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Gastronomy: a customer study of restaurant in Cordoba (Spain) included in a prestigious guide

Estudio del perfil del cliente de un restaurante en Córdoba (España) incluido en guías de alto interés gastronómico

Ricardo David Hernández Rojas¹

Maria Adela Balderas- Cejudo²

Dunia Alonso Sobrado³

Abstract

Culinary tourism based on visiting restaurants and tasting dishes where a strong link and identity exist with the destination is increasingly becoming an opportunity to attract tourists. Visiting a fine-dining restaurant is one of the features of culinary tourism and it also leads to greater dissemination of the historical and cultural heritage of the region. Therefore, this paper seeks to learn more about the so-called gastronomic tourist who visits a prestigious restaurant attracted by the information in gastronomic guides or ratings of the chef working there. The field work was conducted at the ReComiendo Restaurant in Cordoba, when the motivations and satisfaction of the customers who visit this type of establishment were studied.

The analysis shows that developing culinary tourism based on visiting a well-known establishment influences the perception of the culture of the area. Therefore, increasing and enhancing the number of visitors at a culinary destination will, to a large extent, depend on the local culinary heritage being featured at its restaurants, the updating of its offer, a tasting menu based on a common thread, together with the updating of traditional gastronomy using cutting-edge techniques.

Key words: culinary tourism, gastronomy, gastronomic guides, gastronomic experiences, Cordoba (Spain).

¹ Profesor del Departamento de Economía, Sociología y Políticas Agrarias. Facultad de Derecho y Ciencias Económicas y Empresariales. Universidad de Córdoba. Plaza de Puerta Nueva, s/n, 14002 Cordoba, Spain. Email: ricardo.hernandez@uco.es

² Esic Business and Marketing School (Madrid, Spain) and the Basque Culinary Center (San Sebastián, Spain). Email: abalderas@bculinary.com

³ Fundación San Pablo Andalucía CEU (University of Seville, Spain). Departamento de Pedagogía y Sociología. Email: dalonso@ceuandalucia.es

Resumen

El turismo culinario basado en visitar restaurantes y probar platos que mantienen un fuerte vínculo e identidad con las tradiciones culturales del destino, se está convirtiendo cada vez más en una oportunidad para atraer turistas. Visitar un restaurante de alta cocina es una de las características del turismo culinario y también conduce a una mayor difusión del patrimonio histórico y cultural de la región visitada. Por lo tanto, este trabajo busca aprender más sobre el llamado turista gastronómico que visita un prestigioso restaurante atraído por la información existente en las guías gastronómicas o las calificaciones del chef que trabaja allí. El trabajo de campo se realizó en el restaurante “ReComiendo” de Córdoba, donde se estudiaron las motivaciones y la satisfacción de los clientes que visitan este tipo de establecimientos.

El análisis muestra que el desarrollo del turismo culinario basado en la visita a un establecimiento conocido influye en la percepción de la cultura y la oferta turística de la zona. Por lo tanto, aumentar y mejorar el número de visitantes en un destino culinario dependerá, en gran medida, del patrimonio culinario local que se presenta en sus restaurantes, la actualización de su oferta, un menú de degustación basado en un hilo común, junto con la innovación de la gastronomía tradicional utilizando técnicas de vanguardia.

Palabras clave: turismo gastronómico, gastronomía, guías gastronómicas, experiencias gastronómicas, Córdoba (España).

1. Introduction

The restaurants included in the leading fine-dining guides consolidate a model of culinary tourism based on quality, unique and local raw ingredients, featuring an innovative cuisine or culinary tradition along with other cultural identity aspects of the region, which are also a factor of the so-called culinary tourism (Hernández, 2018, Everett and Aitchison, 2008, Henderson, 2009). This all shapes a gastronomic experience, which is presented as an example of a quality and prestigious tourist experience. In fact, gastronomic experiences are the conceptualization that underpins the latest changes occurring in the kitchen, especially in the highly-regarded haute cuisine (Martínez de Albeniz, 2018). In today's world of *liquid modernity* according to Bauman (2006, 2010), where uncertainty is part of daily life, the guides provide some certainty of success in the face of a desire for a satisfactory gastronomic experience. In addition to product, cuisine and renowned professionals, a gastronomic experience seeks to heighten knowledge of the local culture or, if possible, experience it through the senses. In this regard, gastronomic guides (also considered to be travel guides) are one of the instruments that provide a certain assurance of a successful experience.

As regards the authoritative guides in Spain and Europe, two guides are, mainly, considered. The Michelin guide is the most established, both in terms of seniority and continuity. The guide is published by a French company, although its scope is worldwide and it is valued internationally. From the professional perspective, its endorsement is the most sought-after by restaurants given the ensuing increase in sales and prestige. The ratings, called "stars" are awarded to the restaurant, not to the chefs. The Michelin guide also offers other statuses apart from the stars. There is the so-called Bib Gourmand, a status given to those establishments that do not meet the requisites to be awarded their first star, but are close enough to hold this category. Then there is that “recommended restaurant” status given to those establishments that meet the expectations of the diners, offer quality dishes, which are often regional cuisine at a moderate price, and are ideal for those who are travelling and want to eat well without spending a great deal of money (Hernández, 2018). Traditionally, the

greatest number of ratings has been awarded to the Autonomous Communities of the Basque Country and Catalonia (Table 1). The Repsol guide dates back to 1979 and now mainly focuses on rating outstanding restaurants. The rating or classification system is based on the number of "soles" and the guide also includes restaurants with the status of "recommended" (Repsol guide, 2018). There are other opinion-based reference systems for travellers. "Trip Advisor" is the main digital reference guide in Spain and is consulted by potential clients, although its reliability in terms of real opinions is not proven (Ayeh et al., 2013). However, this type of digital guides will have to be considered in future research since the traditional media are declining in terms of customer trust, as people are increasingly relying on "their peers" through these digital platforms over the traditional media produced by expert staff (Segarra-Saavedra et al., 2015).

Table 1: Michelin Guide ratings broken down by number of "stars" and by Autonomous Community. Year 2010 and 2018.

Autonomous Community	2010					2018				
	Bib Gourmand	Stars			Total	Bib Gourmand	Stars			Total
		3	2	1			3	2	1	
Catalonia	39	4	3	38	84	59	4	6	44	113
Andalucía	24		1	8	33	36	1	1	14	52
Valencia	19		1	9	29	36	1	2	13	52
Madrid	4		3	10	17	15	1	6	13	35
Galicia	22			8	30	21			10	31
Basque Country	4	3	1	11	19	7	4	1	17	29
Castilla y León	25			6	31	16			10	26
Aragón	10			2	12	17			5	22
Castilla la Mancha	11			3	14	10		1	4	15
Balearic Island	1			4	5	6		1	8	15
Cantabria	6			3	9	8		2	4	14
Canary island	6			1	7	9		1	5	15
Principado de Asturias	3		1	5	9	1		1	7	9
Navarra	2			3	5	4			3	7
Extremadura	4		1	1	6	6		1		7
Murcia	6			1	7	5		1		6
La Rioja	3			1	4	2		1	2	5
	189	7	11	114	321	258	11	25	159	453

Source: Prepared by the authors, based on the Michelin guide (2010; 2018).

This article seeks to delve further into gastronomy, by analysing the influence of these guides on the motivation or reason for a tourist visiting a restaurant included in the guides, as well as their influencing overnight stays and the outcome of the final experience. Academic studies on customer motivation in prestigious restaurants do not exist, mainly due to the reluctance of certain chefs or owners to hand out surveys so as not to disturb the client, or as they do not see any direct benefits from knowing the results. This article therefore contributes data that has not so far existed in the academic world.

The study is divided into five sections. The first section sets out the introduction and the objectives of the paper. The second part locates and describes the target restaurant of the study. The literature is reviewed in the third section and is particularly focused on studies of

prestigious restaurants linked to culinary tourism. The methodology is presented in the fourth part and the results and conclusions are in the fifth section.

2. Geographical location and description of the “Recomiendo” restaurant

The ReComiendo Restaurant is in Cordoba, a province in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia, and geographically located in the south of Spain. Cordoba is noted for its outstanding heritage and cultural legacy (World Heritage Cities of Spain Group, 2017). The restaurant is in the non-tourist neighbourhood of Mirabueno in the city, but can be easily reached from the city centre, the AVE high-speed train station or the main dual-carriageways, as Cordoba has a good transport network. The history of the ReComiendo Restaurant is linked to Pedro Ortega Tobaruela, the head chef and owner of the restaurant. Pedro Ortega is better known by his nickname “Periko Ortega” to both the general public and the culinary world in Spain. This head chef, with twenty years of experience in different fine-dining restaurants and hotel chains, decided to open his own restaurant in 2014, where he strived to innovate in that field based on respecting the region's raw ingredients. His many accolades and awards include the Golden Nose of Andalusia and the award for the Best Tapa Innovation in 2013, and Ortega has been a speaker at culinary congresses. The ReComiendo Restaurant has been in the Michelin and in the Repsol guides from the first year it was up and running. It appears in the Michelin Guide as Recommended, featured as quality *cuisine* and the Repsol guide accredits the gastronomic quality of the restaurant. Regarding the guide based on the opinions and experiences of travellers, Trip Advisor, it should be noted that it is in 10th position on this ranking in Spain within the Best Luxury Restaurants section, with restaurants of the ilk of El Celler de Can Roca or Diverxo, both with three Michelin stars in this gastronomic guide, being in the Top 3.

The gastronomic offer only includes several set menu, specifically three, which change seasonally, and which start at a minimum price of €38 per person. The menus share the common thread of seeking to remind the gastronomic tourist of past culinary experiences. Memories of childhood, adolescence or as an adult which a person, in one way or another, has experienced in their lives, from a childhood breakfast or snack, and not forgetting the traditional stews made by their mothers, aunts or grandmothers. At present, these culinary concepts are disappearing due to changes in socio-economic models (such as the women working outside the home, the use of new technologies or work schedules). The ReComiendo Restaurant produces an avant-garde cuisine, which involves applying the latest culinary techniques; in addition, it selects the outstanding products and raw ingredients in the region. For example, there is a selection of Extra Virgin Olive Oils from the provinces of Cordoba and Jaén and a series of cheeses from the northern part of Cordoba (Hernández, Rivera & Millán, 2017).

As regards table reservations, there is currently a two-month waiting list to get a table. This waiting list has increasingly become longer since the restaurant opened. The waiting list for a table has become longer as the result of appearing in the different gastronomic guides, its tenth position in Trip Advisor, being on the Choice Awards list. However, as Periko Ortega, the owner, explained in the interview, “word of mouth” is the real reference for customers.

3. Theoretical framework

Academic writings focusing on prestigious restaurants are not very abundant. Furthermore, they are very scarce or non-existent if we focus on the gastronomic tourist and their reasons for a gastronomic experience in a prestigious restaurant. Consequently, this article presents a new approach in this regard. World Heritage Sites (Moreno et al., 2016) do appear as one of the factors for a cultural tourism visit (Correia et al., 2013). Therefore, culture is one of the main motivations and, within it, many authors contribute to gastronomy being considered as no more than a reflection of the culture of the place (Oliveira, 2011, Mascarenhas and Gândara, 2010), and which is very complex (Kivela and Crotts, 2006). In conclusion, and following these authors, we can affirm the existence of a link between the visit to a gastronomic restaurant and the motivation to learn about the culture of the region. As for studies conducted with prestigious restaurants, some research has been carried out. In particular, the case of El Bulli Restaurant, which was number one worldwide according to different guides. There are studies from the perspective of the union of cuisine and science (Mans and Castells, 2011), studies on the central figure of El Bulli, Ferran Adrià (Moreno, 2009), or studies on how Basque and Catalan fine-dining restaurants have influenced the promotion of Spanish gastronomy. (Konagaya, and Morales, 2003). Other authors have studied the phenomenon of Basque chefs and their union, following the thread of the movement called *Nouvelle Cuisine* (Aguirre García et al., 2011) or studying the way of creating culinary dishes (Martínez Vivanco, 2017). This scientific literature shows how the academic interest is focused on the north of Spain, where there are more mentions in the gastronomic guides of the country and where the leading restaurants with the highest ratings are to be found.

In a recent publication, "the existence of some kind of guide and the possibility of tasting" is pointed out as one of the four key elements of a gastronomic route (Jeambey, 2016, p.1193); (Cava et al, 2019). So the existence of guides helps to provide assurance and expand knowledge in the face of a gastronomic experience.

With regard to studies that justify local gastronomy as an attractive factor for tourism, there are numerous studies on this (Hillel et al., 2013, Oliveira, 2011, Millán et al., 2016, Hernández et al., 2016). Likewise, studies that Results show that intellectual food experience and intention to revisit the restaurant have a significant effect on intention to visit the city of origin, whereas behavioural food experience and attitude towards food authenticity positively influenced intention to revisit the restaurant. Attitude towards food authenticity plays a vital role in the relationships between food experience, intention to revisit the restaurant, and intention to visit the city of origin (Pu et all,2019) Finally, we must emphasize that a restaurant qualified as "good cuisine and service" can be a tourist destination in itself (Boniface, 2003).

4. Methodology

In accordance with the established objectives, the methodology used to carry out this research has followed a mainly quantitative strategy, using a survey conducted with the customers of the ReComiendo restaurant as a data production technique. Specifically, the survey was conducted between September and November 2018, every day throughout the week, including weekends, for two months, except for Sundays when the restaurant is closed. Prior

to preparing the survey, an interview was conducted with the owner of the restaurant, together with the bibliographic and documentary review, to prepare the survey questionnaire.

The structure of the survey is based on different previous research on tourist motivations (Melgar, 2013, Orgaz-Agüera and López-Guzmán, 2015, Millán et al., 2018, Hernández and Millán, 2018) divided into three different parts: the socio-demographic characteristics of gastronomic tourists; the motivation or reason for their trip and, finally, the evaluation and opinion on aspects of gastronomy and destination.

For the content of this survey, what was considered a "gastronomic experience" was also taken into account, since according to Martínez de Albeniz this term "needs clarification so that it does not work, as it often does, as an empty signifier, losing its power of designation. Not everything can be considered a gastronomic experience. If that were the case, logically, nothing would be unique" (2018, p.122). Therefore, the presence of culinary aspects as well as other cultural aspects in the gastronomic offer of the establishment has been taken into account.

The people surveyed were the clients themselves in each of the restaurant's services, both at noon and in the evening. The survey was offered to clients at the end of the service, but not to all of them and it was conducted randomly in order not to impede the natural progress of the restaurant. Previously, a pre-test of 15 surveys was carried out to detect possible errors. There were a total of 17 questions. These were divided into three sections: the first six questions considered socio-demographic characteristics such as age, sex, origin or whether or not the clients spent the night in the city. A second part, from Questions Seven to Twelve asked about the reasons for the visit. And, a final section, based on the Linker Scale, addressed the gastronomic satisfaction, both of Cordoba in general and the restaurant in particular. A total of 424 clients completed the survey. The reliability index according to Cronbach's Alpha was 0.79. The high reliability index obtained reinforces the validity of the research work carried out (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Table 2 presents the technical data sheet of the research carried out.

Annual clients of the ReComiendo Restaurant	11348
Sample	424
Sample error	+/-5,03%
Process	Sampling convenience
Period	June-July 2018
Sample Control	Implementation and supervision of field work by the authors of the research

Source: Prepared by the authors

The data collected were organized, tabulated and for statistical analysis using the SPSS 21.0 program. The data was processed using univariate and bivariate statistical tools. Regarding the limitations of this study, there is one in particular: only one restaurant included in the prestigious guides was studied, due to the reluctance of and difficulties to access these

establishments. In any case, this exploratory research is a starting point, with the aim of expanding the field work to a greater number of establishments included in guides and to consolidate the initial conclusions obtained.

5. Results and discussion of results

The main data according to the socio-demographic characteristics of the gastronomic tourist who visits restaurants in prestigious guides are listed in Table 3.

Table 3. Socio-demographic characteristics of gastronomic tourists

Questions	Answers	Percentage
1. Sex	Male	43.24%
	Female	56.76%
2. Age	Between 20 and 30 years old	12.14%
	Between 31 and 45 years old	48.62%
	Between 46 and 55 years old	28.25%
	Between 56 and 65 years old	9.34 %
	Over 65	1.65 %
3. Origin	Cordoba	45.87%
	Other Provinces of Andalusia	18.14%
	Rest of Spain	20.88%
	Abroad	15.11 %
4. Average Stay	Do not spend the night	81.34%
	Overnight 1 night	16.88%
	Overnight 2 nights	1.78%
	Overnight 3 or more nights	0.00%
5. How they travel	Single	0.00%
	With a partner or friend	6.88%
	With a sentimental partner	80.98%
	With partner and children	3.90%
	With a group of friends (more than one)	8.24%
6. First visit	Yes	63.14%
	No	36.86%

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Regarding the differences by sex, it is worth noting that a greater percentage of women visit this type of establishment. In terms of age, 48.62% are aged between 31 and 45 years, and there are none over 65. These age results coincide with Oliveria (2011), who made and set a similar profile in culinary tourism as a result of cross-checking data in three studies: Ontario Ministry of Tourism (2005), Queensland Department of Tourism Research (2003) and the one

by Lankford and Çela (2005). Regarding the origin of the clients, it should be noted that over half (54.13%) are not from Cordoba. Among those coming from abroad, special mention should be made of those from the United Kingdom, the United States and ending with France and Russia in that order. As regards overnight stays, particularly noteworthy is that over 80% of food tourists do not spend the night in Cordoba, attributable to the city's magnificent communications by AVE (high-speed train) and road. For example, from Córdoba in a few hours, you can be in Barcelona (Catalonia).

The motivation or reason for the visit is reflected in Table 4. The outstanding fact is that the restaurant appearing in a gastronomic guide is the main motivation in 44.92% of cases for their visit, followed by the assurance provided by recommendations and the fame of the head chef, as well as a high percentage, over 15%, for social reasons, which coincides with Fields (2002) who found that eating away from home was a social function.

Table 4. Motivation or reason for visiting the prestigious restaurant

7. Why do you go to a prestigious restaurant, where the average price is presumed to be higher?	- It gives me assurance regarding the quality of the food and the service (recommendations or because I already knew it)	26.47%
	- Appears in a gastronomic guide	44.12%
	- The chef is famous in society and is in the restaurant so people can meet him	14.31%
	- To show off with friends or socially	15.10%
8. As for the tasting menu, what motivates you the most?	- Traditional food cooked like yesterday	11.71%
	- Traditional food but presented with avant-garde touches	20.86%
	- Cutting-edge food	15.43%
	- Food where an introductory thread or gastronomic history is followed	51.23 %
	- Many different dishes	0.77 %
9. Are you motivated to go to a prestigious restaurant to discover local products and raw ingredients that are unique to the area?	Yes	72.43%
	No	27.57%
10. Do you go to the restaurant to round off a trip or gastronomic route featuring DOP or unique raw ingredients and seeing how they are directly used in the kitchen?	Yes	5.56%
	No	94.44%

11. It motivates you to learn new cooking techniques applied to the dishes	Yes	82.86%
	No	17.14%
12. It motivates you to discover new dishes or techniques	Yes	91.86%
	No	8.14%

Source: Prepared by the authors.

As for being motivated by the tasting menu, over half of the gastronomic tourists state that a tasting menu - consisting of between 10 and 15 dishes with a common thread or gastronomic history - is their real reason to travel and go to such a restaurant. This is in addition to just over 15% of the clients saying that their motivation is to discover cutting-edge cuisine that is, applying techniques and presentations in more innovative dishes. Authors such as Barrera (2006) have already demonstrated the importance of the common thread with respect to the design of a gastronomic route and applicable to the menu concept. As shown in the last question, nine out of 10 customers are motivated by the possibility of discovering new dishes or ways of working, that is, by discovering and tasting food using the latest cooking techniques. With respect to the local cuisine assessment, as shown in Table 5, the rating of the restaurant ReComiendo is higher than the valuation for Cordoba as a destination, with both being very high, with scores of 9 and 8 out of 10, respectively.

Table 4. Evaluation and opinion on aspects of gastronomy and destination.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
13. Mark from 1 to 10, how do you rate the gastronomy of the ReComiendo Restaurant	0.00%	1.20%	1.34%	0.00%	3.00%	4.54%	0.00%	7.82%	82.10%	0.00%
14. Mark from 1 to 10 how you consider or rate the gastronomy of Cordoba	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.23%	4.54%	1.08%	81.05%	12.10%	0.00%
15. Mark from 1 to 10 how you consider the heritage offer of Cordoba	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.65%	1.05	92.10%	5.20%

16. Mark from 1 to 10 how you rate the service	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	0.00%	2.30%	2.64%	0.00%	7.00%	8.54 %	15.10%	56.37	8.05%	0.00%
Mark from 1 to 10 how you rate the restaurant's cuisine	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00 %	0.00 %	8.15	88.20 %	3.65%

Source: Prepared by the authors.

It is noteworthy how the cultural offer of Cordoba is valued above the value assigned to the gastronomy of Cordoba or to the gastronomy of prestigious restaurants. In other words, gastronomy is a complement from the point of view of heritage cultural tourism, which in the case of Cordoba is highly valued, and improves the experience of tourists who are motivated by tangible heritage culture.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The restaurants included in gastronomic and prestigious guides are a factor of attraction for the so-called culinary tourism, as shown in this paper, where the satisfaction of both the gastronomic offer of the establishment analysed and the destination in general are quite high, but increasing overnight stays is still pending.

Given this statement, this paper has helped to better understand the gastronomic tourist profile. With regard to the characteristics of such a tourist, this study corroborates the data of other studies, both in age range and with respect to the company with which these culinary tourism experiences are enjoyed. However, one of the contributions of this article is the incorporation of women as gastronomic tourists, who use catering establishments to a greater extent to enjoy a gastronomic experience.

Regarding the motivation to go to a fine-dining restaurant, the presence in gastronomic guides plays an important role, as does the menu as a cultural thread of the gastronomic offer, in addition to the motivation to discover new dishes or culinary techniques.

Whith regard, original experiences shape the attractiveness of the authentic of the cuisine [71,82,83] elucidated and validated the influence of tourist experience on food, demonstrating the importance of food experience in tourism, according to the authors (Guan & Jones, 2015;Jung et al,2014;Quan & Wang, 2004)

In terms of assessment of the destination, this study corroborates the high score given to the cultural destination, yet the score for the prestigious restaurant is greater, indicating how good gastronomy helps to improve the experience at the destination. The value obtained in regard to cultural heritage allows us to infer that the relationship between culture and gastronomic identity is relevant for gastronomic visitors.

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