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Summary and Conclusions

In this concluding chapter we thematically summarize the main ideas and conclusions of this book, with emphasis on how our improved understanding of foodies contributes theoretically and aids food tourism development and marketing. In this way the various theories, ideas, facts and research findings are integrated in a way that should be conducive to discussion, idea-generation, and action, both for students and practitioners. The chapter concludes with a discussion of research needs and some thoughts on future prospects for food tourism and foodies.

The phenomenon of food tourism

Food tourism is a recent global phenomenon of considerable importance to cities and destinations, and its prospects for continued growth are strong. Food tourism and foodies are integral parts of the experience economy. Forces of globalisation, especially economic growth and the influence of mass and social media, will continue to cause growth in food tourism for some time - but constraining forces, and ever-expanding competition, must always be considered. To be competitive, marketers must understand the foodie and the experiential benefits they will travel for - this requires demand-side research and planning. Market intelligence on foodies that can be effectively employed in food tourism planning, development and marketing has been slow to develop, and this book provides the first and most comprehensive effort to fill the gap.

Food and beverages are essential services, at the very core of hospitality and inseparable from tourism. Food quality has always been recognized as a 'hygiene' factor in the sense that bad food experiences can ruin a trip and generate negative publicity. But food quality has become an important issue, alongside food security and health matters, and it is now understood that food helps define a culture and often motivates travel.

Food tourism is now being promoted globally, as made clear in the World Tourist Organization's report on food tourism, and its great potential to generate

profits and create jobs has been firmly recognized. Many cities and countries are investing heavily in the planning, development and marketing of food tourism, with a number of associations and marketing consortia, like Good Food Cities and Slow Food, leading the way.

Examples provided in this book include Cornwall, England (contributed by Liz Sharples), where the organization Cornwall Food and Drink is a successful regional initiative. Sharples also provided the case of a destination restaurant in Wales, the Walnut Tree, and highlighted the importance of the innovative chef and local/fresh food in attracting food tourists. Developments in the Niagara Region of Canada were reported by Atsuko Hashimoto and David Telfer, and in that region it is a combination of food and wine tourism that has made it popular. Alessio Cavicchi's profile of Italy makes it clear why that country always ranks at the top of food and wine-lovers' preferred destinations. We have outlined New Nordic Cuisine as a branding and cultural development scheme, with specific examples of food tourism development in Gothenburg (Goteborg), Sweden, and Copenhagen, Denmark. Data from large-scale, North American surveys enabled us to profile the scale, significance and nature of culinary tourism, plus we presented visitor-survey data from Charleston, South Carolina - a top foodie destination - to demonstrate economic impacts. David Gration's case study of food events in the Sunshine Coast region of Queensland, Australia illustrates both the region's use of food as an attraction and the crucial roles played by events. As well, we have referred to Scotland and Ireland as examples of countries aggressively pursuing food tourism, and especially have noted the branding efforts of Ireland.

Forces shaping food tourism were considered in Chapter 2. While the forces propelling growth have been, and will likely remain dominant for some time, it is always wise to consider constraining forces affecting food tourism (and tourism in general). A general evolutionary process can be seen, with food being elevated over time (but only in privileged, wealthier parts of the world) from a necessity in meeting basic human needs to a product and service satisfying diverse preferences in a consumer society, and most recently becoming a defining element of lifestyle and identity – hence the emergence of foodies and food tourism. Within the context of the experience economy, food experiences, or food plus beverage, are now seemingly on par with all other leisure and travel experiences in terms of the food-lovers' willingness to pay for novelty, excellence and authenticity.

As an important social and economic phenomenon, food tourism has to be examined from both supply and demand sides. We have placed the demand-side first, as research and theory development on the foodie and food tourist have lagged behind supply-side studies. It is a complex phenomenon, not quickly summarized in a few statements about the attractiveness of food. Foodies are not all the same in their personalities, interests, level of involvement and travel propensi-

ties. Food destinations offer quite different experiences and are at varying stages of development and sophistication in catering to food tourists.

Motivation to travel for food experiences does not automatically arise from a love of food, although high involvement is definitely correlated with high travel propensity. There have to be present additional motivations (both seeking and escaping, or push and pull factors) to attract foodies to travel to specific destinations, events or restaurants. Research makes it clear that food tourists seek authenticity, novelty, learning opportunities, socializing and *communitas* with fellow foodies. They are willing to pay for the memorable experience, the ones that lead to story telling and yield life-long pleasure. In these pursuits they are influenced by personal recommendations from friends and relatives, and their social-world links.

What it means to be a foodie

The term 'foodie' is open to interpretation, and it is not always used in a flattering way. Some people think being a foodie is good, reflecting progressive social, cultural and environmental values, while others associate it with snobbery or elitism. We have taken a rather neutral perspective, exploring all the points of view and related terminology, and often we have simply referred to 'food lovers'. The bottom line is that being a foodie is a matter of self-identification. It is whatever you want it to be, and probably its various connotations are constantly evolving.

We defined foodie this way: a food lover, one whose personal and social identity encompasses food quality, cooking, sharing meals and food experiences. Foodies incorporate all aspects of food into their lifestyle, which often leads them to travel for new and authentic food experiences.

Foodies can be examined in different ways, related to their cooking and eating behaviour, self and social identities, values and attitudes, lifestyle and travel, and these are all themes developed throughout the book, particularly through research findings. Our analyses have revealed that being a foodie is much more than eating or a love of food. The key dimensions of being a foodie are found to be identity (i.e. self identification in which a love of cooking and learning about food are central), a concern for quality of produce and meals, social bonding (as in sharing meals and other food-related experience) and conscientiousness (including care with the purchase, preparation and disposal of food). We have not found evidence that healthy eating is of paramount concern, but we suspect that is the case for many foodies. Many foodies are also novelty-seekers, looking for new experiences and tastes. And of course many foodies are motivated to travel by all these factors.

Psychological and social theory was brought to bear in examining the personal and social identities of foodies, and this reflection is essential to understand any leisure or lifestyle pursuit. Only individuals can decide if they are foodies, because they identify with what it means; it cannot be determined solely by appearances or behaviour. And what it means to them is always in part a reflection of social considerations including the possibility that foodies are part of a social world consisting of many other like-minded people. Whether the bonds are local, national or global in scale, foodies and other special-interest groups can connect easily and frequently through social and mass media.

The social-psychological construct called ego-involvement was very important in our research and theorizing about foodies and food tourists. Scales were developed and refined, first in Australia and then through the multi-country online survey that generated over 3,000 respondents - all self-declared food lovers. It was clear, through analysis, that involvement with food is a flexible and evolving thing, but most people are readily categorized into high versus lesser involvement. We used the top 11% of means on our involvement scale to classify and analyse the 'highly involved foodies' or HiFs in our Swedish study.

Highly involved foodies make food a central part of their lifestyle and take all food-related activities very seriously. This is where the connection to serious leisure theory is important. It is now clear that a high level of involvement with food is closely associated with food tourism and with certain preferences that are important to destination developers and marketers. This does not imply, however, that foodies will always get more involved over time, nor that all highly-involved foodies will become food tourists. It does mean that marketers should seek, and now have the tools to identify, the highly-involved foodies who are most likely to visit their destination for food-related experiences.

Food lovers can elect to become involved with others who share their passion, and these 'social worlds' are increasingly found through social networking. Evidence exists to support the contention that online social networking through blogs and other websites influences foodies as to their preferences and habits and encourages food-related travel. Celebrities and experts can influence the decision-making process, attracting foodies to specific areas and getting them interested in particular foods and experiences. For marketers, this means that traditional mass media are now less important, and very precise targeting of communications is essential.

If you believe you are a foodie, it does not necessarily brand you as being the same as all the others. There are numerous ways in which food-loving can be manifested, through an interest in styles and processes of cooking, specific foods and beverages, authentic culture-based cuisines, or visiting particular destinations associated with food. That means careful attention is required by marketers