

*Leadership the Key Ingredient*

**An Overview of an Exploration Study of the Issues  
Surrounding Implementing a Culinary Tourism  
Strategy on the Dingle Peninsula**

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**Abstract**

This paper presents an overview of the author's research thesis which was part of a M.Sc. in Culinary Innovation and New Food Product Development in D.I.T.

The research paper explored the issues surrounding implementing a culinary tourism strategy on the Dingle Peninsula in County Kerry. The Dingle Peninsula has been selected by Ireland's national tourism development agency (Fáilte Ireland) as a region with potential to become a leading food destination.

The research methods consisted of a wide review of literature relevant to the field of culinary tourism. In addition, qualitative research methods including semi-structured interviews of tourism stakeholders on the Dingle Peninsula and through the collection of data from observation were employed. The findings of this research study illustrates that there is potential for culinary tourism on the Dingle Peninsula and that the stakeholders are aware of the impact this would have on the region, while accepting that several challenges and obstacles need to be addressed. This research study has determined that both a strong vision and effective leadership are the key ingredients to implement such a strategy, which will maximise the benefits and overcome the majority of the challenges.

**Introduction**

This paper presents an overview of the author's research thesis titled 'An Exploration Study of the Issues Surrounding Implementing a Culinary Tourism Strategy on the Dingle Peninsula'. The overall aim of the initial research was to explore the issues surrounding a culinary tourism strategy on the Dingle peninsula in West Kerry from the viewpoint of the stakeholders, with the objective to investigate what further measures

needed to be undertaken to implement a culinary tourism strategy on the Dingle Peninsula.

Fáilte Ireland has acknowledged the potential that culinary tourism could present to Ireland by establishing a National Food Tourism Implementation Framework as part of their wider commitment of developing key tourism destinations.

The Dingle Peninsula which is located in the south-west of Ireland has been selected by Fáilte Ireland as one of these key tourism destinations. There are several reasons to suggest as to why this region was nominated within the framework. The region is already an established and popular tourist destination, boasting much admired natural scenery and offers an increasing recognition of the food experiences offered in the region. However, it is acknowledged by policy makers and the local stakeholders that the region is only in the very early stages of becoming a leading food destination.

The researcher has determined that there is little scholarly work within the field of culinary tourism. Therefore, it can be assumed that a study applied to a region such as the Dingle Peninsula will contribute to the progression of their culinary tourism strategy, whilst establishing measures that may be relevant to other destinations and in the discipline of culinary tourism.

Considering that culinary tourism is a recently new phenomenon, it is apparent that tourism scholars have identified noticeable gaps within the field. Henderson, (2009) affirms that there is a need for further study from the perspective of stakeholders regarding the supply chain and the service delivery with relation to food tourism. In addition, a recurring request from scholars is the need to provide more information with regards to the motivations of culinary tourists. Whilst Field's, (2002) body of work has focused on motivations, other academic scholars such as Alonso and Liu, (2011) continue to stress that little research exists surrounding the motivations of this matter.

Finally, in consideration of all of the above points, the researcher acknowledged that a research study which would explore the issues surrounding culinary tourism on the Dingle Peninsula from the viewpoint of the stakeholders would complement the existing knowledge specific to this region and to the field of culinary tourism universally.

## **Introduction to Culinary Tourism**

The concept of amalgamating food and tourism is a relatively recent phenomenon which is receiving an increasing amount of attention among both scholars and destination marketing planners. The amplified interest in this topic is directly related to the increased desire by tourists to travel specifically for food experiences.

Hall, (2011) emphasises that ‘food consumption has become integral to tourism and its economic impact and can have significant economic effects in the supply chain’. The literature further supports the fact that food constitutes one third of tourist expenditure (Blichfeldt & Therkelsen, 2010; Kim, Eves and Scarles, 2009; Hall, and Sharples, 2003; Telfler, and Wall, 1996; Boyne Hall and Williams, 2003). While Hjalager and Richards, (2002) outline that food has been identified as a significant tool to promote a destination, hence the relationship between food and tourism is a critical tourism resource (Henderson, 2009). Furthermore, Du Rand and Heath, (2006) affirms that no destination can ignore the importance of food, either as a key or supportive attraction’.

Research prior to this, considered both food and tourism as fringe academic disciplines and placed food as a secondary resource within the travel product mix (Hall and Sharples, 2003; Smith and Costello, 2009). Current research however highlights that the interest in food itself has become a key motivation for travellers to visit a destination (Kim, Eves and Scarles, 2009; Kivela and Crofts, 2006; Quan and Wang, 2004). This dynamic shift is primarily due to the strategic importance and economic opportunities that food tourism may bring to a region (Meler and Cervoic, 2003).

Meler and Cervoic, (2003) state ‘that for a tourist, the satisfaction of nutritional needs is not any more a mere act, but increasingly a culinary-gastronomic experience’. Blichfeldt and Therkelsen, (2010) reiterate this by highlighting that food is now one of the most important elements in a tourist’s destination choice and travellers’ decision-making.

Fáilte Ireland has acknowledged the potential that culinary tourism could present to Ireland by establishing a National Food Tourism Implementation Framework as part of their wider commitment of developing key tourism destinations.

## **What is Culinary Tourism?**

Drawing from a wide variety of literature the term culinary tourism may be replaced with terms such as food tourism, gastronomic tourism, food and wine tourism without losing any value of the definition. To evaluate the full potential of culinary tourism, it is critical to determine a clear definition.

Long (2004) defines the subject as: 'culinary tourism is about food as a subject and a medium and a vehicle, for tourism'. The author further adds that culinary tourism is the intentional, exploratory participation in the food-ways of another, participation including the consumption, presentation of a food item, cuisine, meal system or eating style considered to belong a culinary system not one's own'. Meanwhile Hall and Sharples, (2003) recognise the culinary tourism as the visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants.

It is worth drawing attention to Smith and Xiao's (2008) definition:

*Culinary Tourism is any tourism experience in which one learns about, appreciates, or consumes branded local culinary resources. Furthermore culinary tourism is when culinary experiences occur, though these are not the primary motivation for the trip.*

Furthermore Wolf, (2006) adds that culinary tourism may be defined as travelling in order to search for, and enjoy prepared food and drink. Green and Dougherty (2009) suggest using a broad description which states, that it is the pursuit of unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences and provides a way of linking local food systems with the tourist experience'.

At the European Culinary conference held in Vienna in 2011, Professor Hall argued the point:

*That within the definition of culinary tourism the time-frame needed to be extended to both pre-travel and post-travel of the tourist and not just limited to the period of while the tourist is at the destination (Hall, 2011)*

However, Murray (2008) stresses that 'the term culinary tourism is sometimes wrongly defined and this can be misleading and as a result may result in inappropriate decisions being implemented by tourism planners and operators'. To further strengthen this argument it is worth referring to Hall, (2011) who maintains that 'while everybody must eat, not everyone is a food tourist'.

In consideration of the above definitions and a review of the literature, the researcher adopted a more inclusive definition:

*Culinary tourism is any tourism experience which occurs pre-travel, during and post-travel where the tourist intentionally experiences the food or food practices of the particular destination, by knowingly seeking to consume such local foods, or partake in activities which involve the food customs of the destination.*

The literature indicates that since food experiences are central to the field of culinary tourism, such experiences may be presented to the tourist through several different forms such as:

- Food outlets; restaurants, cafes and bars
- Accommodation providers offering culinary experiences
- Local food markets
- Food shops in particular those specialising in local foods and food souvenirs
- Food festivals and food events
- Culinary trails
- Cookery schools
- Visits to food producers

(Henderson, 2009; Green and Dougherty, 2008; Smith, Costello and Muenchen, 2010; Hall and Sharples, 2003 and Du Rand and Heath, 2006)

### **Challenges Encountered in the Implementation of Culinary Tourism**

Stewart, Bramble and Ziraldo, (2008) states, that some of the challenges are common in areas throughout the world where culinary tourism is establishing itself. This is a view that is reiterated throughout the literature (Green and Dougherty, 2009; Du Rand and Heath, 2006; Dougherty and Green, 2011; Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance, 2011). Contrary to this Hall, (2011) claims that ‘each destination is unique, thus challenges differ in each region and policy makers must not copy other policies elsewhere’.

Most customary challenges are:

- Industry research
- Support infrastructure

Cooperation among stakeholders including DMOs (Destination Marketing Organisations)

Awareness internally/externally as a culinary destination

Service quality

Furthermore, within the literature the matter of preserving the authenticity of the area was cited as a challenge (Henderson, 2009, Cohen and Avieli, 2004 and Sims, 2009). Authenticity itself can present challenges for the consumer (tourist) in the form of cultural differences and impediment (Cohen and Avieli, 2004). From the point of view of the stakeholders the needs of the consumers are of great significance. However, the authenticity of a region must be to the forefront with policy makers. Sims, (2009) addresses this and echoes a view throughout the literature that 'local traditions must be conserved and protected from dilution'.

The collaboration and cooperation of the all the stakeholders within the field of culinary tourism is a foremost challenge that is recognized throughout both the academic and practitioner's literature. Several authors cite the challenges among stakeholders and the critical need for this topic to be addressed (namely Boyne *et al*, 2003; Presenza and Cipollina, 2010; Evertt and Aitchision, 2008; Tefler and Wall, 1996 and Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance, 2011).

### **Methodology**

The overall objective of the research was to evaluate the issues surrounding implementing a culinary tourism strategy on the Dingle Peninsula. In addition, several research questions were addressed to gain a greater comprehension of the issues surrounding the implementation of a culinary tourism strategy, with particular focus from the stakeholder's point of view.

The research questions of the research were:

What are the central characteristics of culinary tourism?

Who benefits from culinary tourism?

What are the challenges faced within implementing a culinary tourism strategy?

What further needs to be achieved to implement such a strategy?

The Dingle Peninsula was chosen since it is already established as a tourist destination. Furthermore, the region is continually recognised for its local food production. In addition, as highlighted to within the literature review of the research thesis, Fáilte Ireland, has selected the Dingle Peninsula as one of the regions to be included within their national food tourism implementation framework.

For these reasons, implementing a new strategy for a new subset of tourism would have some advantages over towns that do not have tourism structures already in place. This predominantly encouraged the researcher to evaluate the issues involved within such a region for the purpose of implementing a food tourism strategy.

### **Research Approach**

The literature reviewed for this research draws on both quantitative and qualitative research methods. In addition, examples of case studies, comparison studies and ethnographic research methods were used by authors throughout the literature.

Qualitative research methods were primarily selected since it examines the words, actions and view points of the people experiencing the situation. Marshall and Rossman, (2011) further add that qualitative methodologies are pragmatic and are enacted in a naturalistic setting. Acknowledging that this research is from the view point of the stakeholders, this further strengthens the justification to use qualitative methods.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

With respect to the different types of interviews techniques, for the purpose of this research, semi-structured interviews were selected to be the most appropriate. It is emphasised within the literature that semi-structured interviews have a 'clear pre-determined focus and through flexibility in how the questions are formed, which allows for open ended discussion of the answers' (Kane and O'Reilly-De Brun, 2001), allowing the researcher to expand any question to explore any given response in greater depth (Mitchell and Jolley, 2010).

Following the review of literature, key stakeholders were identified from different key groups. The participants for the semi-structured interviews included stakeholders from within the tourism industry. The participants were primary stakeholders from four key areas in the field location.

These four key areas were:

Hospitality stakeholders

Statutory organisations

Food producers

Food retail outlets

The researcher decided to address the following principal themes in interviews with the participants, which would contribute to addressing the overall research objectives:

What exactly culinary tourism means to them

What are the benefits of culinary tourism?

How does culinary tourism influence the region?

What are the potential challenges?

What more needs to be done to implement a strategy

### **Sample Size**

It was necessary to establish a sufficient sample size to achieve the objectives set out in this research. It is imperative to consider the time and sources available to complete the study. According to Patton, (2004) qualitative research permits inquiry into selected issues and usually produces a wealth of detailed data from a smaller number of people, 'especially if the people selected are information rich'. Patton, (2004) further adds that 'the validity, meaningfulness and insights generated from qualitative research have more to do with the data richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher, than the sample size'. Whilst there are no exact numbers of subjects required to conduct a qualitative research Kuzel, (1999) determines that 'typically sample sizes range from five to twenty'.



## Sample Description

The following table presents an overview of the selected participants:

Table 1: List of Participants Interviewee	Description
<b>Regional Manager</b>	Fáilte Ireland
<b>Chairman</b>	Dingle Chamber of Commerce
<b>Regional Manager</b>	MFG, Dingle
<b>Chairman</b>	Dingle Food Festival
<b>Food Producer x 4</b>	Rare Dexter Beef Producer Cheese Maker and Cheese shop (retailer) Baker/Shopkeeper and Farmers' Market stall-holder (retailer) Ice-Cream Business Representative
<b>Accommodation providers x 3</b>	Guesthouse owner Guesthouse owner Hotel Manager
<b>Restaurant/ Cafes x3</b>	Restaurant Owner/Chef Restaurant Owner/ Front of House Restaurant Owner/chef
<b>Residents (not involved in tourism) x 2</b>	Male Local Resident Female Local Resident

## Research Findings

Following the data gathering from the semi-structured interviews and through observational methods the data was presented in accordance with the research questions which facilitated a clear and coherent representation.

This segment of the paper evaluates these findings and provides broad discussions surrounding the findings as presented in the last chapter. Additionally it addresses the research objectives which were to:

Evaluate the possible benefits of a culinary tourism strategy on the Dingle peninsula,

Explore the challenges encountered within the field of culinary tourism,

Evaluate the potential stakeholder's views and practices,

Investigate what further measures need to be undertaken to implement a culinary tourism strategy on the Dingle Peninsula,

In addition, further evaluations were formed from the principal themes and theories which emerged within the literature review which were set in context with the findings from the field work.

### **The Characteristics of Culinary Tourism**

To evaluate the foundations of culinary tourism it was imperative to determine the characteristics of culinary tourism, from both within the literature review and from the research findings. Within the findings of the field work a mutual comprehension was ascertained with comparable submissions to that of the definitions offered within the literature review. However within the findings, the descriptions referred only to the activities and experiences while the visitor was already at the destination, failing to broaden the definition to include the pre-travel and post-travel as recommended within the review of literature.

Surprisingly, there was no emphasis of pre-travel or post-travel within the findings considering the fact that the participants of the field work were familiar with the features of tourism and the significance of the activities that occur with visitors both pre-travel and post-travel. Nevertheless, it is an issue which does not display any less knowledge on the part of the participants considering that the notion of food tourism is such a relatively new phenomenon even within the academic world.

Whilst the culinary tourists and the activities that they wished to pursue were identified, a significant matter was addressed by one of the participants which were not evident within the literature review. This issue was that frequently visitors were converted to food tourists only after developing a strong interest in food from the region while on vacation and therefore leaving on a quest to discover similar food experiences. This is a noteworthy consideration that ought to be included within any policy relating to the development of food tourism. However, this development as addressed by a participant now diminishes slightly the statement within the literature review that ‘while everybody has to eat not everybody is a culinary tourist’. It further broadens the potential of culinary tourism and enables the possibility to target all visitors, and not just the tourists who arrive perceived as culinary tourists.

## **Challenges and Practical Solutions**

Within both the literature review and the findings of the field work, numerous challenges materialised. Some parallels have been drawn from both the literature review and the findings from the field work, outlining the challenges associated with culinary tourism.

The point drawn from the literature review by Hall, (2011) that each destination is unique, thus presenting challenges distinctive only to the region itself is an argument worth taking into consideration. However while acknowledging Hall's point, it was established that similar themes do occur within the domain of challenges.

From the findings of the field work it was established that the participants accepted that the region had the potential to become a leading food destination in time, although it was the general consensus that the region was not at a market-ready stage. Participants cited the lack of current physical infrastructures as a major challenge. In addition the lack of networks was noted, while the lack of availability of a diverse range of food products was also stated.

On the other hand, this should be of no great revelation that the region is deemed not to be at the market stage just yet, considering that the concept of food tourism is a relatively recent development within Ireland. Although certain acknowledgement must be credited to the region's inclusion within the framework to development culinary tourism within Ireland, since Fáilte Ireland have recognised the Dingle Peninsula's potential for food tourism.

Furthermore, the foremost challenge as determined by a regional manager for Fáilte Ireland, was the requirement to bring together all the different divisions that make up the complete tourist product on the Dingle Peninsula and establish a clear message rather than each sector sending out different messages, whilst trying to achieve the same goal.

This line of reasoning is significant to the initial development of the policy and the development of the complete tourist product in the region. On the other hand it can be calculated that this is more of an issue that needs to be addressed and rectified rather than a challenge. It is the opinion of the researcher, that this will only become a challenge providing the policy is established ignoring the need to amalgamate the projected messages to establish one overall 'umbrella unique selling point for the region'.

Moreover, it was offered by participants interviewed for this research, that a very distinguishing vision is required to determine the direction of such a culinary tourism strategy.

Establishing a vision has to be positioned as one of the foremost issues that needs to be ascertained. Achieving this would ultimately lay a strong foundation to facilitate the strategy by establishing a framework set down by criteria to maximise the potential of each section.

In addition, drawing on support from the findings and from the literature review; establishing such a formidable vision with the appropriate criteria would ensure to ameliorate and overcome several challenges, by creating a strategy to develop food experiences on par with other leading food destinations worldwide. Therefore more awareness from both within the region and outside the region could be generated. Furthermore, strict criteria would resolve any issues or doubts among all parties as to the credibility of the project. While additionally it would actuate standards together among stakeholders and for visitors.

Strong leadership was determined as a practical solution to effectively implement the policy. Similarly, efficient leadership itself should manage and reduce the conflict amongst stakeholders, hence enabling all parties to develop the region as a leading culinary food destination.

### **Recommendations**

The following section presents a number of recommendations set in the context of this research and is aimed to provide additional knowledge on the issues surrounding the implementation of culinary tourism on the Dingle Peninsula. There is no doubt that the region has the potential through its people and through its food experiences to market itself as a leading food destination. However, much initial planning and work needs to be undertaken before noticeable benefits are reaped.

### **Initial requirements**

As disclosed in the findings chapter of the research thesis, there are a number of requirements that have to take place to implement a culinary tourism strategy. It is imperative to position these requirements in a sequence of initial importance to create the

strategy. On evaluation of the literature and the qualitative data for this research study, the foremost initiative has to be that all parties involved within the tourism product in the region come together to firstly consider the overall direction of tourism within the region. Furthermore, a clear vision is required for maximising the culinary tourism potential of the region.

Drawing from the data collected, it is recommended that realistic short term and long terms goals are established. In addition, considering the potential of culinary tourism and the work load involved, a principal matter of urgency is the issue of establishing a paid position to undertake the primary responsibilities that are required to effectively implement the strategy.

An important initiative to establish is what exactly the Peninsula has to offer. This would require a database to determine all the players who could contribute to the strategy.

Since the Dingle Peninsula by nature is a place of renowned scenic beauty it is reasonable to assume that a food trail could become a major attraction for visitors. This food trail would offer the visitors as they enter the peninsula's boundaries a prospect to drive along a trail to include food experiences in the forms of visitations to local producers, sampling of local food, staying overnight in accommodation providers with local food to offer and eating in restaurants specialising in local food.

Furthermore drawing from the models within the literature review, there is a need for a cookery school to provide both short courses and long-term courses to allow visitors an opportunity to learn the traditions and engage with the knowledge of how to cook with the food produce they sampled on their trip.

An opinion which was formulated from the evaluation of this research thesis is that all food experiences need to move to a more central position within activities currently in place in the region.

## **Conclusions**

The overall aim of this paper was to explore the issues surrounding the implementation of a culinary tourism strategy on the Dingle Peninsula, with a particular interest in evaluating the point of view of the stakeholders.

The principal objectives of this research were: to evaluate the possible benefits of a culinary tourism strategy on the Dingle peninsula; to explore the challenges encountered

within the field of culinary tourism; to evaluate the potential stakeholders views and practices and to investigate what further measures need to be undertaken to implement a culinary tourism strategy on the Dingle Peninsula.

Overall, it must be noted that there is evidence that the Dingle Peninsula most certainly has the potential to establish itself as a leading food destination, providing a strategy can be put in place with the interest of the all the stakeholders central to the policy. The overall aim of the policy needs to discover a way to develop the food experiences of the region.

In addition, it needs to work in hand with the local resources and all other divisions of the tourist product available on the Dingle Peninsula to develop a sustainable model. This inevitably would further contribute to the regional development that supports the livelihoods of the local economy. All of this will only be achievable if a clear vision is determined with criteria set down to achieve both the short and long terms goals of the project.

To conclude this paper it was determined that it is essential that the region establishes strong, efficient and effective leadership to drive and implement a strategy that has the potential to create a successful culinary tourism strategy, which will ensure that the Dingle Peninsula is a leading food destination globally. Finally, the findings signify that for all stages of the strategy to survive and prosper, it is imperative that funding is obtained to create a paid position with the responsibilities to effectively manage and provide leadership for a culinary tourism strategy in the region to operate as successfully as possible.

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