

P A R T II  
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# Food events and festivals

CHAPTER 4

Conceptualizing  
festival-based culinary  
tourism in rural  
destinations

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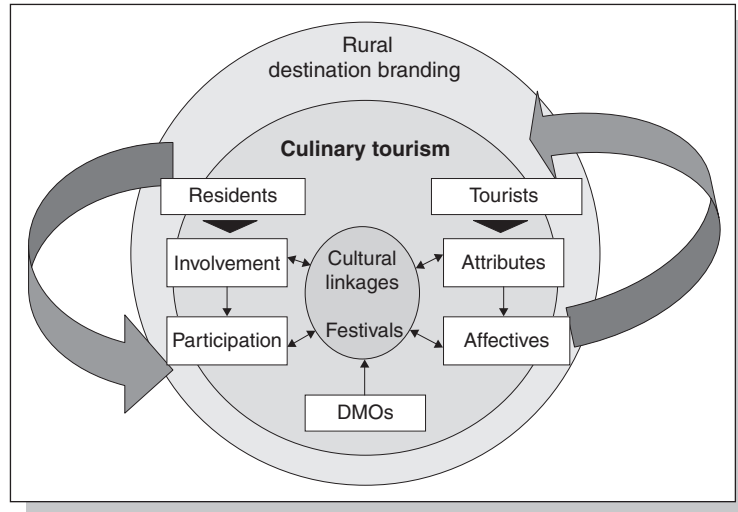
## Introduction

Destination branding is a powerful marketing resource used to differentiate one location from another (Cai, 2002; Kotler and Gertner, 2002). Successful destination branding must incorporate various elements of a destination to portray a unique and positive image to attract tourists. Festivals staged in rural areas can utilize a destination branding strategy to differentiate their location. Festivals often include food and food related elements as unique regional celebration of culture. Cultural significance combined with food at festivals and implemented as a branding strategy will form a powerful emotional connection with a destination. Experiencing food and food related elements at a destination can be defined as culinary tourism. It is known that the sharing of food also elicits an emotional response and a sense of an identity with place (Visser, 1991; Bessiere, 2001; Long, 2004). The use of food and food related elements in destination branding materials will not only evoke a positive response to a destination, but also invoke an emotional identification with the food image affirming a positive response to a destination.

Food is present at the majority of festivals, and is considered an essential service (Getz, 1991). In many cases, food is the primary reason for the festival celebration. For the tourists, it is a way to experience new cultures and flavours (Mitchell and Hall, 2003; Rusher, 2003; Long, 2004). The experience of the food exceeds mere sustenance. People consume food with others to form social relationships (Visser, 1991; Long, 2004). Experiencing local cuisine through demonstration or experiential interaction allows a tourist to take ownership in a destination (Bessiere, 2001; McKercher and du Cross, 2002). The personal nature of this interaction translates into a deeper appreciation for the culture (Long, 1998; McKercher and du Cross, 2002). This deep appreciation generates an emotional identification and connection with a destination. The affective component associated with the consumption of local food at a destination assimilates into the destination's image (Lewis, 1997; Felsenstein and Fleischer, 2003). The objective of the study was to develop a conceptual framework for the study of festival-based culinary tourism as a unique way to differentiate rural destinations through branding.

## The framework

The synthesis of existing literature resulted in the conceptualization of a framework for festival-based culinary tourism in rural destinations (Figure 4.1). The foundation of this framework is



**Figure 4.1**  
Conceptual  
framework of  
festival-based  
culinary tourism

the model of destination branding proposed by Cai (2002) and its underlying theories. As defined by Cai (2002), destination branding is the selection of consistent elements to identify and distinguish a brand through positive image building. Image building is the core activity of destination branding. A key element of the destination branding model is the projection of positive images to the target market. These images would create an emotional response reminding a tourist of a destination. This emotional response would be the affective intangible component a person would associate with a destination.

Place is considered one of the greatest untapped resources for branding opportunities (Morgan et al., 2004). Culinary tourism as defined by Long (2004) is any experience of food or foodways other than one's own. Hall and Mitchell (2001, 2005) offer a comprehensive definition of culinary tourism including 'visitations to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and special locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production region are the primary motivation factor for travel'. For the purpose of this study, the definition is confined to food and food related elements associated with festivals. Hall and Mitchell (2005) identify 'experiencing the attributes' of food as an element of culinary tourism. It is this emotional identification intertwined with the symbolic interaction between a resident and tourist that makes culinary tourism a powerful factor in destination image development. Culinary tourism is a specific branding strategy suggested to differentiate one rural

location from another. Food is considered an element of culture (Visser, 1991). Cultural assets involving food and food related elements (FFRE) from festivals that are indigenous to the rural area could be identified as culinary tourism. Rural destinations can capitalize on cultural assets and elements of culinary tourism unique to their community for branding. FFRE specific to a community and presented at festivals can contribute to the success of culinary tourism through destination branding. FFRE at festivals are the basis of the conceptual model.

The framework in Figure 4.1 considers all stakeholders in the process of developing successful culinary tourism through destination branding. The stakeholders are the residents and tourists. They are brought together by the festivals with food and food related elements. FFRE are defined as specific items related to indigenous plants, animals or food products, recipes, culinary preparation, cultural food rituals or ceremonies, culinary customs or cultural traditions, presentation, manufacture, restaurants and consumption of food or any other culinary item an area would consider proprietary. This framework focuses on the FFRE at festivals as the cultural linkage. For example, a festival centred on indigenous food or a food harvest would be a cultural link. Members of the rural community would identify the food as an element of the rural destination brand. These cultural linkages are resources that must be effectively branded and managed for short- and long-term planning of the community.

Successful staging of festivals and exhibition of food depends on the enthusiasm, involvement and passion of the residents. Local residents, as stakeholders, need to be involved from the planning stage through execution and evaluation (see left panel of Figure 4.1). The left panel represents the contributions of the resident stakeholders to portray the image of a destination. The residents work to form critical alliances with the area destination marketing organization to determine what FFRE from festivals they wish to showcase. Communication and involvement among local planners, destination marketing organizations and festival organizers that is vital to ensure the needs of all stakeholders are being considered. The marketing effort must be unified among the stakeholders to make sure the images and elements being portrayed are consistent.

The tourists as stakeholders (see right panel of Figure 4.1) experience the food or FFRE of a festival. A successful experience will lead to a deeper appreciation of the culture. The tourist will identify with the culinary experience and elicit positive feelings regarding the destination and FFRE shared. A positive attitude will remain with the tourist regarding the destination

long after the tourist has returned home (Hall and Mitchell, 2005). This residual good will reinforce the image of the destination again in the visitor's mind long after the trip has ended (Lewis, 1997; Felsenstein and Fleischer, 2003). Using FFRE as a symbol for culture and festivals as a medium for cultural exchange, food can be used as a destination image builder (Lewis, 1997; Cai, 2002).

Much academic research has been done on the study of image as it relates to the tourist destination selection process (Gunn, 1988; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Tapachai and Waryszak, 2000; Cai, 2002; Anholt, 2004; Baloglu and Love, 2005; Connell, 2005; O'Leary and Deegan, 2005). The affective component of an image by a tourist is one of the most powerful determinants regarding destination selection (Cai, 2002). The image of FFRE creates an emotional identification enriched with symbolic meaning of culture, creating an affective association with FFRE at a destination.

Baloglu and McCleary (1999) discuss two components of images, the perception or cognitive portion, as well as the affective component. The cognitive component refers to the knowledge, or information one possesses. The affective component refers to how a person feels about the information. Their research concluded that image is more likely influenced by affective components than cognitive and affective components together. Essentially, an emotional attachment or feeling is more influential than direct knowledge and emotions. The destination branding model of Cai (2002) integrates organic and induced image concepts with attributes, attitudes and affective components of a destination. The images along with the emotional attachments made are integrated into the marketing components, contributing to the branding elements and strengthening the brand identity of a destination.

There are two types of images that exist in the mind of a tourist, organic and induced (Gunn, 1988; Cai, 2002; O'Leary and Deegan, 2005). Organic images are images that a person gathers throughout one's life. These images are unsolicited and occur randomly. Unsolicited images happen in everyday readings, newscasts, on the Internet, in the classroom, or anywhere a discussion about a specific location is taking place. These impressions can either be positive or negative (Gunn, 1988; Cai, 2002; O'Leary and Deegan, 2005). Induced images are images placed in the media consciously by advertisers, destination management organizations, travel organizations or any person wanting to market a specific location for future travel. People are constantly bombarded with induced images that attempt to claim product or destination loyalty. These images

are designed to be favourable and are separate from organic images since they have an element of planning by designers (Gunn, 1988). Some examples of induced images would be destination brochures, travel posters, television commercials or advertisements in a magazine.

## Food image as an element of a brand

Food and beverage expenditures make up the largest portion of a tourist's budget while at the destination (Mill and Morrison, 2002). The economic impact of food consumption is one of the most relevant considerations in how to increase consumer spending at a destination. By adding FFRE to the marketing materials, culinary tourism can enhance and strengthen the brand of a rural destination.

According to the American Marketing Association, 'A brand is defined as a name, a logo, symbol, package design or other attribute that identifies a product and distinguishes it from others'. A brand extends beyond traditional, tangible product features. It includes the intangible qualities assigned by a consumer that adds value to the product. At the base, it is a product along with its quality, function, attributes and usefulness. It also encompasses symbols, images, emotional attachments, organizational associations and relationships (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000).

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) identify four dimensions guiding brand development: brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and brand loyalty. These dimensions contribute to the equity or total value of a brand. Brand awareness is the familiarity a consumer has with a specific brand. Awareness is also associated with perception and attributes. Perceived quality is another dimension that can affect profitability by influencing brand associations. It is the perception of a location by a tourist that is the most critical. Positive attributes of an image translate into a favourable intangible identification with a destination. Also contributing to brand development are the associations made with the specific brand. Associations such as imagery, emotional attachments or symbols are key. However, any positive association a consumer makes with the brand contributes to the strength of the brand. The fourth dimension is brand loyalty. Loyalty is at the core of brand development and each contribution made by awareness, quality and associations will increase the loyalty. As the dimensions guiding brand development grow stronger, the value or the equity of the brand increases. By adding FFRE

elements from festivals to a destination brand, the awareness, imagery and emotional connection increase. This increase in brand identity will strengthen the brand.

## Community support

Support and involvement from the community is important for the success of any destination (Lewis, 2001; Fagence, 2003). With intense resident involvement comes integration into local economies and culture. All stakeholders must be involved from the inception and planning process, to ensure maximum acceptance and success. This theory holds especially true for fairs and festivals. Regional festivals often centre on a community culture or local speciality. Since the inception of the festival is local, the management of the event takes on a 'grassroots' effect, allowing the community integral control of the event. Participation in festival events allows residents an opportunity to socialize with tourists. This interaction allows for a cultural exchange and appreciation for 'other'.

A tourism initiative has a greater chance for success if it comes from within the community, assessing its own resources and assets. Since festivals occur annually and need to grow from year to year, stakeholders must consider that the local environment may experience changes and respond accordingly to ensure continued growth and success. Using local talent for leadership roles, it provides for future growth and use of proprietary assets, and maintains control from a local base of support. With residents of a community behind a tourism initiative, garnering support from local agencies, it has the greatest chance of success.

Continued festival success translates into an increase in food at festivals and a strengthening of the destination brand. This theory works well with fairs and festivals. A festival is a celebration of culture from a specific region, typically, but not exclusively, rural. The festival starts small with locals handling all aspects of the event. If a festival is perceived by organizers as an opportunity for tourism growth, it already has local support and inherently, cultural significance. These steps exemplify Twining-Ward's (1999) and Lewis's (2001) philosophy of identifying a community's strengths to be used for an economic advantage. The increase in FFRE means an increase in the images and attributes of a destination, creating a powerful branding strategy.

Cultural tourism is said to improve the quality of life for the residents (Bachleitner and Zins, 1999). There is much debate



over this topic. Some people believe that by inviting rural tourism to an area it only leads to cultural exploitation and decline. The increase in vehicular traffic, demands of natural resources and pedestrian traffic take away from the leisure experience and leave the consumer and the resident with a feeling of being consumed and discarded. If the resident has little or no control over the tourism area, there may be negative attitudes towards visitors of any kind (Smith and Krannich, 1998; Russo, 2001; Davis and Morias, 2004). Regional festivals celebrate community, culture and heritage. One reason tourists visit destinations is to experience culture different than their own (Bessiere, 2001). This conceptual model of culinary tourism in rural destinations is community based. Festivals are an excellent way to incorporate community involvement with resident interest in tourism planning.

## Residents' attitudes

In the last 20 years, tourism scientists have constantly examined social aspects of tourism, including the community issues as residents' attitudes towards tourism. It is widely believed that tourism must have support of the host community (Morrison et al., 1986; Murphy, 1986; Long, 1988; Hu and Ritchie, 1993; Lankford, 1994; Fagence, 2003). However, research work has unequivocally found that support is not always there. In fact, support only constitutes one pole on a continuum of host community's attitudes. The other pole is opposition. Depending on the stage of the destination life cycle, the distribution of residents on this 'love-hate' continuum varies. Tourism scientists agree on some factors that underlie different attitudes. These factors include attachment to the community (Mc Cool and Martin, 1994), level of knowledge about tourism and the local economy (Davis et al., 1988), level of contact with tourists (Akis et al., 1996), and perceived ability to influence tourism planning decisions (Lankford, 1994).

Bachleitner and Zins (1999) used a survey instrument developed by Lankford and Howard (1994) to measure the residents' perception of the impacts of tourism. The researchers uncovered a significant factor in the data that suggests that, the further away the residents live from the centre of tourism activity, the stronger they perceive negative impacts on the environment. Conversely, the more residents are involved in the process of change, the more favourably they perceive the process.

## Role of destination marketing organizations

The underlying factors of community involvement, knowledge of tourism activities and host–guest interaction can be influenced to improve resident’s attitudes, but tourism scientists have yet to offer solutions that are conceptually generalizable, and pragmatically adaptable to rural communities, where the task of tourism development is in the hands of either an ad hoc tourism council or in most cases, a convention and visitors bureau (CVB). The conceptual model proposed with its foundation of festivals being thoroughly embedded in the community, offers a pragmatic and adaptable solution to resident involvement and participation.

In the context of destination branding for rural tourism, the destination marketing organizations (DMOs) must work together in the community to enlist the full support of the residents. Destination branding is an arduous task that takes commitment and dedication from all of the stakeholders. All interested parties must have a unified branding strategy to make sure the consumer is receiving a consistent message about a destination. Destination branding is one of the most useful tools a destination management organization has available when trying to reach a consumer, creating an emotional attachment and identification with a location (Morgan et al., 2002; Morgan and Pritchard, 2004; O’Leary and Deegan, 2005). The planning and staging of festivals offer a great opportunity for a DMO to ‘combine forces’ with the community to maximize the branding opportunity of a rural area.

## Conclusion

Many regions of the world celebrate their culture or heritage through festivals. Often, one of the themes highlighted in a cultural celebration is food. When tourists are attracted to a destination community by FFRE of the destination, culinary tourism takes place. The quality of this unique tourism experience on the part of tourists depends on the extent to which they (guests) can interact with the residents (hosts) over FFRE. The success of this unique tourism forms on the part of the destination depends on its ability to create an enriching tourist experience and to optimize the economic and socio-cultural impacts of tourism. Festivals provide an optimal opportunity for tourists and residents to interact and share each others experience; and FFRE are a fixture at almost all festivals or festive events. This chapter posits that the festivals staged by

rural communities are de facto venues of culinary tourism, and as such their potential to rural destination branding remains untapped.

Brand-essence, a single thought that identifies the soul of a brand (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000), is an expensive but powerful proposition for a brand owner. The word, 'essence' elicits a culinary sensory response – the sense of smell. It would be interesting for a destination to develop a 'branding essence' using a food item or product from a festival to assist in destination brand identification. A potential strategy to strengthen or contribute to a brand of a destination would be to incorporate the indigenous cuisine or food products of a regional festival and use them as an element of the brand. Food items should be unique to a place, region or area and hold social significance that allows differentiation from other destinations. By adding food into a brand element, the concept of brand essence takes on a whole fragrant or aromatic new meaning.

Successful culinary tourism must incorporate the needs of residents and tourist while considering the short- and long-term effects of area resources to sustain tourism development. Residents must be actively involved in the tourism planning process in order to facilitate acceptance of tourism activity within the rural community. Festivals provide an excellent way to integrate tourism and community support in rural areas. Branding is a way that rural areas can capitalize on their indigenous resources and market a destination. Using FFRE at festivals as an element of the branding mix can strengthen a brand and contribute to the uniqueness of place. This addition will make a rural destination more competitive in today's marketplace.

The contemporary notion of destination branding emphasizes the personal experience of tourists at a destination (Morgan et al., 2004). Whether food consumption is for sustenance, epicurean adventure or an attempt to share the local culture, an exchange occurs. Research has shown that positive host-guest interactions will leave lasting impressions of the destination on the tourist, long after the vacation is over. A positive experience of an enriching nature triggers repeat visitation, as well as positive word-of-mouth – the benchmarks of successful destination branding. When FFRE are branding themes, they become the benchmarks of successful culinary tourism. Rural destination branding would be significantly enhanced if FFRE from festivals were incorporated into the branding strategy of a rural destination. Further research will be needed to empirically test the model and the propositions.

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