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Understanding Tourists' Complex Food Relations

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ABSTRACT

A series of classifications on tourists and food exist. The qualitative interviews upon which this paper draws, however, indicate that tourists' relations to food are more complex than extant classifications suggest, for instance in terms of variety sought. The paper discusses these complexities and points to implications for future research.

Key Words: Food tourists, consumption patterns, novel food, familiar food, variety-seeking

1 OBJECTIVE

A common denominator in the literature on tourism related food consumption is that tourists are classified as *either* being attracted to novel food *or* as individuals that prefer familiar food, thus suggesting that tourists' relations to food are rather stable and static. However, as few in-depth studies actually exist of tourists' food related consumption patterns, we do not know whether existing classifications constitute adequate descriptions. The purpose of this paper is hence to discuss the roles food play for tourist and particularly to suggest whether these roles align with extant theory.

2 MATERIAL & METHODS

In order to better understand tourists' actual eating practices and reactions to eating opportunities, the paper is based on 20 in-depth interviews with Danish couples and families with children.

3 RESULTS & CONCLUSIONS

Preliminary results suggest that some tourists do not align well with existing categorizations as relations to food vary, not just across holidays but particularly within the context of a single holiday. For example, sometimes tourists choose a ‘boring’ sandwich and at other occasions they prefer either ‘gourmet food’ or local food. Hence their relations to food are thus neither stable, nor static during the holidays. Deliberately seeking variety is ignored by these ‘either/or’ classifications. Accordingly, to ‘box’ tourists makes us ignore the variety seeking behavior that some tourists apply in order for food to be ‘non-boring’ or even act as peak experiences. Furthermore, the study indicates that if we wish to understand tourists’ relations to food, we need detailed studies of tourists’ actual eating practices as such practices seem far more unstable and multi-faceted than extant theory suggests.

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