

## GASTRONOMY TOURISM: THE CASE OF CRETE THROUGH THE EYES OF DOMESTIC VISITORS

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**Abstract:** Many tourism scholars have recognised food as a research topic, and not only because of its nutritional importance (Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Hall & Sharples, 2003; Cohen & Avieli, 2004). This can be credited to the fact that cooking and culinary consumption has gained a more prominent place, as far as tourism experience and leisure consumption is concerned (Mykletun & Gyimothy, 2009). Food consumption is one of the most enjoyable activities that tourists undertake during their holiday (Ryan, 1997) and a travel motivational factor. Gastronomy is a cultural, economic and social part of a country. The identity of Greek gastronomy is rich, with deep roots and well known culinary traditions, which can be traced back to ancient times. Cretan gastronomy is considered a very interesting area, the most typical example of the famous Mediterranean diet, enhancing good health and longevity. Despite the gastronomic identity of the island of Crete, it has not yet evolved into a gastronomic centre or a pole of attraction for special interest tourists. The aim of this paper is to identify whether gastronomy constitutes a motivation for domestic tourists to visit Crete as a gastronomic destination. Moreover, it explores domestic tourists' views regarding the ways local gastronomy could successfully be promoted, as well as their perceptions of Cretan gastronomy based on their current visit and experiences to the Island of Crete.

**Keywords:** Gastronomy Tourism, Domestic Visitors, Motives, Perceptions, Island of Crete

### Introduction

Several attempts have been made to define gastronomy tourism. Hall and Sharples (2003) define it as a travel experience to a region with a distinct gastronomy for recreational purposes, including visits to primary or secondary food producers, gastronomic events, rural markets and cooking demonstrations in order to taste quality local products. Smith and Xiao (2008: 289) characterise gastronomy tourism as every travel experience through which one learns, appreciates and enjoys well-known products of local gastronomy. Other authors suggest that gastronomy tourism refers to travellers seeking to explore new foods and flavours, using food as a means to get to know different cultures and ways of life (Long, 2004). Different terms that have been used in existing literature, suggest that gastronomy tourism is present during the organisation of the trip, with food representing, primarily or secondarily, a main element of vacation. Gastronomy tourism includes various gastronomic experiences, such as having food in a local canteen or a gourmet restaurant, cooking lessons, visiting wineries and food festivals (Hall & Mitchell, 2001; Wolf, 2002; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004; Kalpidis, 2014).

Food could constitute a primary motive for a trip, adding value to the destination's image (Boniface, 2003; Quan & Wang, 2004; Long, 2004; Jimenez-Beltran, 2016) as it is considered a

fun activity for tourists, creating familiarity and bonds with the host environment, rather than tourists being simple observers (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). Existing research regarding gastronomic tourist's attitudes, views and behaviour is rather limited (Hall & Mitchell, 2003), although satisfaction and dissatisfaction issues are very important. This knowledge could be the key to the improvement of tourism destination's competitiveness (Gillespie, 2001; Kivela & Crofts, 2006).

## **Literature Review**

Gastronomy has not always been so important on the tourism agenda. In the past, food was often viewed mostly as a necessity rather than as an attraction, emphasising the perceived need to serve large numbers of guests as efficiently and cheaply as possible. However, in the past 20 years, the positioning of food and gastronomy in the tourism industry has changed substantially, as destinations have increasingly recognised their potential as a major attraction for visitors and as a means of differentiation in an increasingly crowded global marketplace (Richards, 2015). Destination product portfolios consist of a variety of tangible and intangible goods and services. Food, including beverages, can form one of the most important elements of these portfolios (Okumus et al. 2007), acting as either a primary or secondary trip motivator (Quan and Wang, 2004) that adds value to the destination (Boniface, 2003; Boyone et al. 2003; Long, 2004).

While gastronomy tourism is a relatively new field of academic enquiry, a growing body of literature suggests that experiencing authentic food may be the main or an important reason for travelling to a destination (Bessiere, 1998; Boniface, 2003; Long, 2004; Quan and Wang, 2004) and an important source of visitor satisfaction (Ryan, 1997; Bessiere, 1998). Generally, the link between gastronomy and tourism offers benefits to all parties involved. Local cuisine adds authenticity to the tourist experience and contributes to the quality update of the destination, increasing the number of visitors and their length of stay. It can also contribute to the promotion of sustainable tourism (Jones & Jenkins 2002; Hall & Mitchell 2006; Haven-Tang & Jones 2006).

Researchers have focused primarily on the role of local food as a fascinating attraction for additional consumption by tourists (Hjalager and Richards, 2002; Gyimothy and Mykletun, 2009). Hu and Ritchie (1993) found that food was the fourth most important attribute in the way tourists perceive the attractiveness of a destination, after climate, accommodation and scenery. Remington and Yuksel (1998) reported that food was the fourth most important contributor to the satisfaction of visitors and the most important reason tourists return to Turkey. In addition, Yuksel (2001) found that both the first time and repeat visitor commonly regard quality of food as one of the main reasons to go back to Turkey. Enright and Newton (2005) reported that food was the second most important attractor for Hong Kong, fourth for Bangkok and fifth for Singapore. Furthermore, according to the World Tourism Organization, 44% of travellers include food in their high-end selection criteria while choosing a destination. Other surveys show that visitors spend about 40% of their budget on food and drink and are willing to revisit a destination if they have had pleasant gastronomic experiences (Yuksel 2001; Boyne et al. 2003; Amer 2006; ΣETE 2009; ekriti 2014). Moreover, according to UNWTO, even if gastronomy or wine is not the dominant motive for selecting a destination, a significant increase is recorded when evaluating the role of food as secondary or additional and supplementary incentives in determining tourist choices. Previous surveys indicate that eating in restaurants constitutes the second most popular activity for visitors to the US and the first leisure activity of Americans when they visit other countries

(UNWTO, 2012:6-7). For many tourists, consuming local delicacies and participating in local foodways are essential parts of the tourist experience (Chang, et al., 2010).

In other words, local cuisines ‘represent a core manifestation of a destination’s intangible heritage, and through its consumption tourists can gain a truly authentic cultural experience’ (Okumus et al. 2007:253). A local traditional cuisine can therefore become a ‘sensory window’ (Telfer and Hashimoto, 2003) into a destination’s context, culture and history. Promotional activities that focus on this aspect can attract visitors and give them a glimpse into the heritage of the people of that particular area (Mykletun and Gyimothy, 2010).

### **Globalization and Gastronomy Tourism**

Robertson (1992:8) defines globalization as ‘the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole’. Waters (2001:5) describes globalization as ‘a social process in which the constraints of geography on economic, political, social and cultural arrangements recede, in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding, and in which people act accordingly’. Globalization has influenced many aspects of human activity, including food production and consumption (Lang, 1999; Wilhelmina, et al., 2010).

In the past food was linked to specific areas and seasonal periods, but it can now be purchased anytime from anywhere (Hall & Mitchell, 2001). Gillespie (2001) suggests that this fact has led to the globalization of cuisines and food and consequently to the decline of local cuisines. In contrast, Vargas Llosa (2001) contends that globalization will not eliminate local cultures, on the contrary, the increasingly interconnected and interdependent world will create incentives for new generations to learn and assimilate to other cultures.

Globalization is considered responsible for changes in eating habits and traditions. There is also an increasing emphasis on healthy eating and a growing demand for organic foods. At the same time there is the phenomenon of restaurant chains spreading around the world (‘fast food’), which is creating a globalized taste. With the availability of food products throughout the year there is a growing disconnection of food from the place of production, (Kalpidis, 2014). However, when exoticism, diversity and quality are replaced by uniformity, the needs of the visitor are not met, since diversity and ‘sense of place’ are achieved when interest focuses on the particular natural and cultural characteristics of a given region (Haven-Tang & Jones 2006).

### **Promotion**

Destination promotion is becoming increasingly competitive worldwide. Providing innovative and well-coordinated tourism products and experiences is considered to be exceedingly important for tourism destinations, since this will enable them to attract international demand and to differentiate their tourism products and services. Global competition and industry concentration increases the challenges for destinations such as Crete. The literature suggests that innovative promotional techniques and the use of new technologies will be the only way to manage the sustainable development and promotion of alternative tourism in destinations such as Crete (Soteriades and Avgeli, 2007; Soteriades and Wickens, 2012).

The local culture of gastronomy and wine can have a primary role in the tourism development and promotion of destinations, as more people are traveling today for reasons of gastronomy (Bessiere, 1998; Hall and Sharples, 2003; Long, 2004). Consequently gastronomy, in its wider sense, has gained an elevated profile as a pull factor in destination promotion (Hjalager and Richards, 2002; Boniface, 2003; Hall and Sharples, 2003; Cohen and Avieli, 2004). Images of food can be used effectively in destination promotion although Boyone et. al. (2003) suggest that adopting a promotional philosophy approach to developing gastronomic tourism is challenging since there is insufficient understanding of the food-buying behavior of tourists. Although the significance of gastronomy is growing not all destinations, including Crete, have taken advantage of the potential and opportunities it offers and have not used it effectively in their promotional activities (Okumus et al. 2007).

Social media plays a role in driving the interest and enthusiasm for new food experiences. Hence food tourism is massively popular among millennials, who share their food experiences on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. It is possible for marketers to acquire additional promotion through organising events, such as market feasts or beer festivals, and encouraging millennials to share the experiences on social media (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009).

Furthermore, a recent study by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) involving the UNWTO Affiliate Members working in different sectors, shows that food events are the most popular tourism product, followed by cooking class and workshops, as well as food fairs highlighting local products. Similar studies also reveal that organizing events is the most used marketing and promotion tool, followed by brochures and advertising (UNWTO, 2017).

Despite the gastronomic and cultural wealth of Crete, as well as the quality of local products, not much has been done for the promotion and establishment of Crete as a gastronomic destination. Local authorities have organised some festivals such as (neakriti, 2017) a Cretan diet food festival in Rethymno, the festival of Shepherd and Cheese in Zoniana and the Amari Green Festival.

### **The Gastronomic Tourist**

According to Boniface (2003), food tourists are ‘well-educated, discerning sorts of people’. Boyne et. al. (2003), suggest that there are four types of cuisine tourists. The Type I tourists are those for whom gastronomy is crucial to their holidays and look for gastronomic elements, particularly local food. For Type II tourists, gastronomy is also important but not as much as for Type I tourists. They do appreciate gastronomic elements when presented to them. For Type III tourists, gastronomy is not an important part of their holiday even though they may attend such an event. Type IV tourists are not interested in including gastronomic elements in their holiday.

The American Culinary Traveler Report (2013) provides some interesting findings regarding gastronomy tourists: They are most interested in local and authentic foods and culinary experiences that are different from those they can get at home. They combine culinary experiences with participation in cultural, heritage and nature-based activities. Increasing reliance on reviews and friends’ recommendations makes getting the word out through social media and other user content sources critical for the promotion of destinations. Festivals motivate culinary travelers, so destination marketing organizations should consider hosting beer, wine or culinary festivals

featuring local fare, products and unique food activities, such as chef demonstrations and samplings. ‘Foodies’ want to be educated when travelling. Baruah (2016) discovered that eighty-three percent of participants enjoy learning about the local culture and cuisine of the destinations they visited, and the same percentage said they would spend more money on food and drinks while travelling.

Gastronomic tourists in Greece and Crete specifically present the following characteristics (SETE, 2009; Travelnews, 2015). They are:

- Predominantly aged between 30 and 50 (the second largest group falling in the 51-64 age band)
- Professionals with a higher than average income relative to the average visitor
- Interested in the local culture and traditions of the destination
- Experienced, with many of them being adventurous travelers
- Spend a significant percentage of their budget on gastronomic activities

The main countries of origin are USA, France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Holland and the UK (SETE, 2009). It is worth noting that countries in this list are also the main markets for the Greek tourism industry.

### **Gastronomy Tourism in Crete**

The island of Crete had attracted the attention of the scientific community as early as 1948, when researchers from the Rockefeller Foundation of the United States were summoned by the Greek Government in an attempt to improve, in the post-war era, the ‘bad’ living conditions of the Cretan population. Within this framework, a detailed assessment of the Cretan diet was performed, and –to the surprise of the researchers– it proved to be nutritionally sufficient, with only a few exceptions which were limited to areas with a very low income and very limited food production by the families themselves (Hatzis et. al. 2015). The Cretan diet was inscribed in 2012 by Unesco as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity ([greekgastronomyguide.gr](http://greekgastronomyguide.gr)). The Cretan diet is recognised by the international scientific community as the most characteristic and high-quality version of the so-called Mediterranean pattern of eating, including olive oil, wine, honey, aromatic herbs, wild greens and cheese ([destinationcrete.gr](http://destinationcrete.gr)). The Cretan diet is not just a variety of dishes laid on the table. It comprises a whole philosophy of life and represents the lifestyle of the Cretan people. Visitors to the modern restaurants in the cities or the small tavernas and cafes in the country report having the wonderful experience of participating in the life of the local people (Region of Crete, 2013). The spread of Cretan gastronomy is driven by the large agricultural production of the island with conventional and organic crops, the existence of various emblematic products such as oil and wine, the big variety of local recipes, tavernas that preserve tradition and the general attitudes of Cretans who preserve their traditions (SETE, 2009).

The development and promotion of gastronomy tourism in Crete, and more specifically the Cretan cuisine, is very important for the sustainable development of the Island. The food and beverage ‘industry’, involving as it does restaurants, hotels, tourism agencies, airlines, shops, tourism activities, such as cultural routes and tours, cooking lessons, food and wine tasting, participation in agricultural activities, specialised conferences and seminars and thematic museums (Moirá, Mylonopoulos & Kontoudaki, 2015) has a central role to play in the economic prosperity of Crete.

There are, of course, differences between the Greek and the Cretan cuisine, with the latter representing one of the types of Greek cuisine. The Cretan cuisine offers a lighter option with a healthy abundance of fish, grain and fruits. It focuses more on the power of aromatic herbs and spices to define its dishes, as well as the high monounsaturated fat content of the Cretan diet (Psilaki & Psilakis, 2001). As mentioned in the literature review, there is research regarding the views of international visitors for gastronomy tourism in various countries, but there is limited research concerning gastronomy tourism in Greece, and more specifically in Crete. There is research concerning the views of hotels for gastronomy tourism in Greece (Trihas, Kyriakaki & Zagkotsi, 2015), and on the consumption of local products by international tourists in Crete (Proust, Angelakis & Drakos, 2009). It is worth noting that although Greek tourists are travelling less due to the economic crisis (Hanianews, 2017), Crete is still among the most popular destinations for domestic tourists, but research in this area is sparse. Hence, this paper focuses on the motivations of domestic tourists who visit Crete and in particular their views and opinions of Cretan gastronomy.

## **Methodology**

According to Brunt (1997), in the tourism industry there is a focus on statistical analysis and numerical presentation, which means that industry managers can use this information to make decisions within a knowledgeable framework. For example, quantitative research is predominantly useful in the areas of forecasting and predicting demand in the hospitality sector and in the study of tourists' behaviour (Dunn, 1994), which is the case in this study. According to Wickens (2002), the social survey is one of the main methods of data collection, which embodies the features of quantitative research. Taking into consideration the objectives and nature of this specific research, it was decided that quantitative methods were appropriate, as the aim was to investigate the opinions and perceptions of domestic visitors to the city of Heraklion.

A survey using structured questionnaires was undertaken. Questions were developed working deductively from general to specific. It should be noted that the review of the literature played a significant role in research planning, questionnaire development and at the design stages, as it became an input to the planning, design and analysis of the questionnaires. The questionnaire employed closed questions because they facilitate speedy completion and make quantification and coding easier. They also provide the opportunity to ask more questions in relation to the time and money available (Brunt, 1997). Questionnaires were distributed to domestic tourists residing in four hotels in the City of Heraklion. These hotels were selected mainly for their size and visitation rates, in order to acquire a representative sample. The participants in the research process were selected on the basis of convenience and purposive sampling. A total of 260 questionnaires were distributed during a period of three weeks in September 2017, of which 150 were returned completed. 30 questionnaires were not included in the results because in each case only 2-3 questions had been answered. Due mainly to time constraints it was decided to proceed with the analysis of results using the 150 completed questionnaires. After the collection of data, results were analysed with the Excel Statistical Package. The results of the analysis are summarised in the tables below. Given that the sample size of the survey was small, it was considered more appropriate to express results in terms of percentages.

## The Survey: Results

Crete seems to be a destination that tourists visit more than once. For a very high percentage (83.8%) of the sample this was not their first visit, while for only 16.2% of respondents this was their first visit. Table 1 shows the main motivations for visitation: sun and sea (26.2%) and local culture and traditions (20.6%). Crete is considered an ideal destination for family vacation for the 20.2% of the sample and 15.5% chose the island for its climate and natural environment. Gastronomy tourism does not seem to be popular among Greek tourists, as gastronomy was a motive for only 9.2% of the respondents. Museums and archaeological sites are a motive for 7.3%.

**Table 1: Main Motives for Visitation**

Sun & sea	26.2%
Culture & local traditions	20.6%
Ideal for family vacation	20.2%
Climate & natural environment	15.5%
Gastronomy	9.2%
Museums & archaeological sites	7.3%
Other	1.0%

It was important to ascertain whether the term ‘gastronomic tourism’ was familiar to Greek tourists. Results were rather positive, as 70.5% of the respondents reported that they are familiar with the term, whereas 29.5% said that they had never heard this term before. According to the literature, globalisation is considered responsible for changes in eating habits and traditions. However, as Table 2 shows, for our respondents the main effects of globalisation on gastronomic tourism include: changes in eating habits (25.4%), spread of international cuisines restaurants (16.8%), spread of fast food chains (15.8%), reduced consumption of local traditional cuisine (13.5%), emphasis on healthy diet (11.9%), increased demand for organic products (10%) and promotion of dietary patterns emphasising on meat (6.6%).

**Table 2: Ways that Globalization Affects Gastronomy Tourism**

Changes in eating habits	25.4%
Spread of international cuisines restaurants	16.8%
Spread of fast food chains	15.8%
Reduced consumption of local traditional cuisine	13.5%

Emphasis of healthy diet	11.9%
Increased demand of organic products	10.0%
Promotion of dietary patterns emphasising on meat	6.6%

Competition in international markets creates the necessity to promote the Cretan gastronomy tourism. According to our respondents (see Table 3) there are seven main factors that can contribute to the promotion of local gastronomy. The use of the internet is considered the most important means of promotion (27.6%), followed by traditional media (22.8%) and the organisation of gastronomic events abroad (22.5%). The development of thematic parks or a thematic museum, the organisation of gastronomy festivals and the use of advertising materials and brochures were considered less important and received lower percentages.

**Table 3: Means of Promoting Gastronomic Tourism**

Promotion through internet	27.6%
Promotion through media	22.8%
Organisation of gastronomic events abroad	22.5%
Development of thematic park	7.8%
Organisation of gastronomy festivals	7.8%
Development of thematic museum	6.2%
Advertising material and brochures	5.3%

Regarding the gastronomy initiatives that take place in Greece and Crete (see Table 4), the largest number of respondents (23%) are mostly aware of wine tourism initiatives and more specifically the ‘Wine Roads of Northern Greece’. The ‘Greek Breakfast’ initiative that has been introduced by many hotels all over Greece over the last few years is known by 19.4% of the respondents, followed by the ‘Cretan Diet Food Festival’ in Rethymno with 13% and the ‘Festival of Shepherd and Cheese’ in Zoniana, Rethymno. Table 4 also shows that a number of other initiatives are less well known by our respondents, e.g., the Nikolaos Tselemendes Festival in Sifnos (9.7%), the Thessaloniki Food Festival (5.4%), the Sani Gourmet Festival in Halkidiki (4.6%).



**Table 4: Gastronomy Initiatives Awareness**

Wine roads of Northern Greece	23%
Greek breakfast	19.4%
Cretan diet food festival – Rethymno, Crete	13%
The festival of Shepherd and cheese - Zoniana, Rethymno, Crete	11.2%
Nikolaos Tselemendes festival – Sifnos	9.7%
Thessaloniki food festival	5.4%
Sani Gourmet Festival – Halkidiki	4.6%
Amari Green Festival – Rethymno, Crete	3.6%
Mount Athos Gourmet	3.3%
Gastronomy festival – Lefkada	1.9%
Bread festival of Kastamonitsa – Heraklion, Crete	1.4%
Wine festival in Dafnes – Heraklion, Crete	1.3%
Eco Zakynthos	0.9%
None	0.8%
Other	0.5%

The majority of our respondents (95.8%) were aware of the advantages of the Cretan Diet, with only 4.2% answering negatively. In order to investigate which traditional local plates of the Cretan cuisine are well known, we asked our respondents to write down the first one that came to their mind, from the plates they have tasted up to that point. As presented in Table 5, the most well-known dish among domestic visitors were snails, lamb cooked in various traditional ways, pilaf, Dakos and Dolmadakia. All respondents (100%) answered positively that they had tasted traditional Cretan cuisine during their visit to the island.

**Table 5: Which is the First Local Traditional Dish that Comes to Your Mind**

Snails (traditionally cooked with salt, olive oil, vinegar and rosemary)	22%
Antikristo (lamb traditionally cooked face-to-face)	18%
Marriage pilaf	14.7%
Dakos (type of bread with tomato, olive oil and feta cheese)	13.8%
Dolmadakia	6.3%
Lamb in the oven (traditionally cooked with potatoes)	5.2%
Snails with groats	4.2%
Lamb with chicory	3.6%
Artichokes with broad beans	3.1%
Small pies with mizithra (traditional cheese) and honey	3.0%
Kalitsounia (traditional sweets for Easter)	2.6%
Apaki (pork meat)	2.3%
Pie from Sfakia	1.2%

Regarding the types of places where respondents tasted traditional Cretan cuisine, more than half, (52.1%) visited a traditional taverna, 26.2% a friend's house, 16.4% a restaurant, 4.2% a hotel and only 1.1% visited a gastronomy festival. The majority of the respondents, (87.6%) reported having bought traditional food and beverage before their departure from Crete. Table 6 shows the traditional beverage and food bought by domestic tourists before their departure from Crete.

**Table 6: Traditional Food & Beverage Bought Before Departure**

Raki	23.6%
Cheese	19.6%
Paksimadi	14.5%
Honey	12.3%
Olive oil	12.0%
Wine	6.3%
Olives	4.8%
Spices & herbs	3.8%
Raisins	3.1%

Domestic visitors presented various perceptions regarding traditional Cretan cuisine, as presented in Table 7.

**Table 7: Perceptions of Traditional Cretan Cuisine**

Large variety of local recipes	42.3%
Quality of local cuisine	42.0%
Medium quality local cuisine with high prices	6.7%
Use of non-quality raw material	5.3%
Rude employees	1.7%
Distorted image of local cuisine	1.5%
Bad quality of local cuisine	0.5%

As to whether the Cretan cuisine is a motive for the respondents to revisit Crete, 33.6% answered that it is a very important motive, 48.6% answered that it is important enough, 15.8% answered that it is not very important, and for 2% of the sample it was not at all a motive. The study shows that food is not a primary or major motivation for visitors when deciding to visit Crete, but it is among their motives for visitation.

### **Respondents' Demographics**

Women comprised 54.7% of the total sample and men 45.3%. The highest percentage of the respondents (43.6%) were 30-40 years old, 34.3% were 41-50 and 22.1% were 51+. As far as education was concerned, more than half of the sample (50.8%) had a University degree, 30.8% a high school education, 14.3% a Masters or PhD degree and 4.1% had primary school education.

Regarding income, 9.3% was below 500 euros, 19.3% earned 501-900, 30.8% earned 901-1300, 11.5% earned 1301-1500, 10.8% earned 1501-2000, 7.2% earned 2001 – 2500, 4.3% earned 2501-3000 and 6.8% earned above 3000 euros.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this research was to investigate domestic visitors' perceptions regarding issues of gastronomy tourism in Crete. Research showed that the highest percentage of domestic tourists are repeat visitors and their main motivation is the sun and the sea. The study shows that gastronomy is not a primary motivation for visiting Crete, although it is a term that most respondents are familiar with, as they were aware of the benefits of the Cretan diet. All respondents had tasted the traditional Cretan cuisine during their visit and bought traditional products before their departure. Although a significant number of respondents believe that globalisation has changed eating habits, they also recognised that the island offers a quality traditional cuisine with a large variety of local recipes. Hence, this could be a significant driver motivating repeat visits to the island. As our results indicate, Gastronomy is not yet a main motive for visiting Crete. The major recommendation of this study is that a significant marketing strategy promoting Gastronomy Tourism based on the use of modern channels of communication such as social media should be developed. For this approach to be viable, innovation is required in terms of e.g., the organisation of gastronomic events and festivals.

Crete has the potential to attract gastronomic tourists, domestic and international, due to its cultural and historical heritage, as well as the climate and natural environment, on a twelve-month basis. However, this study indicates that there are certain weaknesses, such as quality problems, lack of effective promotion of its rich resources, and lack of a central related tourism policy. Issues of promotional activities concentrated on gastronomy tourism should seriously be considered by both the public and private sectors. We therefore propose to undertake a similar study into the perceptions of international tourists regarding gastronomy tourism in Crete in order to ascertain their perceptions of Cretan cuisine as a motive for visitation.

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