounts on air and railway tickets, offering convenient schedules, and ensuring access to relevant information.

At the same time, the development of domestic tourism faces a number of challenges. These include insufficient development of transport and tourism infrastructure in certain regions, limited financial resources, a shortage of qualified personnel, weak marketing and promotional activities, regulatory and bureaucratic barriers, as well as shortcomings in the protection of ecological and cultural heritage, all of which negatively affect the growth of domestic tourism.

The concept of "*culinary tourism*" was first introduced into academic discourse in 1998 by Lucy Long, an associate professor in the Department of Folk Culture at Bowling Green State University in Ohio, USA. This concept was used to express the idea that people understand other cultures through local food. This approach laid the foundation for the formation of gastronomic tourism as an independent type of tourism.

The development of gastronomic tourism gained further momentum in 2003 with the establishment of the non-governmental and non-profit organization known as the World Food Travel Association, which operates globally to promote and develop gastronomic tourism.

There are numerous definitions of gastronomic tourism. The term "*gastronomy*" originates from the Greek words "*gaster*" (stomach) and "*nomos*" (law). According to K.A. Balynin, gastronomy encompasses all food products that humans can consume. In the dictionaries of L.I. Zdanovich and D.N. Ushakov, as well as in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, this term is interpreted as being associated with refinement, delicacy, and taste in food consumption.

Meanwhile, in dictionaries edited by D.N. Ushakov, S.I. Ozhegov, and T.F. Efremova, gastronomy is defined as a general term for high-quality prepared food products. In the encyclopedic dictionary of F.A. Brockhaus and I.A. Efron, gastronomy is described as the totality of knowledge related to the art of cooking and its application; in terms of content, it is often equated with gourmet culture or even excessive eating.

In general, gastronomy can be interpreted as a discipline that connects food, culture, culinary art, and service. The authors Brockhaus and Efron emphasize that it is incorrect to confuse gastronomy with culinary art. The term "*culinary*" originates from the Latin words "*culina*" (kitchen) or "*culinaris*" (related to the kitchen) and refers specifically to activities focused on food preparation, including recipes, technologies, equipment, and production processes.

Thus, culinary art and gastronomy differ in content. Culinary art is a narrower concept that encompasses the processes of preparing food from raw materials, technological methods, equipment, and recipes.

Gastronomic tourism refers to travel undertaken for the purpose of becoming acquainted with national cuisines, culinary traditions, food production, and cooking technologies, as well as acquiring new knowledge and experience in the field of gastronomy.

According to some sources, gastronomic tourism is defined as "travel undertaken to become familiar with a country's national cuisine and food preparation characteristics, as well as

to enhance knowledge and skills in the culinary field” . A similar definition is found in the textbook by X.F. Ochilova, where tourism is described as travel aimed at exploring local cuisine characteristics and culinary traditions, as well as tasting dishes or products that are unique for the tourist.

Another definition describes gastronomic tourism as “a distinct type of tourism focused on exploring the cuisine and food preparation characteristics of a particular region, as well as participating in gastronomy-related events”. In these definitions, such key concepts as “a distinct type of tourism,” “familiarization with national cuisine,” “culinary traditions,” and “uniqueness” are emphasized.

Based on an analysis of existing definitions, gastronomic tourism can be explained as the movement of individuals from their permanent place of residence to another region, with the primary purpose of enjoying local flavors, gaining gastronomic pleasure, becoming acquainted with national cuisine, food and beverage preparation characteristics, enhancing professional knowledge, and participating in culinary-related events.

Officially, gastronomy was recognized in 2015 as an important element of culture and intangible heritage. In the same year, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) recognized gastronomic tourism as a separate tourism sector.

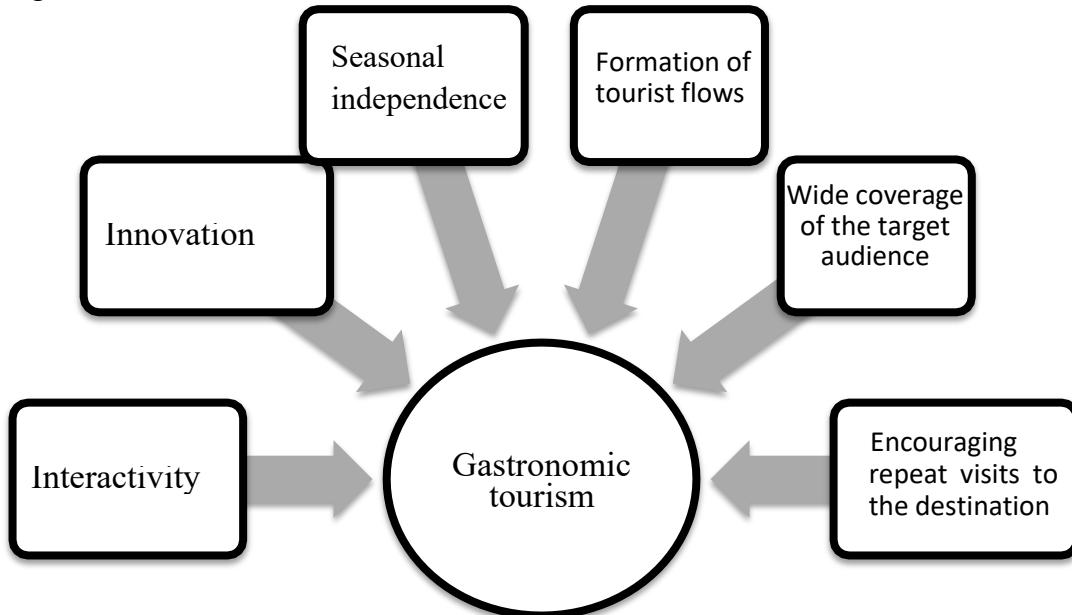
The main participants in gastronomic tourism are, first and foremost, gourmets, as well as professionals whose activities are directly related to food preparation and consumption, including restaurateurs, chefs, sommeliers, confectioners, tasters, and restaurant critics.

Figure 1 presents the key features of gastronomic tourism.

Figure 1 – Characteristics of Gastronomic Tourism

Gastronomic tourism includes several main directions:

- gastronomic tours to rural areas;



- restaurant-based tours;
- educational gastronomic tours;
- ecological tours;
- gastronomic events (festivals, celebrations);
- combined tours.

Recommendations for Attracting Tourists to the Republic of Uzbekistan through National Cuisine. At present, gastronomic tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan is still at the formative stage. Foreign tourists are attracted by Eastern cuisine, the refinement of Uzbek dishes, as well as the unique and distinctive gastronomic traditions of the Uzbek people and the original

and sophisticated presentation of food. Uzbekistan possesses significant potential for the development of this type of tourism.

At the same time, the restaurant service sector in Uzbekistan remains insufficiently developed, despite its important role in promoting gastronomic tourism. Many restaurants do not offer menus in foreign languages. In addition, catering establishments rarely cooperate with tour operators, which results in a lack of interesting gastronomic offers and integrated tourism products.

Insufficient infrastructure and service quality represent one of the main challenges to the development of gastronomic tourism in Uzbekistan. The country needs to improve tourism infrastructure in order to meet the needs of visitors, including the development of food markets, gastronomic tours, and culinary courses. Another serious issue is the absence of a comprehensive marketing strategy for promoting Uzbekistan's culinary heritage. National cuisine should be promoted through various marketing channels, including social media, television, and print media.

Limited human resource capacity is also a significant challenge in the development of gastronomic tourism. The country needs to invest in the development of human resources in the tourism and hospitality sectors, including the training of chefs, guides, and service personnel, to ensure a high level of service for tourists.

To stimulate the development of gastronomic tourism, culinary tours can be combined with cultural and festive events. For example, celebrations such as Navruz and Ramadan Eid can attract tourists to gastronomic tours and enhance Uzbekistan's image as a tourist destination. Successful examples of such practices already exist in the Uzbek tourism market.

Most tourists study the national cuisine and the calendar of gastronomic events of a destination before traveling. Therefore, it is essential to offer a wide range of products capable of meeting the needs of different categories of tourists. Each region has its own distinctive characteristics and gastronomic identity.

National dishes, or gastronomic brands (such as Tula gingerbread, Italian pasta, or Georgian khachapuri), contribute to the development of tourist destinations by increasing their recognition, and in some cases become an integral part of a region's image. Nearly every national dish of Uzbekistan has the potential to become a gastronomic brand.

Top 10 Most Famous Uzbek Dishes

Dish	Description
Plov	Prepared from rice, lamb, carrots, onions, and spices.
Shashlik	Grilled meat, usually lamb or beef.
Lagman	Noodle soup with vegetables and meat.
Samsa	Baked pastry filled with meat and onions.
Manti	Steamed dumplings filled with meat and onions.
Chuchvara	Boiled dumplings filled with meat and onions.
Uzbek Bread	Various types of bread baked in a clay oven.
Mashkhurd a	Made from rice, mung beans (green beans), and vegetables; served as both a first and second course.
Dimlama	A meat and vegetable stew; the term originates from Turkic languages meaning "to fry" or "to stew."
Norin	Prepared from hand-made noodles served with lamb or beef.

Each region has its own unique gastronomic characteristics. Large cities such as Tashkent and Bukhara offer numerous attractions and serve as "visiting cards" for tourists. Nevertheless, to provide a comprehensive image even of the most popular tourist centers, it is essential for each region to have a clearly defined gastronomic brand.

In international practice, the creation of a national gastronomic map is widely used. Such a map shows tourists where the birthplace of specific dishes can be found and provides opportunities to taste new and refined foods in each region. Moreover, it serves as an effective tool for promoting regional gastronomic tourism in the international market.

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