Food Tourism, with the approach of Presenting Central Plateau of Iran’s Local and Indigenous Cuisine

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Abstract

Food plays an important role in the construction of locations and tourism destinations. Climate, culture and history of a region shape its food characteristic and since food is considered as a subset of cultural tourism or heritage, such a link between the location and cooking ways were used in tourism in several. The food can be understood as a tool to direct and guide tourists throughout the regions or countries. Central Plateau of Iran having diverse population centers, owns a great treasure of local and indigenous foods which the same feature can introduce this region as a major hub for Iran’s food tourism. This research has been prepared through documentary, librarian and surveying methods and tries to introduce the vast table of local and domestic foods of Central Plateau of Iran and submit them to the national and international tourism market economy.

Keywords: Cultural Identity, Fountainhead Food, Food Festivals, Food Tourism, Central Plateau of Iran.
1. Introduction

Food as the human’s first need, is not just a consuming material but it is a cultural nutrient which had found its place in the culture and customs of the indigenous people of any region. From the perspective of nutrition doctors and experts, nourishment is not just related to the body but constructs spirit and character of the nation as well. The human’s most notable success in the promotion of nutrition is related to his discoveries and coinciding with the day that he started to cook food and then a profound transformation was emerged in the quality of the food and cooking gradually began his history (Montazami, 2003). Food and culture symbolization is very important whether in the area of ritual and mythological texts or through modern implications and effects such as national, local and global identity. (Hassanzadeh, 2004: 16).

The first refers to the issue of food can be seen in itineraries of European people to the Orient which naturally were alien-oriented and more than similarities and global mechanisms, emphasized on different phenomena. Boas (1989) remarked the hundreds various ways to prepare the food of Coquetel tribe by the people. Appadurai (2001), took a basic step to understand the culture of feed through his work entitled “the food policy of Indian people in South Asia”. But the role of Claude Levi-Strauss should be mentioned before any other thinker who with his book entitled “Structural Anthropology” (1985) about the origins and practices of the table, announced his basic discussion about the issue that the food is an interstitial and coordinator factor between culture and nature (Fakoohi, 2004).

Even philosophers talk very much about the food so that “Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin” in the Physiology of Taste writes: “Tell me what you eat, so I tell what you do”, food intake shows people’s position based on a range of criteria and within a specific time and place realm in connection with the society( Dougarin, 5: 1987). "Feuerbach", a German philosophical theorists, writes in this connection:

"Instead of a passionate speech against the sin give good food to your people, man is what he eats"(Enayat, 1346).

In Persian references it is possible to speak about the early works which are announcing various foods and nutriments. The Essay (Khosrow and Ridak) is an example of ancient texts which revel Iranian ancient cultural and ethnic knowledge about food and later works such as the book (Bu Ishaq Atma’a) are examples of foods recording in their era.

In modern and contemporary works, the book “Mostatab e Ashpazi” is the first book which from the window of research, looks in food in a more précised and functional way (Dariabandi and Rastegar, 2010).

Tourists who travel to different countries in addition to meeting the country's natural and historical attractions, like to taste traditional dishes of the destination country in order to mention them as a successful experience and good memories and can complete the final stage of the journey process*. This issue caused that Food Tourism, in 2001 was selected as a distinct part from other sectors of the tourism (Wolf, 2006). In this way, the leading countries in the development of tourism, use food tourism as a

* - The structure tourism experience is composed of 5 components include: the early stage of the journey, travelling, to experience of the destination, return to the origin and remembering (Williams, 19: 2009).
beneficial and independent sector of this industry to help the development of tourism in the country, publicize their culture and meanwhile, get great revenues.

Central Plateau of Iran, with a variety of nutriments and different ethnic cultures throughout the study area, can properly use this opportunity and by introducing Iranian fountainhead food basket at international festivals, restaurants, traditional restaurants and local communities etc. introduce Iran's cultural identity to the world further.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. The Central Plateau of Iran

The study area of Iran's central plateau is located between the latitude of 32 degrees 48 minutes and 36 degrees 48 minutes North and the longitude of 49 degrees 55 degrees and 40 minutes East. It is covered by Qazvin plain to the North West, and Damghan to North East, the South West is limited to Kashan Sialk and South East is covered by Kavir plain. This area is located adjacent to the tropic and northern temperate zone. The short distance from the Tropic of Cancer led to pass the desert strip of the northern hemisphere through the area and dominate certain natural conditions. Figure 1, shows the location of the study area.

2.2. Food Tourism

Food Tourism or culinary tourism is experiencing food in a country, region or district and is recognized as an important part of tourism experience. Consumption of local food is known as an important experience for tourists which are considered in addition to enjoying the weather, monuments and landscapes are (Mackercher et al., 2008). Food tourism is known as a sub-branch of cultural tourism and closely related to rural tourism (Wolf, 2013).
Smith and colleagues have defined food tourism as: “visiting destinations which the primary motivation for travel to those destinations is interest in cooking way of a people, nation or region and can include eating and drinking, learning about food production processes, purchasing food and drinks or attending in the cooking courses”. Food tourism includes activities associated with tourist’s food and nutriment such as eating and buying local food products or related products and experiencing the unique features of local food products.

2.3. Food Tourists

Food tourists are usually eager to test native products of a particular region or country. This group is in apposite point of mass tourists or buyers of travel packages who looking to find their national cuisine even outside the country. All tourists usually eat three times a day, but for only a few of them, eating is the main purpose of trip. Hall and Mitchell (2005), classified food tourists as below:

- Suave tourists: They go to very expensive or credible restaurants or pubs.
- Eating / cooking tourists: they are interested in broader issues such as culture and a landscape which food and beverages are produced there.
- Food processing tourists: they are interested in a particular cuisine of a country or region.

2.4. Food Festival

The festival is held each year around food. These festivals are often held as a mechanism for community’s partnerships and alliances during the harvest season for appreciating exuberant products (Steinbacher, 2008).

![Local food festival in Central Plateau of Iran](image)

2.5. Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is a set of cultural elements which aids “characteristic” to an individual or group. In other words, “distinct” he from other individuals or groups in order to enter into interrelations with
himself and others and on other words, be able to hold his responsibility and his physical and mental "entity’s" ability and a system where lives in (Fakoohi, 2009).

2.6. Local and Indigenous Foods

Local food of each region represents the region's local culture and any travel plan will not be completed without tasting the local cuisine of the visited region. Natural, geographical and climatic conditions, life status and the consent of the people, cultures and neighbor’s peoples are of the factors involved in the formation of the local cuisine.

Local food in terms of nutritional value, availability of raw materials, free of chemical preservatives and also the cost of the food are considered as the best foods in different areas of the county. Additionally, native foods carry cultural messages and play a significant role to increase communication among generations and preserve cultural identity. Local foods are considered as a factor for sustainable development and the lack of local cuisine in restaurants menus is a limiting factor for cultural interaction between the host and the guest societies. Figure 3, shows the participation of local and indigenous foods in the sustainable development of the society.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 3. Local food and sustainable development of the society**  
Source: Adapted from du Rand et al. (2003, p. 100)

3. Discussion

Central plateau of Iran is the birthplace of Iran civilization and this situation has caused that various cultures and peoples live in this area. This cultural diversity leads to the diversity of customs and as a
result diversity in residents’ food basket. How to cook food, raw materials and cooking utensils are all to be considered as food tourist attractions.

Local and indigenous cuisine as tourism brand can prepare the relevant context for familiarizing tourists with culture and customs of a region. In Iran’s Geographical landscape there are about 2,200 kinds of food and 109 kinds of beverages and a variety of pastries and bread to be introduced the world which Central Iranian Plateau has a salient shape in this figures of nutriment variety. Based on map 1, location and name of the local cuisine of central plateau of Iran are presented.

Central Plateau of Iran’s local and indigenous cuisine due to consistency with environment and people lifestyles, good price and availability and also traditional cooking methods based on local raw material and utensils are introduced as a major food tourist attraction of Central Iranian Plateau. Tourists seeing and participating in the process of cooking these foods are able to enjoy happy memories of their trip.

Map 1. local and indigenous foods of central plateau of Iran

Centrally located in Iran, the Qom region is known for its rich cultural heritage and diverse cuisine. Qom is located in the central part of Iran, in the Qom province, and is famous for its traditional foods that reflect the rich culinary heritage of the region. Qom is known for its famous dishes such as Mast, a traditional Persian dish made with butter, rice, and meat. Qom is also known for its kashk, a sour milk sauce that is often used as a base for many dishes. Qom is also home to the famous Qom lake, which is a popular tourist destination known for its beautiful scenery and recreational activities.

Kashan: Jajaj stew, stew of white beans, cruse pilaf

Damghan: Many pilaf, vegetable pilaf, carrots and pistachios stew, walnuts and pumpkin stew

Qom: Mashed, plum and lentil soup, Qom Nabit

Semnan: Meat Pilaf, Raisins and Cotyledon Tuh-Chin

Tehran: Sar Gonjeshki, Chicken Cold, Spinach Oatmeal Pilaf

Saveh: plum soup, pomegranate soup, barley soup

Qazvin: Sweet Kuki

Legend

City of
road

Map 1. local and indigenous foods of central plateau of Iran
4. Conclusion

Sometimes food cost includes one-third (and even more) of the total tourists’ expenditure, therefore, it can especially be seen as a tourism profitable sector. Iranian Cooking School, besides the Roman and Chinese cooking schools, is one of the three main food schools and in this way, provides a unique opportunity for Iranian Food Tourism. In recent years many factors such as lifestyle changes have influenced the development of food tourism. Many people have turned to healthier foods and many became vegetarians or adopted special diets and this caused that this model of tourism with an annual growth of 10 to 30% is of the highest growth among tourism sectors. Regions where are pioneers in rural and agriculture tourism are at the forefront of using this opportunity. Since in food tourism, tourists travel with the aim of meeting the native foods, the raw material collection, preparation and cooking process and used tools and beside of visiting destination’s other tourist attractions, collaborate in farming, staying in the local homes and speak with local people. This overlap and unity cause the participation of different sectors of tourism and also investors using this opportunity, enhance regions tourism.

References