I remember three restaurants in Switzerland with a special clearness … [The trout] was, of course, the most delicious dish that we had ever eaten. … We talked about it later … I can almost see it, smell it, taste it.

The Gastronomical Me (Fisher \1943, 203)

Introduction

Enjoying food while traveling is not new, but the role of food in tourism has dramatically gained importance among tourism researchers in the past decade, just as food and drink experiences have become more important to travelers. Everett (2016) posited that food and drink tourism (also known as “culinary tourism” or “food tourism”) has become “a distinct sector” in tourism—and not just an “inconsequential holiday necessity” (13). Stone and Migacz (2016) found that leisure travelers intentionally and actively participate in a wide variety of food/drink experiences, suggesting that food and beverage travel is more than a “niche” activity. In a ten-country survey, 59% of respondents stated that food and beverage are more important when traveling than they were five years ago (Stone and Migacz 2016).

Food experiences are important to destinations. Memorable food and drink experiences have been linked to an increase in travel satisfaction and positive word of mouth (Stone and Migacz 2016). There is also a direct economic impact on destinations, as food expenditures may account for 25%–35% of travel expenses (Correia et al. 2008). Food and drink experiences can also strongly impact the development and crystallization of destination image (Harrington and Ottenbacher 2013). Thus, the study of food tourism has a practical importance to the tourism industry. From a theoretical point of view, Lashley, Morrison, and Randall (2003) suggested that the symbolic and emotional components of meals may be intensified during travel, thus attributing the perceived clarity of the memories to the context of the experience. Yet, the attributes connecting food tourism and memory have not been clearly described or understood.

Abstract

This study identified elements leading to memorable food, drink, or culinary experiences while traveling. More than 1,000 respondents in four countries described their most memorable food or drink travel experience. Qualitative analysis found five general elements leading to memorable food travel experiences: food or drink consumed, location/setting, companions, the occasion, and touristic elements (e.g., novelty, authenticity). While these elements were frequently mentioned together, a single element (e.g., extraordinary view or entrée) was sufficient to create a memorable experience. The broad array of memorable experiences ranged from gourmet to simple, intentional to serendipitous. While local or authentic foods were often mentioned, many experiences included foods that were not local. In general, elements leading to memorable culinary tourism experiences were more specific than those for memorable tourism experiences, and a memorable destination was not required for a memorable food/drink experience. Tourism providers can use these elements to better create their destination's culinary story.

Keywords

culinary tourism, food tourism, food travel, memorable tourism experiences, memorable culinary experiences, food and memory

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While connections between food and memory have been identified by anthropology researchers, there is the tendency to focus on everyday foods and dining experiences. Within tourism, researchers (e.g., J-H. Kim 2014; J-H. Kim, Ritchie, and McCormick 2010; Tung and Ritchie 2011) have provided frameworks connecting travel experiences to memory—usually focusing on an entire vacation, trip, or destination. Tung and Ritchie (2011) recommended that researchers identify specific elements of travel that are likely to foster memorable experiences, and this research considers how food and beverage, essential elements in travel experiences, are connected with memory.

The current study utilized a qualitative approach to expand on both food tourism research and the role of memory in tourism by investigating what makes a food/drink experience memorable. Within this study, existing frameworks of tourism memory are reviewed. Based on the results, we created a new framework that incorporates unique features of food or drink experiences. Suggestions are provided about how destinations, as well as food and tourism providers, can design and encourage memorable food/drink experiences. Throughout the paper, the term “food/drink experiences” is used (instead of “culinary experiences”). Additionally, although “culinary tourism” is a popular term, it does not encompass all food or drink experiences, so this paper utilizes Wolf’s (2014) term of “food tourism” to include food, drink, and culinary tourism.

**Review of Literature**

**Food and Memory**

It has been proposed that food and drink are significant to memory because they often involve all five senses (Sutton 2001, 2010), and food can evoke cognitive, emotional, and physical recollections (Holtzman 2006). However, it is difficult to objectively describe the connection between food and memory. One major reason is that “memory” is difficult to define (Berliner 2005; Holtzman 2006), as it may refer to individual, social, or collective memory. Berliner (2005) argued that the term memory is vague and confusing, proposing that researchers often combine or confuse the concepts of culture and memory. Memory is an ongoing process that can incorporate giving meaning to the past (Holtzman 2006) at an individual or societal level.

Although authors like Marcel Proust (in Remembrance of Things Past) and pioneering culinary writer M.F.K. Fisher mentioned particular food memories, anthropology research has often focused on everyday meals or a pattern of meals—a food structure—relating more to cultural memory than individual memory (e.g., Jochnowitz 1998; Osella and Osella 2008; Sutton 2001). Memories of everyday food experiences are often part of a shared cultural experience (Lupton 1994) linked with a shared cultural identity (Holtzman 2006). It can be difficult to remember individual meals, as “ordinary meals … are non-events” (Sutton 2001, 107), but memory could be triggered by what one “used to eat.” Osella and Osella (2008) wrote that out-of-the-ordinary occurrences, like feasts to entertain visiting traders, induced vivid memories, providing a possible connection to culinary travel memories.

Food may be most memorable while traveling for many reasons. First, food memories often relate to a particular instance, so they can be categorized as events (rather than Sutton’s “non-events”). For example, during travel, even “ordinary” activities (like eating) can be perceived to be “extraordinary” because of the food or setting. Sutton (2001) argued that without an element of novelty, a food may not be able to be the “source of distinction, discourse, and hence memory” (199). Travel often provides this element of novelty by presenting varied food in varied settings with different people. Table 1 presents many potential attributes that may lead to memorable culinary experiences.

**Memorable Tourism Experiences**

For destination managers and tourism businesses, knowing how to develop a memorable experience is important (J-H. Kim, Ritchie, and McCormick 2010). A destination that is memorable will have a competitive advantage by offering more outstanding and exceptional experiences (Chandralal, Rindfleish, and Valenzuela 2015). However, travelers may not necessarily want to revisit a destination in which they had a positive memorable experience because they may not be able to top the memories of their first visit, the second visit may be unsatisfactory, or they want to explore new destinations (Tung and Ritchie 2011; Marshall 2014, 2015).

Nevertheless, there are advantages for tourism providers to foster memorable tourism experiences (MTE). Travelers who developed satisfying MTE at a destination are more likely to share positive word-of-mouth about the destination (Chandralal and Valenzuela 2013; Tung and Ritchie 2011). Further, travelers who experience positive MTE are more likely to bring others to the destination (Tung and Ritchie 2011). Finally, travelers use their past experiences to select future destinations to visit (Kozak 2001) and to formulate purchase intentions (Petrick, Morais, and Norman 2001). Hence, the study of memorable tourism experiences is relevant because of the marketing and competitive implications.

**Framework for MTE**

Studies on MTE have focused primarily on conceptualizing (J-H. Kim, Ritchie, and McCormick 2010) and measuring its determinants (J-H. Kim 2014). While there is a consensus that MTE is a multidimensional construct, it is unclear which specific constructs offer the most valid and reliable measurements (Chandralal and Valenzuela 2015). J-H. Kim, Ritchie, and McCormick (2010) developed a sixteen-dimension scale to measure MTE and found that seven factors capture MTE: hedonism, involvement, novelty, local culture, refreshment,
knowledge, and meaningfulness. Tung and Richie (2011) extended the seven-factor model by exploring how emotions, such as yearning to visit a particular place and high involvement, influenced MTE. They suggested that MTE should also include effects of human interactions on memory creation. Indeed, human interactions can foster (Morgan 2006) or deter (Marschall 2014) the creation of positive memorable experiences. When surveying participants from the United States and Taiwan about MTE, J-H. Kim (2013) found that being in contact with the local culture was an important determinant to create memories.

Chandralal and Valenzuela (2013, 2015) developed an MTE scale to include social connections and human interactions’ influence on MTE. For example, deeper MTE may result from development of stronger connections with loved ones through shared travel experiences. Traveling can also foster new friendships with residents or fellow travelers. However, Chandralal and Valenzuela’s scale (2015) removed negative memories from the analysis. To increase credibility, both negative and positive experiences should be included because they both influence MTE (J-H. Kim 2014; Barbieri, Henderson, and Santos 2014).

J-H. Kim (2014) developed a conceptual framework based on Ritchie and Crouch’s (2003) acclaimed model for destination competitiveness. This resulted in 10 factors that had a high level of reliability and validity to measure destination attributes of MTE: infrastructures, accessibility, local culture/history, physiography, activities and events, environment management, quality of services, hospitality, place attachment, and superstructures. J-H. Kim’s (2014) constructs differed slightly from those of Ritchie and Crouch (2003). For example, J-H. Kim’s infrastructures were elements that boost the imagination of travelers and tailor the experience. “Superstructures” included elements such as local gastronomy and architecture. “Accessibility” included negative elements, including inconvenience of destination and difficulty of travel, demonstrating that MTE can be generated by negative, or even traumatic (Marschall 2014), experiences. Other dimensions of J-H. Kim’s model (2014), including local culture, activities, and hospitality, remained similar to Ritchie and Crouch’s (2003) model. Although this model offers salient dimensions to study memorable tourism experiences, it must be adapted for food/drink experiences.

### Memorable Culinary Experiences

In their model explaining destination competitiveness, Ritchie and Crouch (2003) recognized the importance of gastronomy in destination attractiveness. Ritchie and Zins (1978) interviewed visitors and residents, and both groups rated gastronomy as the second most significant cultural elements of destination attractiveness.

Subsequent studies have aimed at conceptualizing a model for memorable culinary experience and developing a scale of measurements. Quan and Wang (2004) developed a model describing a food experience as either a “consumer” experience (the utilitarian needs to feed oneself) or a “peak” experience (a hedonic involvement). A peak experience is likely to be created when the consumers’ utilitarian needs have become intensified by the introduction of novel elements. This finding was later reproduced in experimental designs (Crolic and Janiszewski 2016). Thus, Quan and Wang’s model (2004) suggests the importance of unique foods to memorable culinary experiences.

However, a limitation of this model is that it does not consider other elements, such as service quality and the physical dining environment. Cann (2014) found that service quality was the chief factor influencing restaurant satisfaction, followed by food quality and the physical environment. Agreeable memories from wine tourists have been found to be positively correlated with higher levels of satisfaction and loyalty (Quadri-Felitti and Fiore 2013). Décor may also influence the consumers’ experience (Susskind and Chan 2000; Ryu, Han, and Kim 2008; W.G. Kim and Moon 2009).

Locality may also influence memorable culinary experiences (Tsai 2016; Ali, Hussain, and Ragavan 2014). Researching local cuisine in Taiwan, Tsai (2016) found that travelers who experience local gastronomy expressed a higher level of attachment to the destination, as food unites visitors with a local culture. In research about food and souvenirs, Lin and Mao (2015) suggested that food helps tourists to “appreciate an abstract culture via tangible means,” which may create a connection with the culture (26). When travelers taste local cuisine, they are introduced to the destination’s culture, and emotional ties might result from these flavorful encounters.

### Table 1. Aspects of the Culinary Experience That May Lead to Memory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Aspect of Culinary Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>standard; familiar; family (Sutton 2001); great joy or pleasure; unhappiness, frustration;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>special occasion; marker of difference/out of the ordinary; did not match expectations;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ethnic cohesion; surprise; smell and taste (particular senses) (Lupton 1994); weird foods;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“real” food/authenticity; atmosphere; themed restaurants; meeting expectations (Kivela and Crotts 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasions</td>
<td>family events, repetition (Sutton 2001); holidays; family rituals; type of meal or snack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Lupton 1994); change from everyday life (Kivela and Crotts 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>status-seeking, individualism, novelty-seeking (Sutton 2001); sentimental; particular emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traits</td>
<td>(Lupton 1994); food reflecting their lifestyle; learn about local culture; hands-on learning;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>prestige (Kivela and Crotts 2009);</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Possible Determinants of Memorable Food/Drink Experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Determinants</th>
<th>Proposed Definitions</th>
<th>Based on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local culture</td>
<td>Offers the opportunity to taste dishes made with local ingredients, recipes, and technique</td>
<td>J-H. Kim (2014); Lin and Mao (2015); Quan and Wang (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Décor</td>
<td>Facilitates the immersion into the food/drink experience through the use of music, design, architecture, color, and smell</td>
<td>J-H. Kim (2014); Magnini and Thelen (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service quality</td>
<td>Based on the extent to which the staff is perceived by travelers as being friendly, courteous, helpful, and willing to go the extra mile</td>
<td>J-H. Kim (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social interaction</td>
<td>Relates to whether the food/drink experience fosters social interactions between the travelers and the residents as well as between the travelers and their traveling party</td>
<td>Chandralal and Valenzuela (2013, 2015); Chandralal, Rindfleish, and Valenzuela (2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novelty</td>
<td>Refers to the extent to which the food/drink experience provides an intensification of daily life experiences by offering novel, fresh, and original features</td>
<td>Quan and Wang (2004); Ritchie and Crouch (2003)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a review of items appearing in the literature and to advise this study, Table 2 presents a variety of aspects that may impact memorable food or drink tourism experiences. We have identified several conceptual and methodological gaps that need to be addressed to better understand memorable food/drink experiences. Included is a need to explore how non-food-related factors generate more memorable culinary tourism experiences (Quan and Wang 2004). Memorable tourism experiences have primarily considered a destination or trip as a whole, but individual elements (such as dining or drinking) are the source of many memories. At the same time, research on food and memory has focused mostly on everyday experiences. This research will attempt to fill these gaps by determining how food and beverage experiences while traveling may become memorable.

Method

This study was advised by an adaptation of the qualitative principle of memory-work, a social constructionist paradigm devised by Haug (1987). Memory-work has been recommended for tourism studies (Small 1999) and consumer behavior (Thomsen and Hansen 2009). Following other disciplines, this study adapted memory-work from its original feminist applications (Onyx and Small 2001). Memory-work allows people to “invoke experiences and feelings without being specifically directed by an interviewer” (Lupton 1994, 682) without any conscious guidance or leading by the researcher. Lupton (1994) recommended asking a broad question “to invoke a wide range of memories around a general trigger topic” (669), and this study followed this approach by asking individuals to recall a particular episode or event.

Within a survey, respondents were asked an open-ended question: “Briefly describe your most memorable food/drink/culinary experience while traveling.” Their responses represented top-of-mind recollections, similar to how an individual would recall or describe a past trip. Similar to Kivela and Crotts (2009), individuals were allowed to answer “in their own words and provide as much detail as they wished.” (166). While this method did not allow researchers to ask questions to further elicit details, it allowed for a more natural response, as well as being able to survey a larger number of respondents than would be possible with an in-depth face-to-face memory-work approach. This represents an abridged version of memory-work because it asked respondents to elicit past experiences, but it did not use a collective group to interpret the responses.

The question was part of a general survey on food and beverage tourism administered online in four English-speaking countries: Australia, Ireland, United Kingdom, and United States. These countries were selected because of their size in generating culinary tourists and offering culinary activities to visitors.

The survey was sent to a sample of tourists utilizing an online panel of respondents and also distributed to the email list of tourism organizations in these countries. Respondents were at least 18 years of age and had taken at least one overnight trip (minimum 80 km/50 miles) in the past year. The survey was completed by 1,188 respondents, and 1,022 of these answered the question of food memory. Respondents were balanced by gender and generation, with the exception of older individuals, who were underrepresented. Of the total respondents, 85.5% (n=1,016) were from the online panel, and 14.4% (n=172) self-selected after hearing about the survey from a tourism organization. Table 3 shows demographics of respondents. The respondent profile differed slightly between the online panel and the tourism email samples. The average age was similar (44.6 panel; 45.5 tourism) between the groups, but the panel sample was more balanced by gender (52% female compared to 68% of the tourism sample). Overall, both groups recognized a connection between food travel and memory.

Responses from all four countries were aggregated into the data set. This was deemed appropriate because, aside
from destination of the vacation, responses were not easily identifiable with a particular country, providing evidence that the data could be analyzed as a whole.

Vague responses (e.g., “good food,” “it was nice”) which did not identify a memorable experience were removed along with nonspecific occurrences (e.g., too many experiences to think of one). Many replied “none.” It is uncertain if they had no memorable experiences, could not think of one, or did not want to answer the question. Therefore, they were also removed. Of the 1,188 surveys, responses from 1,022 individuals were included in the analysis.

An anthropology researcher identified general themes from the data without considering existing frameworks. These generic themes were as follows: food and place, famous and iconic foods, authentic/local foods, and alcoholic beverages. A tourism researcher separately read all responses and categorized specific experiences that resulted in memory. This expansive list included the role of food, the meal period, specific beverage, specific foods, setting, service quality, the occasion, and specific city or country. A second tourism researcher identified themes from the review of literature on memorable tourism experiences, memorable culinary experiences, and memory of food as such. An Australian traveler (40, M) remembered “authentic Chinese dishes while travelling through Hong Kong.” An American visitor (48, M) to Jamaica recalled “an abundance of dishes including breadfruit and jerk chicken with authentic flavors that I have never experienced since my visit there.”

Local foods were mentioned as memorable, and these often reflected iconic foods, including sushi in Yokohama (76, F, USA); dish pizza in Chicago (46, M, USA); tom yam soup in a mall in Thailand (38, M, UK); seafood at the Loch Fyne Oyster Bar in Scotland (64, M, Australia); and Tuscan food in Italy (many). However, local foods were not limited to what a traveler may expect before visiting. For example, a visitor to Reykjavik ate “at a restaurant focusing on locally sourced ingredients. The meal is something I will always remember and gave me a new appreciation for the food in that region” (27, F, Ireland).

Authentic foods were considered to be particularly memorable, but it should be noted that “authenticity” was often defined by the traveler’s personal definition. An Australian traveler (40, M) remembered “authentic Chinese dishes while travelling through Hong Kong.” An American visitor (48, M) to Jamaica recalled “an abundance of dishes including breadfruit and jerk chicken with authentic flavors that I have never experienced since my visit there.”

Unusual or bizarre foods included eating reindeer in Norway (53, F, Ireland), guinea pig in Peru (73, F, USA), game meat in Africa (51, F, Australia), and unusual fruits and nuts in Thailand (69, M, USA). Often, these strange foods could be considered to be local, authentic, or novel.

An abundance or variety of foods also created distinct memories. An American visitor (36, M) to Cancun remembered a resort’s “amazing food every night. Multi-cultural cuisine & different foods everyday. Huge selection of fresh foods.”

Experiences other than meals, including wine, beer, and alcohol experiences (e.g., “Tasting Limoncello on my trip to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Demographics of Survey Respondents (N = 1,188).</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown / Prefer not to Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent (born pre-1946)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Boomer (born 1946-1964)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation X (born 1965-1980)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation Y (born 1981-1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown / Prefer not to Answer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

In general, the elements of the memorable food or drink experience included a particular food or drink, the location or setting, companions, the occasion, and/or touristic elements (such as authenticity or novelty). Notably, many respondents expressed multiple elements. This section details the different elements found to contribute to memorable food tourism experiences, along with representative comments. Each respondent’s age, gender (male or female), and national origin is listed in parentheses (e.g., 76, F, USA).

Particular Food or Drink Experience

At its simplest level, memory may result from what particular food or beverage was served. There was not a single food characteristic that consistently ranked as the most memorable. It may have been a food, a beverage, or a dessert. The food may have been gourmet or simple. Often it was believed to be local or authentic, but this was not necessary to create a memory.

Local foods were mentioned as memorable, and these often reflected iconic foods, including sushi in Yokohama (76, F, USA); dish pizza in Chicago (46, M, USA); tom yam soup in a mall in Thailand (38, M, UK); seafood at the Loch Fyne Oyster Bar in Scotland (64, M, Australia); and Tuscan food in Italy (many). However, local foods were not limited to what a traveler may expect before visiting. For example, a visitor to Reykjavik ate “at a restaurant focusing on locally sourced ingredients. The meal is something I will always remember and gave me a new appreciation for the food in that region” (27, F, Ireland).

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Experiences other than meals, including wine, beer, and alcohol experiences (e.g., “Tasting Limoncello on my trip to
the Amalfi coast in Italy. Although I tasted various wines from the Chianti region, tasting this lemon liqueur was a unique and memorable experience for me.” [28, F, UK]), coffee breaks, and desserts (e.g., “I went to Shatley Springs and they had an amazing endless homemade breakfast.”) 30, F, USA) were also frequently mentioned as memorable.

Service could be as memorable as food or drink. Frequently the service level was mentioned in connection with the food, so it appears that for many people, the food itself is inseparable from the way it was served. A restaurant in Dubrovnik had excellent service, ambiente, food, and wine (55, F, UK), and Gregans Castle in Ireland had good service, food quality, and ambiance (46, F, Ireland). Another Irish traveler (58, M) pointed to a restaurant in Portugal where “the service was perfect.”

Location/Setting

Because tourism requires travel outside a usual environment, a key element of any tourist experience is where an experience occurred. Travelers often revealed what about the environment contributed to the memory. Generally, these may include a memorable restaurant, a memorable setting, or somewhere besides a restaurant (such as a bar or winery).

Memorable restaurants were due to various reasons. Famous or iconic restaurants were featured on television shows, in movies, or through popular culture. They may also be famous for the food they serve or their quality ratings (such as Michelin stars). They ranged from fine dining experiences (e.g., California’s French Laundry) to casual restaurants. On one extreme, a visitor (31, F, USA) recalled a visit to a “3 Michelin star restaurant in New York City [with] the most courses in a degustation I have ever eaten, food was so creative/innovative and full of flavour, so refined, beautiful décor and impeccable service!” A more casual experience was memorable to another American traveler (24, F, USA), who mentioned a visit to the comfort food restaurant Lambert’s when she “went to visit my cousins down in Missouri [USA] and we went to a place called the Home of the Throwed Rolls. The food is served family style and the waiters throw rolls to you.” Others mentioned the restaurant environment, such as trendiness, theme, or décor. In these instances, it was not the food or service, but the environment that was memorable (e.g., “There was a restaurant in Ireland on the inside it looked like you were inside a giant tree.” 31, F, USA).

Individuals also pinpointed the “local” or “authentic” nature of the restaurants. These memories were created because they were felt to be unique to that geographic environment. They often featured cuisine that would be authentic to a region or foods that locals would enjoy. One American traveler (32, M, USA) fondly recalled “a small noodle shop in Xing Jiang . . . suggested by the locals. It was small, dirty, hot, and generally miserable. There was no menu, and the owner only made that one dish for 20+ years. It was delicious!”

Setting or view could be just as (or more) memorable as (than) the food. Participants referred to specific elements highlighting a setting (e.g., “In Portugal watching the moon over the sea whilst eating tuna steak.” 56, M, UK), an iconic element of the place (e.g., “Eating a pizza in Rome in full view of the Colosseum.” 26, M, Ireland), or even a privileged view (e.g., “Went to Seattle Space Needle for dinner. The view was breathtaking . . . which revolves for you to enable to see all the view of Seattle.” 57, M, Australia). As such, individuals may not remember the restaurant’s name, and some did not mention the food they ate. It is not stated whether or not the food would have been as memorable without the setting, but removing the unique setting/view from the experience leaves very little in the responses (e.g., In “Lake Como, Italy . . . . The restaurant dining room faced the lake and had a wonderful view.” 70, F, USA).

Outdoor components were often included, where individuals could experience the atmosphere of the location. This could include a variety of elements, from urban (e.g., “Sitting outside Cafe de Paris in Monaco having coffee and cake and soaking up the atmosphere.” 61, M, UK) to rural (e.g., “beef dish at Uluru eaten outside at night in the desert.” 44, F, Australia).

Environments other than just restaurants were memorable, demonstrating that food and drink experiences should not be limited to traditional dining. These ranged from typical consumption environments, like bars and pubs (e.g., “Grilled fish in a beach bar in Gambia,” 55, M, UK) to production facilities like wineries and breweries (e.g., “I went to a brewery and tried lots of beers and they had great food.” 23, M, UK). There were also other unique environments like eating “octopus on a catamaran in Barbados!” (30, M, USA) and an Irish traveler (44, F) who recounted a visit to South Africa to an “ostrich farm with small house on farm that cooked ostrich steaks while serving wine . . . fantastic food, scenery and people.”

Street food’s unique and local nature also created memories, which often included the types of foods and a connection to local and authentic culture. “My most memorable experiences was in Darjeeling, India getting ‘Momo’s’ on the side of the road” (21, F, Ireland). “Sitting in the gutter of the main street of a small seaside town, eating fresh crayfish meat direct from the boat . . . and a mess of hot chips from the local fish shop. Amazing and unforgettable!” (63, M, Australia).

Homes were another environment that evolved from the responses. It is notable that eating at locals’ homes is not a traditional part of the general tourism system. Examples included “Being invited to a local private house in Sri Lanka and eating wonderful homecooked food” (50, F, Ireland) and “I was invited to a colleague’s home for dinner and it turned out to be a very social occasion with his extended family and friends” in Vietnam (49, M, Ireland).

General geographic location, such as an entire city, region, or country, was often mentioned as memorable. For
these travelers, it was not a single experience that came to mind, but the country (or city) and the cuisine combined to create a memory. These seem to be similar to many MTEs in that a whole trip or locale was memorable. Travelers remembered: the “unexpectedly high standard of food” in St. Petersburg Russia (36, F, Ireland); “Amazing” food in Japan (24, F, Australia); and “eating my way through Hawaiian culture” (42, M, USA).

Companions

Social interactions were a key to memory, as respondents frequently mentioned who participated in the food or drink experience—including both travel companions and local friends/relatives at the destination. Many experiences may be memorable because of the individuals who shared in the experience, and romantic partners and spouses were cited most often when recalling memorable food experiences.

Family and friends were notable companions. A British traveler (46, F) remembered “having a five-course meal prepared in front of us by our own chef, for my husband and me, while staying at the Taj Palace Hotel in Mumbai.” Others recalled trips with extended family (e.g., “Travelling around Vietnam with my mother and grandparents and them introducing me to their favourite foods.” 39, M, Ireland) or close friends (e.g., “A weekend away with my ‘foodie’ friend to Sydney to visit Tetsuya’s.” 47, F, Australia). Often, these memorable experiences were part of a special occasion, such as a honeymoon, birthday, or anniversary, which will be discussed in a subsequent section.

Local residents (“Locals”) also were featured in memorable experiences. This included friends who lived in the area (e.g., In Washington DC “I was taken to the [tapas] restaurant by two locals who said the chef was famous.” 48, M, UK). Eating in the presence of locals helped to create a more authentic experience, and some also specifically mentioned the absence of tourists (e.g., “Visiting a road-side café in Spain which was full of locals—no tourists.” 44, F, Ireland), even though they were personally engaging in tourism.

Meeting new people played a role in many memorable food experiences, as travel creates an environment to commune with and meet others. Often memories derived from an environment where the traveler socialized with new people, whether with locals (e.g., “Standing on the side of a street in Mumbai. Sharing street food with locals who were suggesting different things and offering to pay . . . was great to immerse myself.” 43, M, Australia) or even other tourists (e.g., “the best Mexican food I have ever eaten in Australia from a restaurant on the beach at Tweed Heads. There were about 12 of us and we were amazed at how authentic the food was and how much fun we had with the staff which included three South American people and one chap from Tijuana.” 56, M, Australia).

Occasion

Special occasions, including honeymoons, anniversaries, and birthdays, were frequently connected to a positive food/drink memory. The food itself may be included in the memory, but without the celebration, the experience would likely have not occurred. An Irish traveler (53, F) remembered “pig cooked on a spit at a wedding in Wales,” while an American (46, M) fondly recalled “having a chocolate soufflé in Key West . . . for my honeymoon with my wife. It was the best dessert I have ever had. I dream of it still.”

Festivals, cooking classes, culinary tours, and specialized food travel experiences were among memorable experiences aside from restaurants and bars. This is noteworthy because these experiences (unlike a typical restaurant dinner or street food lunch) are designed to create an experience (and frequently focused on tourists). Respondents mentioned a great variety of events, including: a beer festival in New York City (23, M, USA); the Napa Valley wine & food festival (68, M, USA); the Truffle Festival in Canberra (51, F, Australia); and eating Japanese food at the Cambridge Folk Festival (63, M, Ireland). Others mentioned learning experiences like a Jamaican cooking class (31, F, USA) and a Balinese cooking class (54, M, Australia).

Touristic Elements

Beyond the physical aspects of an experience, there were many sociological or cultural aspects of an experience which connected it to memory. These items, such as authenticity and nostalgia, which frequently occur in tourism theory, are broadly labeled “touristic elements.”

Novelty, an exposure to new environments, created many of the most memorable food/drink experiences, as travelers experienced a food for the first time: “My first time ever ordering a whole lobster. It was in Buzzards Bay, Cape Cod in Massachusetts” (59, F, USA); and “When I last went on holiday to Spain, I tried paella for the first time, initially I didn’t think I would like it but absolutely loved it” (30, F, UK).

Authenticity and the role of authentic and local experiences have been discussed. However, “authentic” foods were not limited to local cuisine, and it did not have to be local to be memorable. Examples include eating at a fine dining Italian restaurant in Las Vegas (32, F, USA), an Indian restaurant in Edinburgh, Scotland (40, M, UK), and Asian food in Dublin (“Hang Sang Supermarket in Dublin that served huge portion of Chinese, Japanese and Korean food.” 48, F, Ireland).

Nostalgia intuitively seems important because memory reflects on a past occurrence. A sentimental longing or continued discussion of a memory could be categorized as nostalgia. For some, eating food brought back a memory of a past time (e.g., “We went to the Minnesota State Fair. We grew up there and had memories of the food and fun we had
as kids.” 66, F, USA). Another perspective is that thinking back on food travel experiences created a nostalgia (e.g., “had a lobster soup and a steak that melted in my mouth at a fine dining restaurant in a [Las] Vegas casino, we still discuss it 2 years later.” 44, M, USA).

Variety was a key in many experiences, from buffets in Las Vegas to cruises (e.g., “When I took my cruise there was an assortment of free food that I experimented and tasted which I probably would not have done if I had to pay for it.” 28, F, USA). More telling, though, is the sheer variety of unique occasions which resulted in a memorable food/drink experience, which are exemplified throughout.

Surprise was evident, as many of the memories resulted from unplanned excursions or serendipitous travels (e.g., “We found an amazing off the beaten path bbq [barbeque] joint in Texas . . . it’s now our favorite restaurant.” 36, F, USA). It did not seem to matter if an individual was interested in seeking out culinary experiences in order to have a memorable one.

A desire to return often resulted from memorable food experiences. Many travelers did not only mention a memory, but they also reflected on how this occurrence changed their behavior. Some returned to enjoy an experience again. For some, this may have happened on the same trip (e.g., “We arrived at our 4 star hotel, toured the menu for the formal dining, selected our choice but ended up in the bar next door having fish and chips. It was remarkable. The following night we declined our free dinner to go back for more fish and chips.” 64, M, Ireland). Sometimes it was on a subsequent trip (e.g., “I ate spare ribs . . . in a very small restaurant in Austria . . . in 2010. I went back there in 2015, drove from 2 hours from Vienna just to eat it again” 29, F, UK). There are also travelers who wished to make plans to go back on a future trip (e.g., “I went to a Canadian restaurant where everything was maple flavored. It was so good that I plan to go back every year if I can.” 33, F, USA).

Hedonism would be expected, as food/drink experiences are hedonic in nature. As the pursuit of pleasure, hedonism can also be implied by many of the intentional culinary experiences that individuals sought out, enjoyed, and remembered. An American traveler (19, M) remembered the “New York style pizza I ate way too much of on my last trip to the city.”

Emotions and sensuality, especially the major senses of sight, smell, and taste were evident throughout the responses, including many mentioned above. This is important because food and drink are some of the only travel experiences which can incorporate all of these senses.

Negative elements were evident in certain responses, demonstrating that bad experiences could also be memorable. An American traveler (26, F, USA) was clear: “It’s not a positive experience, but the food experience I remember most is . . . I ordered a portobello burger and it was terrible!” A British traveler (70, F) remembered “lifting a burger bun and finding a caterpillar crawling on the burger yuk.”

Experiences Encompassing Multiple Themes

It was common that an experience fit into many categories, indicating that it was often not a single element that led to the most memorable experience. It may be a combination of the type of food, the quality of the food, the setting, the companion(s), and/or other attributes (e.g., local, authentic, novel) that contributed to a memorable experience. As food travel includes many elements, this is not surprising. However, it provides evidence that many attributes may combine to create a memory. Examples include combination of food, friends, and a view (e.g., “In Maine, went to a local family restaurant. Ordered lobster rolls and clam strips, sat at a picnic table on a cliff overlooking the ocean. Very memorable, great memories with family and great food.” 23, F, USA) and the environment, food, wine, service, and companions (e.g., “Lunch at Le Meurice in Paris. The grandeur of the room, the spectacular food, the 110 year old Armagnac, the amazing service and wonderful company.” 46, F, Australia).

Discussion and Conclusion

What Makes a Memorable Food/Drink Experience while Traveling

While it is likely impossible to state that there is a single category of food/drink experience that is most memorable, this research found multiple connections between travel and culinary memory. Through hundreds of responses, clear categories developed, revealing there are many physical and temporal elements that make up a memorable food or drink experience. Table 4 presents the various attributes that contribute to each element. It may be easy to think of these elements as the what, where, who, when, and why of the food or drink tourism experience, especially for destination managers or tourism developers who wish to create memorable experiences.

A single element (a memorable view or a single local food) may have been enough to create a memory. However, remembering an instance often included a combination of elements, such as celebrating a special occasion with family members in a gourmet restaurant with excellent food and service. We propose that food/drink experiences with more elements are likely to be more memorable. Another observation is that no element is required. Instead, the great variety of memorable food/drink experiences (i.e., types of food, price range, location) is notable. Another observation is that there is not a timeline on reflection of these experiences, as individuals mentioned recent and distant memories.

Experiences were both intentional (visiting a gourmet restaurant to celebrate an anniversary) and serendipitous (“discovering” an unexpected place). Likewise, they could be gourmet (like the French Laundry) or simple, like a food stand. This provides evidence that travelers find memory in a
variety of settings. It may also indicate that tourists are often cultural omnivores, seeking both highbrow and lowbrow experiences (Peterson and Kern 1996).

**Memorable Food or Drink Tourism Experiences Compared with Memorable Tourism Experiences**

The results of this study build upon previous research in memorable tourism experiences (MTE). Overall, the most memorable food (culinary) travel experiences are generally unique to a single moment in time. This is in contrast to the research on MTE, which focus primarily on broad aspects of the destination as a whole. For example, J-H. Kim (2014) considered destination attributes which may lead to memorable experiences. These generalities (e.g., accessibility of a destination, interesting events, unique architecture, and quality infrastructure) may play a bigger role in a complete memorable vacation (or MTE) than a single experience would.

When recalling a memorable food/drink experience while traveling, respondents rarely considered the overall impression of a destination in regard to overarching aspects (e.g., architecture, accessibility, friendliness). In general, the only generic impression of importance was the food or cuisine. For example, a general statement about food (“winery tours ‘Italy—a foodie’s paradise’”) was often given, but the general categories found in J-H. Kim, Ritchie, and McCormick (2010) or J-H. Kim (2014) were not found.

Instead, memorable food or drink experiences tended to be focused on singular instance, and it would be difficult to separate the elements – including the place, the occasion, and the companions. It is likely that a traveler may be able to have memorable food or drink experiences in a variety of locations without considering J-H. Kim’s general “destination attributes of MTE.” It is proposed that a memorable destination is not required to generate a memorable food or drink experience. Instead it may occur in both obvious and unexpected environments, through both careful vacation planning and serendipitous experiences. For example, a roadside restaurant such as Lambert’s was mentioned by respondents, even though Sikeston (Missouri) is not a major touristic destination on its own. The responses also provide support for Tsai’s (2016) proposition that locality is important. However, there may have been no connection between satisfaction with a destination and memorable food/drink experience.

While the general models of MTEs are too broad to accurately predict a memorable food/drink experience, many elements of MTE models can be applied to memorable food/drink experiences. Among the MTE attributes that evolved from the current research were elements from J-H. Kim, Ritchie, and McCormick (2010) (e.g., hedonism, novelty, local culture, and meaningfulness); Morgan (e.g., shared experiences, and local experiences); and J-H. Kim (2014) (e.g., special events, special cuisines, service quality, and local culture). Social aspects, important to Chandralal and Valenzuela (2013, 2015) were also found to be important in generating memorable food/drink experiences.

However, a single element would not be required to make the food/drink experience memorable. For example, while elements like local culture and novelty were often cited in memorable food/drink experiences, they were not necessary. While J-H. Kim (2013) proposed that local culture is important to determining memories, many of the respondents recalled that their most memorable experience may reflect the food of another culture, instead of local cuisine. In addition, “novelty” was not required, as individuals ate familiar foods or returned to memorable experiences. While an individual’s memorable food/drink experience would nearly always be considered a “peak” experience, J-H. Kim’s (2013) definition seems to be too specific in terms of local culture and novelty.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4. Elements of Memorable Food or Drink Tourism Experiences with Examples.</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Food/Drink</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>WHAT food or drink was experienced</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local foods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authentic foods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Novel foods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unusual or bizarre foods</td>
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<td>Variety of foods</td>
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<td>Wine and beer</td>
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<td>Service quality</td>
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<td>Street food</td>
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<td>Homes</td>
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There is a likely connection between food/drink experiences and tourist behavior. Travelers mentioned returning to a food/drink experience, as well as expressing the desire to revisit the same experience on a return trip. While this research did not attempt to test previous findings (Tung and Ritchie 2011; Marschall 2014, 2015) that individuals may not want to return to a memorable destination, it provides evidence that this proposition is not universal. Instead, many respondents (without prompting) stated that they have returned to re-experience the food or drink of a location. Thus, there is the possibility that because of their sensory nature, a culinary memory may be associated with repeat visitation.

While local and authentic foods were important, this study provides evidence that memorable food/drink experiences may not necessarily be local foods. Individuals experienced unique and cultural foods in countries different from their origin (such as a Hawaiian restaurant in Florida or an Italian restaurant in Pennsylvania). This contrasts with researchers’ suggestions that food tourism must involve the purchase or consumption of local or regional foods (Ignatov and Smith 2006) or emphasize local ingredients or local culinary resources (Smith and Xiao 2008). Instead it appears that the only limitation to memorable food tourism experiences was that they must happen away from home on a vacation or trip.

Overall, this paper presented the elements that contribute to memorable food/drink experiences, which differ from the elements of a memorable destination or a generic memorable tourism experience. This research found that a single element (such as a food, a restaurant, or a view) may be sufficient to define the most memorable experience, or that a variety of different individual factors may lead to memory. In addition, no particular element (not even a memorable food) was required to create a memorable experience. Experiential attributes of travel, like companions, guest service, or the view, were often the most memorable traits of the experience. As both carefully planned culinary trips and serendipitous moments were associated with the most poignant memory, it appears that destinations of all types may benefit from memorable culinary experiences. It is likely that all destinations may be able to use memorable culinary experiences to market to potential visitors as well as to create remarkable memories—which have been associated with positive word of mouth and future travel decisions.

**Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

This research used a modified memory-work framework to investigate experiences. Further elicitation of responses would likely result in richer data, as would a complete memory-work approach. While there are limitations to conducting qualitative research using online samples, this approach was chosen to reach a larger sample. This study asked respondents for one most memorable experience, so elicitation of many experiences may help to expand this study. Another aspect not considered is the level of anticipation or planning that went into selecting the experience.

This research could also be expanded using quantitative data. Researchers could ask individuals to think of a memorable food/drink experience and identify which of the elements (food, companions, setting) they could recall. Qualitatively, individuals could be given the list of categories and asked to detail their memories from each category. Additionally, researchers could better connect memorable experiences to elements like satisfaction and repeat visitation. For example, individuals mentioned returning to memorable experiences, but the “when” and “why” could be explored in more detail.

Finally, the research could be expanded by determining how memorable food/drink experiences differ when traveling compared to dining out in one’s usual environment. There are also connections between motivation to participate in food and drink experiences that may connect to memory.

**Implications for Tourism Providers**

Food and beverage activities, as part of the local culture, should be a key component of a destination management strategy. The model presented in this article would be useful for destinations when developing a destination marketing strategy. Managers could ensure that each aspect in Table 4 (e.g., view, interaction with locals, authentic food) is represented in a destination and that marketing of a destination included a variety of experiences. By incorporating various elements, marketers can target different types of travelers, who may be attracted by different culinary experiences, from a spectacular view to street foods. Additionally, potential travelers may be better able to visualize themselves enjoying particular experiences and desire to create their own memories. It is easy to imagine a future traveler dreaming, “I can see myself sitting there enjoying that fish taco on the beach!” This may be a way of creating a “pre-memory” that they may seek out while visiting. This research also indicates that for some travelers, culinary activities may entice an individual to return. When compared to other tourist attractions, restaurants, bars, and other culinary attractions may offer more reasons to return—either to enjoy the food, service, or environment again or to experience something new.

This framework could also help individual providers—whether a restaurant, a food festival, or even a food truck—by incorporating more elements into their experiences. For example, a restaurant may provide a better description of what makes the food authentic, encouraging interaction with locals through shared seating, or finding ways to celebrate and encourage special occasions.
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